

Multiple Modernities

A Tale of Scandinavian Experiences

It all started more than twenty years ago, as a young Chinese philosopher arrived at my department at the University of Bergen in Norway – Tong Shijun from East China Normal University in Shanghai. Some years later, he came back and took his doctoral degree on the Chinese discussions on modernization, compared with similar discussions in the West, notably those of Max Weber and Jürgen Habermas. The two of us soon became friends, and as Tong returned to East China Normal University after his dissertation in 1994, we decided to continue our collaboration by establishing a program in comparative studies of cultural modernization in Europe and East Asia, named “Marco Polo”. This program has now been running for nearly twenty years, with a mutual exchange of ideas, by an exchange of scholars and publications, and by conferences. Processes of modernization – one or many? That was the underlying question. Are there different ways of being and becoming modern, or just one? So, what does it mean to be “modern”? Chinese and modern? Western and modern? Those were the immediate questions. But then, what is “the West”? U.S.A. or Europe? Northern Europe or Southern Europe? Eastern or Western Europe? Evidently, quite different cases! And then, what about Scandinavia, and Norway, in all this? Hence I got this special question, head on.

My background is that of a philosopher, working on the philosophy of the sciences, focusing on different kinds of rationality and reasonableness and their role in various processes of modernization. As a university teacher I have been working on the history of western thought,

by a philosophical approach to the history of intellectual modernization from ancient Greek thinkers the whole way up to our time.¹ But now I was faced with a more specific and concrete version of that question: the question of how to conceptualize the special events and experiences of decisive modernization processes in Scandinavia and in Norway. I had to find out how to mediate between philosophy and history, on this concrete case.

That was how the present project came about. It began with papers written for my Chinese colleagues, on various aspects of modernization processes in Norway and Scandinavia. Finally these papers were transformed into a book: *Multiple Modernities. A Tale of Scandinavian Experiences*.² As the title says, the basic concern is that of “multiple modernities”:³ Is there only one way of becoming and being modern, or are there different processes of modernization and different modernities, and what can Scandinavian experiences teach us in that respect? Modernization and modernity – one or many? That is the underlying question.⁴ My concern is that of finding an answer by trying out some main conceptions of modernization on Scandinavian events and experiences. Scandinavia is chosen because that is my region, a region I am familiar with, even though I am not a professional historian, but also because Scandinavia is often seen as an interesting case in terms of relatively successful modernization processes.

However, there are different conceptions and theories of modernity and modernization. Which one to choose? Which conception of modernization should be tried out on Scandinavian experiences and events? In this project, I have chosen to conceive modernity and modernization processes in terms of versions of rationality. Moreover, rationality is here conceived of as action based and thus as situated in historical agents and institutions. By this

approach the development and usage of various kinds of scientific expertise are seen as primary issues. The same is true of learning processes inherent in sociopolitical practices

For me, this approach comes naturally, given my scholarly formation and interests. But quite independently of my personal background, I do think that this notion is fruitful. For instance, make the following thought-experience: Imagine that you take away all activities and items that in one way or another are dependent on scientific and scholarly rationality and reason, from science-based technologies of all kinds to institutions and professions relying on scientific and scholarly insights and formation. The kind of society that remains, after this elimination, would hardly be seen as a modern one. So, if you still want to call it a modern society, that which is left after this thought-experience, I think you have to confess that you have a peculiar notion of modernity and modernization.

Two things should be recalled, concerning this science- and rationality-related notion of modernity and modernization: (i) Sciences and rationality are primarily conceived as *activities*, not merely as theories. (ii) These activities are conceived as being *situated*, historically and institutionally, among different persons and collective agents.

Moreover, for this approach, it is crucial that there are different kinds of sciences and rationality: There are causally explaining sciences, as in physics, establishing “means to an end”, allowing us to intervene in causal processes, thus making science-based technologies possible, by an interaction between technological development and scientific activities. This is well known, already from the history of the emergence of the new experimental and mathematically formulated natural sciences after the Renaissance. However, at the time of the Renaissance there were also a renewal of interpretive sciences, namely in

theology and in law: By the Reform and the emergency of Christian congregations outside the Catholic Church the question of the correct interpretation of the Holy Scriptures became an urgent one. And by the emergency of national states, with an extended state bureaucracy, there was a renewed concern for the interpretation and justification of juridical laws (increasingly conceived in secular terms). In short, there was a revival of interpretive reasoning.⁵ But then there was also a need for argumentative reasoning, for open and enlightened discussions for and against the various interpretations and justifications. The same holds true for the causally explaining sciences: In order to find out which hypotheses are the better ones, one has to discuss the various reasons for and against. All in all, this means that argumentative reasoning is a common activity, for all the various kinds of scientific and scholarly activities.⁶

Hence, given this approach, we have an answer to question as the “one-ness” of modernity and modernization: On the one hand, there is a variety of (interconnected⁷) forms of reason and rationality, on the other hand, we do have the unavoidability of argumentative reasoning. Multiple modernities, yes – but not in this respect.

Two implications should be spelled out: (i) Since there are different kinds of rationality, and since these different kinds of rationality are situated in different professions and institutions – e.g. among theologians and lawyers, in a religious community or a legal institution – it is important to look at different kinds of expertise and how they are embedded in different institutions.⁸ Hence there is a question as to what kind of expertise, what kind of science and rationality, that is listened to and applied in political or economic institutions, at the expense of other kinds of expertise and rationality. This is the realm for critique of various cases of

unreasonable one-sidedness and shortcomings. (ii) When rationality in this sense is conceived not only in terms of causally explaining sciences and related technologies and professions, but also in terms of interpretive and argumentative activities, it follows that not all contemporary societies that rely on natural sciences and science-based technologies should thereby be conceived as modern societies: For instance, when the interpretive and argumentative activities are lacking, in academic institutions and also in society at large, then there is a decisive shortcoming in this kind of society. It is not really modern, according to our conception of modernity and modernization. This point has more than a purely theoretical interest. Compare this kind of imbalance both in the US and in the Middle East. For instance, for Sayyid Qubt, the Egyptian founder of the Muslim brotherhood,⁹ as well as for the religious leaders in Iran, technology and natural science are appreciated and accepted, but not humanities and the social sciences – because then we have interpretive and argumentative activities, and thus possibly a critique of theological and theo-political doctrines. This vulnerability for critique (in a Kantian sense) from interpretive and argumentative disciplines is inherently embedded all the three monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), since they are based on Holy Scriptures and since they have a notion of one God (presumably almighty and benivulent), and in both cases there is inherently a need for interpretations followed by argumentations. A lack of the kind of rationality that is fostered by interpretive and argumentative disciplines is therefore decisive for how a society is able to cope with some urgent political question. In short, today this is a challenge in the US, due to the role of fundamentalist Christians by presidential elections, creating a state mate of American politics in the Middle East. The same is true for the Israeli politics and for the opinions and actions of poorly educated Muslim populations in the region. In short, this shortcoming, as to the need for a full scale of rationality and reason in

modern societies, has detrimental effects. Moreover, according to our notion of modernity and modernization, where interpretive and argumentative activities are included, these societies should not be called modern, but at best semi-modern societies.

What does it mean to be ‘modern’? To be Chinese and modern? Muslim and modern? Norwegian and modern? Is there, basically, just one way of being modern? Or are there ‘multiple modernities’) – different ways of becoming modern and of being modern? In short, is the process of modernization one and unilinear? Or, are there alternative processes of modernization?

Before we proceed to address these questions, it is important to note the political urgency of the underlying context. Today we are confronted with challenges that could be cast in these terms: is there a conflict between the West and the Muslim world due to pre-modern aspects in the institutional development and social imaginary of the latter? Is Western modernity, with its consumerism and demography, a sustainable society? And what about China in this respect? Moreover, to what extent is the West, for instance the United States, really modern according to the main criteria, such as the requirement of a ‘modernization of religious consciousness’, including an open and enlightened ‘criticism of religion’? These are timely questions, demanding critical and nuanced analyses of various aspects of modernization, of how they manifest at different stages and in different regions and countries. This paper aims to address some of the theoretical issues that have arisen in attempts to understand this underlying context, specifically, whether the processes of modernity are singular or multiple.

Two Theories of Modernization

There are probably as many different views on these questions as there are theories of modernity and modernization. One kind of theory of modernity and modernization is conceived in the terms of a predictive social science in search of causal explanations. This kind of theory often operates with the hypothesis that there is only one process of modernization which, by internal necessity, leads to some ultimate stage. From this perspective the process of modernization is ‘deterministic, endogenous, and unilinear’ (cf. Knöbl 2001). Theories of this kind flourished in North American sociology after each of the two world wars. Modernization was conceived as an unavoidable development in terms of industrialization and individualization, extensive deregulation and market economy, privatization of religion and the death of ideology, and multiparty democracy. In short, this view holds that we are all moving towards a situation that resembles the Anglo-American world as it was seen at that time.

Another kind of theory of modernity and modernization – the one that is embraced here – is conceived in terms of a ‘reconstruction’ of learning-processes and institutional differentiations. Those in favour of a reconstructive approach have different views on how the processes of modernization should be conceived. There are, for instance, different opinions as to whether there is basically one line of development or various paths. We can divide these theorists into ‘universalists’, reconstructing what they conceive to be the unavoidable steps in the intellectual and moral learning-processes leading up to the present stage of modernity, and ‘pluralists’ who conceive these processes as rather ‘contingent and multifarious’, just as they conceive modern societies as an open-ended multitude.

Processes of Modernization: One or Many?

We shall look into these questions, discussing whether (or to what extent) there are alternative processes of modernization. We begin by asking: what could rightly be seen as ‘unavoidable characteristics’ of modern societies, and thus as arguments against the pluralist reconstruction? (cf. G. Skirbekk 1993; 2007).

(1) When we in a serious discussion seek to ascertain what is true and right in a given case we cannot, for self-referential reasons, exclude relevant arguments, nor can we decide to exclude persons who might contribute to the discussion. I cannot assume that I am right without taking the counter-arguments into account. In this sense we are unavoidably bound and obliged by what Habermas called the ‘forceless force of the better argument’ and by a mutual recognition of other persons as both reasonable and fallible (like oneself).

This kind of reflective discussion requires a particular attitude: flexible and open for change, according to the better arguments, and firm against the temptation to give in to social pressures to comply with popular but dubious opinions. This is a particularly modern conception of how to handle basic validity questions, that is to say questions of truth and of justice. It is a conception of argumentative rationality that for self-referential reasons is unavoidable in any culturally modern society. Hence, in this very important sense, there is only one modernity.

(2) Moreover, modern societies are inherently connected to scientific and scholarly research. And all scientific and scholarly disciplines rely on argumentative rationality (manifested for example by the fact that all disciplines have their doctoral disputations). Hence

the principles mentioned above are also ideal presuppositions for scientific and scholarly research. (They are presupposed ideally, although they are not always fulfilled.)

Simultaneously, modern scientific and scholarly research is characterized by a plurality of different disciplines, each with its specific concepts and methods. There is not one all-embracing scientific and scholarly truth, but a plurality of perspectives that cannot be overcome by any all-embracing meta-theory. But we can do our best in reflecting on these various perspectives and argumentatively try to sort out their comparative strengths and weaknesses in various cases.

This is not easy, but nor is it impossible, and it is an urgent task since there is always a danger that some perspective might obtain an excessively dominant position and thus lead to biased understandings – consider the danger of ignoring the long-term ecological effects of industrial projects that are predominantly understood in economic and technological terms. Furthermore, scientific and scholarly research is not merely perspectivistic, it is also fallible and uncertain in various ways. Hence, scientific and scholarly research is basically a self-critical procedure, an ‘organized scepticism’ (Merton 1968). All in all this means that modern societies, to the extent that they are based on scientific and scholarly research, have to incorporate the attitudes and institutional arrangements that are required for this kind of argumentative rationality and organized scepticism.

One of the necessary institutional implications is that basic research (and hence universities) should be governed neither by religious or ideological agents or institutions, nor by special political interests or market forces. Some institutional autonomy is required. The same is true as an institutional condition for an enlightened public sphere and for enlightened political

deliberations and decisions. Hence, in modern societies there is a need for ‘institutional differentiations’, such as the one between religion and the judiciary system – not least because there is an irreducible (reasonable) plurality of religious and non-religious world views, in the modern world. (Superstitious and irrational beliefs do not belong to this field of reasonable disagreement, cf. John Rawls 1993, pp. 54ff.) At the same time there is also a need for institutional interaction, for instance between the judiciary and the political system, as well as between politics as power and politics as open and public discussion and will formation.

Basically there has to be some differentiation between the main institutions, such as state, market and culture (life-world). On the one hand, political opinions differ as to the best way of differentiating these institutions. On the other hand there are extreme versions of imbalance that are clearly detrimental for any modern society, as when the state fatally overrides both economy and culture (cf. the Soviet Union), or when the market (in all-embracing capitalism) overrides both the state (including the judiciary system) and the life-world (including interpersonal relations), or when a traditionalist clan system takes the place of the state and its sub-institutions as well as of market transactions (as in Somalia today). Hence there are clearly some extreme versions of institutional *imbalance* that should be avoided in any modern society.

All in all, this means that there are some institutional differentiations that are required and some institutional arrangements that are not predetermined. In this respect our reconstructive approach to the question of modernization indicates both some degree of necessity and some degree of contingency.¹⁰

At the outset we focused on self-referential requirements in processes of modernization and

thus on arguments in favour of what can be seen as necessary for all modern societies, and against the pluralist view. But at the same time we have also emphasized (i) the plurality inherent in scientific and scholarly research, as well as pointing to (ii) a possible variety of institutional arrangements, and referring to (iii) the irreducible plurality of reasonable world-views, both religious and non-religious (cf. G. Skirbekk 2006). The plurality of world-views has an affinity with the question of ‘value plurality’. Even though some basic normative principles of justice might be argumentatively justified (as procedural context-transcending norms for the regulation of conflicts), many value questions are clearly contextual, culturally dependent, or simply a matter of taste, and are thus beyond any universal justification. In this sense we may operate with a distinction between universal norms and contingent values. In the realm of value questions, of different cultural codes and traditions, there is thus ample space for legitimate variety and creativity. Hence the pluralist conceptions of modernization processes find strong support when we focus on these questions.

Thus, to the question ‘are the processes of modernization one or many?’ we can briefly summarize our reconstructive deliberation in these terms: there is an unavoidability (and ‘oneness’) related to argumentative rationality and its requirement for special mental abilities and institutional arrangements. Within these restraints there is space for some plurality in institutional arrangements. And finally there is reasonable disagreement on various value questions and world interpretations – both religious and non-religious – and hence there is an unavoidable plurality in these cases.

Special Experiences

A further step: in the processes of modernization, we must cope with both unavoidable principles and argumentative claims on the one hand and with contingent values and opinions on the other. But in addition we have deeply entrenched special experiences and learning-processes: different societies have gone through different historical crises and events.

Topography, material conditions, catastrophes, wars and inherent socio-cultural tensions, these are among the (more or less) contingent factors that make a difference to the collective identity, institutional arrangements and political culture of a society. Moreover, there is an interrelation between institutions and culture: cultural values and personal virtues that are appropriate in clan-based societies are dysfunctional in modern societies with well-functioning and independent legal and socio-economic institutions.

Hence, there are differences among apparently modern societies. In order to illustrate this point, we may look at some striking differences among Western nations, like France and the United States. In both countries political modernity was manifested via universalist declarations of human rights at the end of the eighteenth century. But their conceptions of the state–market relationship and of the role of religion in modern societies are strikingly different. In France (like Germany and the Nordic countries) the state was given a more dominant role in the processes of modernization than in the U.S. (or U.K.). In France, ‘freedom of religion’ predominantly meant (and means) a freedom to criticize religion whereas in the U.S. it primarily meant (and means) a freedom for various Protestant sects and other religious convictions to be left alone. Voltaire and the French philosophers of the Enlightenment operated in a different socio-cultural setting than the first European settlers of North America, and they promoted another intellectual culture that still prevails.

The Scandinavian Case:

Interplay between Lutheran State Officials and Successful Popular Movements

In this section we shall take a look at some of the special processes of modernization that occurred in the Scandinavian countries, especially Norway, with the aim of elucidating alternative processes of modernization.

Characteristic of the processes of modernization in the Scandinavian countries is, broadly speaking, an interesting interplay (mainly in the nineteenth century) between Lutheran state officials and popular movements and elites. The Scandinavian countries were among the very few Lutheran states with almost no other confessions for a long period of time.¹¹ These countries were also characterized by historically quite unique popular movements. On this background they had, by the middle of the twentieth century, combined a comprehensive Welfare State, including widespread material redistribution, with a high degree of trust within the rule of law, and a high degree of political cohesion – more so than in most other countries. It is worth noting that the state played a much more significant role here than in the Anglo-American world. At the same time, early popular movements and their elites obtained political positions quite distinct to those of their counterparts in France.

I shall here restrict myself to discussing some of the main characteristics of the Norwegian processes of modernization.

Norway in Nineteenth Century: A ‘*Beamtenstaat*’ (par excellence)

At the outset, a few facts about Norwegian history should be mentioned, as an introductory

remark. In the eighteenth century the monarchy of Denmark-Norway was a state under the rule of law, to a large extent governed by enlightened state officials. A common school system was established in 1737, one motivation being the promotion of literacy so that everybody could read the Bible, required for the confirmation of Christian youth in Lutheranism. At the end of the eighteenth century a large percentage of Norwegian farmers (peasants) were landowners. Literacy was widespread and the writings of a cultural modernizer like Ludvig Holberg (1684–1754) got a broad audience, including among the farmers. As a result of the Napoleonic Wars, Norway entered a union with Sweden in 1814, but with a newly written and progressive Constitution and hence as a politically independent state (except for foreign affairs). At an early stage, due to the Black Death (in the fourteenth century), and later, due to the power-related politics of the Danish kings (cf. Rian 2007), the national nobility was fatally weakened – around 1814 there was practically no nobility in Norway.

Broadly speaking there were three classes at that time (around 1814):

- (i) State officials (around 0.2 per cent of the population) – mainly university-educated lawyers and Lutheran theologians, plus higher military officers – who became particularly influential for two reasons: there was no nobility, and these state officials were allowed to perform the double role of state servants and active politicians.
- (ii) Citizenry, with their living related to fishery, mines, mills, forestry, shipping and trade – in other words, they were not dependent on a landowning nobility.
- (iii) Farmers (peasants) represented the majority of the population (about 90 per cent in 1814). To a large extent they were literate; many were landowners (around 1814, approximately 57 per cent). An exceptionally high percentage of the members of the

Constitutional Assembly of 1814 were farmers and representatives of rural communities (approximately one third). And for historical reasons the farmers (peasants) represented the national heritage, since there was practically no national nobility, and state officials had for the most part a Danish background.

In short, at the beginning of the nineteenth century Norway was predominantly run by state officials (a Weberian *Beamtenstaat*, par excellence), but with a progressive Constitution, and with a strong peasantry. Gradually, through the National Assembly (*Stortinget*), a democratic opposition supported by the popular movements gained force. In 1884 Parliamentarianism was introduced by this opposition, an event that represented a decisive weakening of the political role of the state officials and the coming-to-power of the Left, supported by popular forces and by the radical intelligentsia. Democracy was adopted in terms of multi-party parliamentarianism with extended franchise for men in 1898. In 1913 the franchise was extended to women.

Now let us briefly look at some major aspects of the popular movements and their elites in Norway during this period.

Popular Movements and Elites

Haugianism was the first popular movement, initiated by Hans Nielsen Hauge (1771–1824), a young peasant who had a religious vision while working in the field in 1796, at the age of twenty-five. Haugianism was at the same time a religious movement (within Lutheranism, against official Lutheranism), and a class movement against Lutheran state officials (Gilje 1997).

Max Weber identified Puritan ethics (Calvinism) as a precondition for capitalism. The Haugians played a similar role in Norway. For religious reasons they favoured hard work and modest consumption. The result was capital accumulation and reinvestment – in paper mills, saw mills, salt production, fishery, ship building, farming and trade. Haugianism combined charismatic leadership and a national network of solidarity (between ‘brethren and sisters’ – not individualistically). The Haugians promoted modernizing activities and learning processes on a broad scale: economic activities, socio-political organization, training in speaking in assemblies (women were welcome both as speakers and leaders), promoting literacy and thereby creating an alternative public sphere. For instance, approximately one-in-four Norwegian citizens, inclusive of new-born infants and the elderly, bought a copy of Hauge’s writings in a time of hunger and hardship.

Haugianism soon became a breeding ground for political actors. They were members of the Constitution Assembly in 1814; they were elected to the National Assembly (*Stortinget*) and to political positions in local communities. By 1840 their main aims had been reached: wider religious and economic liberties. Gradually Haugianism became integrated in Norwegian society. However, they remained within the Lutheran State-Church; they did not redefine themselves as an independent religious community.

With the Haugians (but also, for example, through the influence of the Danish theologian Grundtvig), and due to an alternative school system (*folkehøjskole*) and an alternative public sphere, a version of the typically Scandinavian phenomenon of ‘popular education’ (*folkedanning* and *folkelighed*) gained recognition and became a decisive factor in the formation of a more egalitarian society – roughly speaking, education and cultural formation of the

people, for the people, by the people. This was in opposition to the traditional educational system and ideology, but definitely had the aim of ‘raising the people’, and raising oneself, culturally and educationally.

Hauge was harshly treated by the authorities – jailed in 1804 and finally released in 1811, physically weakened and with health problems. However, Haugianism as a movement prevailed and became quite influential. In many ways it changed Norwegian society permanently, from below. Hence, there was a struggle for recognition between opposing socio-cultural groups and their elites: the typically Scandinavian dialectics between Lutheran state officials and successful popular movements.

The Thrane Movement, initiated by Marcus Thrane (1817–1890) in 1849 and inspired by the uprising in France in 1848, was at the outset a spontaneous protest against food shortages. The movement was supported by unprivileged people in the cities, but even more so in the country side since industrialization was at an early stage.

Thrane was a utopian socialist (like Proudhon) and mildly Christian. He soon became a successful organizer. He and his followers organized workers’ associations (*Arbeiderforeninger*). After one year there were around 414 associations with thirty thousand members, probably around 2 per cent of the total population at that time, organized on both the local and national levels. They effectively established an alternative public sphere with their own newspaper (*Arbeiderforeningernes Blad*).

The political programme was initially rather moderate: for reduced customs tariffs in pursuit of cheaper food, against alcohol abuse, for better schools for average people, for universal military service (a popular requirement already in 1814), and for a general right to

vote for all men. The programme was turned down and the movement became more clearly class-oriented: redistribution of land, support for peasants who wanted to cultivate new land, establishing a state bank for people with few resources, social security for the elderly and disabled.

In 1851 the Thrane movement was suppressed by force by the authorities (the state officials). Thrane was jailed. When released he did not take part in political activities, and after some time he left for the U.S. where he lived out the rest of his life. In a sense, then, the Thrane movement was but an episode – however, an important lesson was learnt: popular movements need to organize and they need an alternative public sphere. And there was more to come.

The Farmers' Friends (or 'people's friends': *bondevenn* or *folkevenn*), led by Søren Jaabæk (1814–1894) from around 1865, represents the third wave of popular movements, starting spontaneously and gradually gaining power by self-organization and self-education and by the use of an alternative public sphere. The farmers' friends organized themselves on all levels: locally, at the county level, and nationally. They got approximately thirty thousand members in three hundred associations. They published a newspaper, *Folketidende*, printing approximately fifteen to twenty thousand copies per issue.

Jaabæk was elected mayor (*ordfører*) in his local community in 1841 and was elected to a seat in the National Assembly in 1845, where he became the leader of the opposition (*bondeopposisjonen*). The farmers' friends acted against city privileges,¹² but for liberalism, and were against high public spending, especially for the state officials.¹³ In short, they defended their class interests and used the National Assembly to fight against the dominant political position of the state officials, especially in the government – hence, the political fight for

Parliamentarianism was an important one.

Briefly, their programme included: support of reading associations (*leseselskap*), opposition to alcohol abuse, support for social security, for savings banks, and for joint associations of producers and consumers (*samvirke*). Around 1870 the movement was radicalized: for the separation of state and church, against Lutheran confirmation,¹⁴ in favour of civil marriage, and against monarchy. In short, Jaabæk's basic ideal was a society with egalitarian harmony.

In addition to these three waves of popular movements (Hauge, Thrane, Jaabæk) I would like to mention two other movements with a more specific agenda: the 'language movement' (*målrørsla*) and the 'Women's movement' (*kvinneverørsla*).

The Language Movement: When Norway got its political independence in 1814 the written language was Danish. It was immediately understood by all Norwegians but spoken (more or less correctly) only by the upper classes, especially by the state officials who had been educated in Copenhagen. The people, especially the peasantry, spoke different dialects, originating from the old Norwegian language of the Viking period, the language of Norse literature.

Hence, the new nation of 1814 was confronted with a strategic question: should one continue with Danish, or try to reformulate a Norwegian language? As it turned out, Danish as a written language prevailed for approximately a century – Norwegian authors like Ibsen wrote in Danish and published their books in Denmark. But for national and pedagogical reasons steps were taken to change the written language into a Norwegian language. Two main strategies were available: reformulate a modern Norwegian language from the Norwegian dialects, or

change the traditional Danish language stepwise in accordance with spoken Norwegian in the upper classes. Both strategies were followed, and thus two official Norwegian languages gradually developed.

Simultaneously there was a conflict between these two strategies and these two languages, a conflict that continues still. This conflict has both national and social elements; at the end of the nineteenth century it was intertwined with the general conflict between state officials (who traditionally wrote Danish) and popular movements (supported by the Left party, established in 1884). This dual situation continues today, resulting in what might be described as blending ‘a fight for cultural dominance’ (in the sense of Gramsci and Bourdieu) and ‘a recognition of others’ (as per Derrida) – the latter being an unintended result of a learning process that led to some degree of inherent ‘multiculturalism’.

The Women’s Movement: Comparatively speaking, women in Norway traditionally had a strong position, legally and socially. But with professionalization and urbanization new challenges emerged, and the role of women in modern societies became a political question for popular movements as well as a major concern for poets and artists (cf. *Nora* in Ibsen).

The Norwegian Feminist Association (*Norsk Kvindesags-Forening*) was established in 1884, the year of the introduction of Parliamentarianism – one of its leaders, Gina Krog (1847–1916), belonged to the left wing of the Left party (*Venstre*). They fought for universal rights: the right to vote, the right to higher education, and legal rights for married women.

Also the women’s movement represented a blend of spontaneous movement and organization abilities – one achievement was the founding of the journal *Nylænde* (1887), as an alternative public sphere. And its organizational ability was clearly demonstrated in 1905, when

Norway unilaterally broke the union with Sweden: only male citizens were allowed to vote for or against the union (368,208 voted ‘no’, 184 ‘yes’). Women citizens were not allowed to vote, hence they organized their own ‘private’ vote for women, and in a two-week period 244,765 women had voted – two-thirds of the male votes, an amazingly high number. This was before e-mail and mobile phones, in a topographically difficult country with a widely scattered population.

A Local Case (1880–1920):

The Interplay of Persons and Institutions

To get a sense of what was going on at a local level, in the lead up to the introduction of Parliamentarianism and into the early twentieth century, roughly the period between 1880 and 1920, I shall discuss a particular community – a county in East Norway, not far from the Swedish border (in the middle of the Scandinavian peninsula) – focusing on the interplay of persons and institutions. Its economy was based on agriculture, forestry and related industries. Forestry was its primary source of wealth. Farms were often middle-size, based on paid labourers. The preceding discussion of popular movements, their elites, and Lutheran state officials provides a general background for this local community, as we shall see, focusing on the interplay between some influential persons and some special institutions (H. Skirbekk [ed.] 1941–1982; Overrein 2001).

The country’s notable institutions include: (i) political institutions in a broad sense, beginning with spontaneous discussion groups, establishment of trade unions and widespread participation in new political parties; (ii) the establishment of a newspaper as a local public

sphere; (iii) the establishment of a local *folkemuseum* to promote historical awareness of the local and national heritage, carried by the traditional agrarian community; and (iv) the establishment of a *folkehøgskule* (people's high school) and a teachers' college to promote education and cultural self-esteem for future generations – inspired by the educational ideals of the various popular movements.

The influential persons under consideration here include: (i) The forest owner (1836–1917) – a rich idealist supporting cultural and educational initiatives; (ii) the politician (1859–1934) – a leftist farmer supporting the workers and the unprivileged, promoting an argumentative and organized political culture; (iii) the scholar (1873–1932) – a teacher, ethnologist and (at the end of his life) state official of the regional school system, and a supporter of the democratic-national movement; and (iv) the editor (1877–1951) – the son of Swedish immigrants, supporting the social and democratic-national movement by his pen and his position as a newspaper editor.

Political Institutions in a Broad Sense

In 1881, a local 'conversation association' (*samtaleforening*) was founded by three young farmers (among them our politician, 22 years old at the time), who had been together in a local school for young people, established in 1873. According to the founders:¹⁵ 'By coming together in order to discuss topics of common interest and to have lectures, the aim of this association is to be enlightening and educating' (*opplysende og dannende*).

An important point concerning procedure: each meeting began by having two persons presenting opposite positions on a chosen topic, on the understanding that serious discussion requires pro and con, arguments and counter-arguments. Some of the topics discussed

(according to written reports, 1881-1884) included:

- ‘Should women have greater juridical autonomy and should one open access for her to most positions?’ (The speaker for the affirmative was Eivind Torp [1844–1890], director and teacher of the school just mentioned.)
- ‘Is the present way of paying priests satisfactory?’ (In short, questioning the economic conditions for state officials. After a lively discussion of various aspects of the remuneration system, there was general agreement for a resolution recommending the abolition of special payments for each service rendered by a clergyman.)
- ‘Will the associations of the armament of the people function conveniently and should one join them actively or passively?’ (This kind of armament was meant to support the army, but it became a leftist case, not favoured by the authorities, since in reality it was an armament of the people. In the lead up to the Norwegian withdrawal from the union with Sweden in 1905 questions of defence were of great importance. There was a lively discussion, overwhelmingly in favour of people’s armament.)
- ‘Does the constitution allow for a royal veto in constitutional matters and if so of what kind?’ (This was a crucial question in the conflict between Swedish and Norwegian politicians – the king was Swedish – and in the fight for parliamentary democracy.)
- ‘Are there major deficiencies in social life in our county and what could be done to improve the situation?’ (During the discussion our politician and another person made the proposal that one should establish workers’ associations [*arbeidersamfunn*].)
- ‘What is the relationship of the literary and political Left to Christianity?’
- ‘Is a republic to be preferred to monarchy?’ (Our politician presented pro-republic arguments.)

- ‘How could agriculture most conveniently be made useful?’
- ‘Is our welfare system for poor people on the right track?’ (Arguments in favour of improvements were presented by our politician, who (i) made an appeal to Christian altruism [while warning against moralizing], (ii) expressed belief in the sciences [*Wissenschaften*] to improve the standard of living, and (iii) spoke out against abuse of alcohol; he also proposed (iv) to transfer the farms of state officials into institutions for work and education for young people.)
- ‘Who should have the right to vote in our country?’
- ‘How should school and home most conveniently collaborate?’
- ‘Advantages and deficiencies of private schools compared with public schools.’
- ‘About the property rights for men and women in marriage.’
- ‘What are the special causes for the deep gap between workers and the well-to-do, and how could this relationship be improved?’
- ‘Should the jury system be introduced in our country?’ (This was an important question concerning the status of the supreme court [and the role of state officials]. Jury and parliamentarianism were twin questions in the power struggle between the state officials and the Left.)
- ‘Is war a crime and could it possibly be abandoned?’
- ‘What are appropriate means against alcoholism (*drukkenskap*).?’
- ‘Popular enlightenment’ (*folkets opplysning*) (Eivind Torp criticized liberalist capitalism for making living conditions worse for the workers and for creating contempt for the workers. He defended a decent Christian life [*sunt kristenliv*], better schools, and extended juridical rights.)

The transition to parliamentarianism in 1884 represented a decisive weakening of the political role of the state officials and the coming to power of the Left, supported largely by popular forces and movements and by the radical city intelligentsia. An important and recurring topic in this discussion association around 1884 was the question of how the working class could be organized and how it could organize itself (for and by the people). Politically empowering the working class demands organizational solidarity among various progressive groups, but in the end it should be achieved by the workers themselves. According to the association's reports, 'The purpose (of workers' organizations) is to promote the well-being of the workers. The case must be promoted by those who gain (and seek) their living by the use of their hands.'

Other topics discussed after 1884 included rules for the police and questions of school reform. There was a heated discussion on the language question at its final meeting in 1885, the year in which the parliament decided that New Norwegian should have equal legal status with Danish-Norwegian. At that final meeting our politician asked all the members to join the local workers' association (*Arbeidersamlag*).

This story is interesting as an example of accumulating learning-processes: first, enlightened discussions (pro and con); then organize trade unions to improve working conditions and promote public education; then join political parties to take part in party politics. This local story thus conforms to a Habermasian ideal: the importance of an argumentative public sphere and of learning-processes, bottom up.

Newspaper

A local newspaper was established early in 1901 as an alternative public space. It was a newspaper for the Left, aimed at raising social questions and reporting on the workers'

movement at home and abroad. It advocated an association of ‘farmers of the left and workers of the left’ (*venstrebønder og venstrearbeidere*) – that is, the newspaper was to the left in the Left (in the political party *Venstre*).

Folkemuseum

The new *folkemuseum* was the symbol of pride in the local and national heritage that had been transmitted through a long tradition of the agrarian society. This local community was basically progressive and forward-looking, but it was also proud of its local and national heritage.

Political identity-building therefore had a historical component: in 1911 this local *folkemuseum* was established, a museum for and by the people. It soon became the third largest folk’s museum in Norway, despite the fact that it was located only 30 km (on flat land) from the county capital, which had a similar museum. To understand how this came about we must consider the interplay between persons and institutions. The four persons we have mentioned were all involved in the establishment of this museum. They collaborated and supplemented each other: the editor with media and public space, the scholar with historical expertise, the politician with political resources, and the forest owner with economic resources. They were all animated by a social and cultural pride for *folkekulturen*, the culture of the people. Together they represented a powerful agency, in collaboration with many other people in the community.

Schools

Schools were established to promote education, with an idealist (ideological) agenda. With the economic support of the forest owner a local *folkehøgskule* (people’s high school) was established in 1928, influenced by the ideals of the Danish theologian and writer Nikolai

Fredrik Severin Grundtvig, which means that it was not pietist or orthodox in religious and cultural matters. A teachers' college (*lærarskule*) was also established – again, only 30 km away from the county capital, which was home to another teachers' college. Both types of school were important for the kind of alternative education and identity-formation that was supported by *Venstre* and the popular movements in Norway. A significant proportion of the young people who were educated in these kinds of schools became major agents for the *Venstre* regime and for the promotion of attitudes in favour of the democratic-national ideas of the popular movements in the nineteenth century.

So far we have looked at some special institutions established in this local community in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Other institutions were certainly important too, such as the new political parties, various public institutions, such as schools and health insurance, as well as institutional and technological developments in agriculture, forestry, infrastructure and communication. Taking a look at the four persons that we have selected may help indirectly to elucidate the important roles of these other institutions by highlighting the interplay between persons and institutions.

The politician: His father (1817–1870) was a farmer and a Haugian, but a moderate one, favouring education, socio-cultural formation, enlightenment ideals, and the 'protestant (work) ethics' – his handwritten diary from 1841–1848 bears witness to his self-discipline through the rational use of time. His list of books and publications from 1860 (at the age of forty-three) contains 148 titles, including writings by Hans Nielsen Hauge and Ludvig Holberg as well as religious literature and various practical and useful books. When he died he urged his son, then

eleven years of age, to seek education and knowledge.¹⁶

The editor is first generation Norwegian. Both of his parents had moved to Norway from Sweden. He was significantly influenced by the socio-cultural ideals and attitudes of popular movements in Norway (but without religious pietism), and he was an influential cultural personality with an excellent pen and a social consciousness. In addition to his many activities in the local community, as an editor and a cultural figure, he was also a member of the board of the national association of the press (*Norsk presseforbund*).

The scholar was a teacher and an ethnologist and became the school director for the region (a state official).¹⁷

The forest owner was a genuine idealist with strong beliefs in the democratic-national ideals and aims of the popular movement. He was rich in terms both of money and social connections. For instance, he supported the new museum, provided funding for the local *folkehøgskule*, and donated around forty-six thousand books to the public library.

Special Modernization Processes: Some General Points

We began with a discussion of general questions concerning alternative processes of modernization. In order to make our discussion more specific, we looked at special learning-processes and institutional differentiations in Scandinavia, characterized by the interplay between Lutheran state officials and successful popular movements, focusing more specifically on modernization processes in Norway, especially in the nineteenth century. Finally we looked at a local case in Norway in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Summarizing what I have said above about popular movements and their elites, nationally

and locally, I would like to emphasize a few points of general interest:

- They had an ability to *organize themselves*, to *transfer* spontaneous popular movements into economic, political and educational institutions.
- The main movements came in three waves (as it were), each time as a process in which spontaneous movements or actions became organized and institutionalized¹⁸ – what could not easily be realized in a singular simultaneous event could thus be obtained *by renewed processes*, from spontaneity to organization.²⁴
- These popular movements operated on a *broad scale*: in the economic field, on the political level, and in matters of education and formation.
- Deliberation and organizational work *were combined*.
- They discussed and organized *on all levels*, locally, regionally and nationally.
- They used the media of their time as an *alternative public sphere*.
- Education was conceived as *self-education*, an educational project that includes practical and theoretical training as well as *consciousness raising* on behalf of one's identity and cultural background.¹⁹
- The leaders of the popular movements behaved as civilized and reasonable persons. Thus the interaction between politically active state officials and the leaders of the popular movements resulted in some basic *mutual trust*. Hence, when the state officials 'abdicated' in 1884, they knew that nothing drastic would happen to them or to the country. This kind of basic trust is certainly a cultural precondition for a well-functioning democracy, requiring a peaceful change of power.
- All agents operated within the same Constitution and the same Confession. The learning processes of a certain tolerance for 'the others' resulted from special experiences of *socio-*

cultural and linguistic differences. Compared with a politically centralized and culturally and linguistically homogenized country like France, Norway might look like an early ‘post-modernist’ society with an inherent ‘multi-culturalism’ – that is, cultural heterogeneity within a political homogeneity.

The latter point deserves a special comment. Whereas many of the points referred to above may have equivalents in the other Nordic countries, there are some peculiar factors in the case of Norway, due to the absence of a national nobility and the ‘foreignness’ of the state officials. The Norwegian farmer was seen as the representative of the national heritage. Hence the popular fight for democracy merged with the fight for recognition of the national heritage. We got a democratic nationalism, from below – probably a unique constellation. Whereas Norway developed a homogeneous political culture (how to do things), it remained somewhat heterogeneous in terms of cultural codes and identity formation.²⁰

Furthermore, the popular movements tended to be pro-modern. That is, they were pro-enlightenment in the sense that they favoured science and new technology as well as education and a progressive public sphere, and they were to a large degree progressive in social politics, in favour of improved working conditions and social security.

The question, then, is: can these processes, roughly similar across the Nordic countries, explain the fact that these countries, in the mid-twentieth century were able to combine a universal welfare system and economic redistribution with a high degree of trust? At least we can say this: there are some deep-rooted processes in the modernization of the Nordic countries that are peculiar – to the extent that Scandinavian words like *folkelighed*, *folkhem* and *folkedanning*

remain almost untranslatable. But they are crucial, and they do allude to what could probably be seen as ‘the gentle charm of the Nordic countries’.

Conclusion: It is Time to Conclude

Processes of modernization – one or multiple? And what about the claim that processes of modernization are deterministic, endogenous, unilinear?

Taking the latter question first: we have looked at cases of modernization processes, especially in Norway. In these cases various exogenous and contingent factors evidently played an important role: the Black Death weakened the nobility and radically reduced the population, which eventuated in better access to land for farmers who survived; partly due to topography, there was no room for serfdom and thus better conditions for farmers; and a war that was lost (in 1814) provided an occasion for writing a new constitution. Nor does this case support the unilinear view which implies that there is only one road towards modernity. In this case the processes of modernization differ on essential points from those of the Anglo-American world as well as those of France and Germany. The role of Lutheran state officials in interplay with progressive and successful popular movements and elites makes a difference. So, evidently the argument that modernization processes are deterministic, endogenous and unilinear appears to be refuted by the Norwegian (and Scandinavian) case.

As to the former question (‘one or many?’): in discussing the question of alternative processes of modernization we initially focused on unavoidable characteristics of the modern condition, partly connected to the need for argumentative and reflective rationality and for an understanding of the sciences and the humanities as ‘organized scepticism’, and partly connected

to the need for some basic institutional differentiations. In this respect there is *one* modernity. At the same time however, there is apparently a certain margin for alternative institutional arrangements and for different values and world-views – *plurality* in this respect is itself a characteristic of modernity. In this sense, debates regarding the possible and desirable arrangements and forms of life continue.

The realm of what is possible includes some room for choice, but not everything that is possible can be freely chosen: we cannot choose to have experiences and learning-processes that we have not gone through ourselves. We cannot experience other people's experiences, and we cannot ourselves 're-make' such experiences when they are so tightly connected to particular events and conditions. Consequently, even though there are different ways of being modern and alternative processes of modernization, it remains to be seen what this means in terms of what we possibly can learn from each other. Similarly it remains to be seen what we today can learn from earlier experiences in our own society.

Hence, when the question 'Are the processes of modernization one or many?' is addressed, there are some fairly strong arguments in favour of the view that any successful process of modernization must accept and appropriate some basic ideas and establish some basic institutional arrangements. In this sense there are some learning processes and institutional differentiations that are necessary preconditions for any modern society. It follows, then, that the processes of modernization are singular ('one'). Our examination of Norway's modernization processes lends support to this conclusion. At the same time, though, this case also reveals how various special factors influence processes. In short, there are in fact alternative processes of modernization. In this sense, processes of modernization are plural ('many'). To conclude, we must recognize, on the whole, a blend of necessity and contingency in the processes of

modernization.

This general conclusion has two major implications. On the one hand it allows for a criticism of societies that deviate from essential characteristics of modernization, such as a modernization of consciousness and a certain institutional differentiation. On the other hand it opens for inter-cultural curiosity and dialogue, for mutual understanding and learning.

So, what does it mean to be modern and Chinese, modern and Muslim, modern and Norwegian, or modern and American? It necessarily entails a basic ‘modernization of consciousness’ and basic institutional differentiations. But how this could and should be done is the kind of question we need to discuss with each other, and hence it is useful to look into various cases of such processes of modernization, in order to understand each other better and possibly to improve unsatisfactory and unsustainable constellations.

Faced with the challenges of modernity in a precarious world situation there is evidently a need for such inter-cultural dialogues, for possible changes and improvements. Then there is also a need for serious discussion, whereby the participants recognize each other as autonomous persons and thereby take arguments seriously, which unavoidably implies that we, as reasonable and fallible persons, are open for mutual criticism, for giving and taking good reasons.

So, are the processes of modernization one or many? Yes, both – correctly understood. As a next step we should ask: what kind of modernity is likely to be a sustainable one? At least we know that a readjustment of the interrelationship between the main institutions and sub-institutions should be reconsidered, starting with the relationship between market economy, politics and civil society – for evidently, unrestrained capitalism and sustainable modernity entail conflicting perspectives and demands (G. Skirbekk et al. 1992), and unrestricted consumption

and reproduction are incompatible with a sustainable future

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Notes

¹ Skirbekk and Gilje, *A History of Western Thought*, published in 16 languages, including Chinese.

² Published by Chinese University Press, Hong Kong, 2011.

³ Cp. Eisenstadt 2000, and Arnason et al. 2005.

⁴ This paper addresses some main points in *Multiple Modernities* (Skirbekk 2011), focusing on learning processes and institutionalizations related to the interplay between state officials and successful popular movements in the nineteenth century. In the book I also comment on the historical background of these events, back to pre-Christian time, and on later developments, up to our time. The book also contains a more extensive discussion of theoretical questions concerning the conceptualization of 'modernity' and 'modernization'.

⁵ In the early European universities, from the 13th and 14th century onward, the major disciplines were theology and jurisprudence, and medicine. At that time, all three were mainly interpretive disciplines, educating for essential professions.

⁶ This is in accordance with Jürgen Habermas, but also with John Stuart Mill, and in both cases the emphasis on argumentative ("discursive") rationality is related to an awareness of human fallibility: Because we are fallible, we need to listen to each other, in a common search for better arguments (better reasons and more trustworthy opinions). Cp. this quotation from J. S. Mill (On Liberty): "There is the greatest difference between presuming an opinion to be true because, with every opportunity for contesting it, it has not been refuted, and assuming its truth for the purpose of not permitting its refutation. Complete liberty of contradicting and disproving our opinion is the very condition which justifies us in assuming its truth for purposes of action; and on no other terms can a being with human faculties have any rational assurance of being right."

⁷ In the natural sciences, as activities, not only causally explaining rationality is at stake, but also interpretations of what other scientists have written, and argumentations for and against various claims and proposals.

⁸ We recall a topic in Max Weber's notion of modernization: the relationship between "value spheres" and institutions.

⁹ Cp. his book *Milestones*.

¹⁰ If we change our approach, and raise questions of 'sustainability', we are faced with other challenges. For instance, to what extent is modern capitalist consumerism ecologically sustainable in the long run? These are certainly complex questions, involving not only problems of scarce resources and of pollution and climate change, but also problems of demographic unsustainability and global epidemics. These questions point at urgent challenges, given that we want to avoid the worst scenarios and take the precautionary principle seriously. Consequently, there are some important constraints on possible versions of modernity, constraints that are revealed by such functionalist considerations, rather than by reconstructive analyses of the past.

¹¹ Say, throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Other Lutheran states were Estonia and Prussia.

¹² For instance, privileges concerning saw mills and trade (from the mid-seventeenth century).

¹³ Especially their income and retirement pension.

¹⁴ Lutheran confirmation promoted literacy. On the other hand, it included a public examination in the church that (in a Foucauldian perspective) may be seen as a system of class-based control and disciplining.

¹⁵ GS translation, word-by-word.

¹⁶ These are some of the activities of this politician, who was also a farmer: 1881–1885 Co-founder and active member of the local 'conversation association' (*samtaleforening*). 1887–1919 Member of the community government (*heradstyret*) for thirty-two years, beginning at the age of twenty-eight. 1893–1895 Mayor (*ordfører*). 1893–1903 Member of the national board of *De forenede norske arbeidetsammfunn* (the United Norwegian Workers' Association). 1893–1929 Director (*forretningsfører*) of local *trygdekasse* (public health insurance service). 1901–1907 Vice Mayor (*viseordfører*). 1901 First candidate on the election list for *Arbeidardemokratane* (Worker Democrats), the party that won the election. 1918–1930 Director of the local branch of the (public) Bank of Norway. First chairman of local branch of *Venstre*. Member of the board of local workers' association (*Arbeidersammfunn*), for approximately fifteen years. In addition to his day-to-day efforts to achieve improvements in farming, forestry and infrastructure, and so on, he is also noteworthy for several specific political issues: 1893: Efforts to reduce working hours for farm workers, and an extra meal a day. 1894: May Day demonstration (the first in Norway outside the cities). 1895: Organizing trade unions and building a trade union house (a *folkets hus*). Efforts for social security in the form of public disability insurance (whether by disease or accident) and old age and retirement pension schemes. Efforts for better education for everyone: free school material and free education after compulsory public school. Campaign for the republic, against monarchy. Campaign for the armament of the people (before 1905). Campaign for New Norwegian language. Campaign against alcohol abuse.

¹⁷ His older brother, a forest owner who in early years had studied in Leipzig, was a member of the national assembly (*Stortinget*) and held central positions in the national forestry and timber industry organizations, including the board of industrial company Borregaard.

¹⁸ Both spontaneity and organization are necessary, but it is very difficult to achieve both at the same time.

¹⁹ Such learning-processes might lead to a mind-set that is open for future mobilization (as seen in the women's vote in 1905, and also in the organized civil resistance during the German occupation 1940-1945).

²⁰ The topography of the country may have contributed to this heterogeneity.