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Claes Berg

Gunnar Myrdal

A Life of Many Dilemmas

 Springer

Springer Studies in the History of Economic Thought

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Claes Berg

Gunnar Myrdal

A Life of Many Dilemmas

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*Dedicated to my beloved family: Adrienne,
Elias and Maria, Daniel and Tove, Jessica
and Jimmie, Julia, Lo, Tilda, Nico, Oscar*

Preface

The idea of writing a book about Gunnar Myrdal first came to me while working in Mozambique as a teacher and development aid coordinator with fellow aid workers from around the world. The challenges of underdevelopment, rooted in 500 years of colonialism, were paramount, raising critical questions: How can poverty be overcome? What roles do economic planning, market mechanisms, education, and healthcare play in the development of a country? How did nations like Sweden succeed in building functional welfare states?

My interest in the Stockholm School of Economics and Gunnar Myrdal deepened during my economics studies at Stockholm University, where I was influenced by two eminent experts Claes-Henric Siven and the late Rolf G. H. Henriksson. However, after courses led by, among others, Torsten Persson, a leading researcher in macroeconomics and political economics, the focus of my doctoral dissertation became modern macro theory. I was then employed at Sveriges Riksbank (the Central Bank) to participate in the work of restoring the Swedish economy after the collapse in the early 1990s, which broadened my understanding of the intricate relationship between economics, politics, and society. The need for strong international relations also became apparent when I was drawn into cooperation with other EU countries and made contact with leading economists and organizations outside of Sweden.

As I prepared to write this book, I reviewed the existing literature on Gunnar Myrdal, finding it fragmented across disciplines like history, sociology, economics, and journalism. While many authors have explored specific aspects of Myrdal's work, I noticed a gap: hardly any author is trying to cover the full scope of Myrdal's life and scientific, political, and international contributions. This book aims to fill that gap by examining the society that shaped Gunnar Myrdal, how he influenced it, how his theories were applied, impacting both society and research. I also explore how the central dilemmas Myrdal addressed in Sweden, Europe, the USA, and Asia have evolved since his time.

This book is a significantly revised translation of *Gunnar Myrdal—ett liv med många dilemman*, originally published in Swedish in 2023 by Dialogos Förlag. First and foremost, I want to express my deepest gratitude to Stellan Andersson, the

leading authority on Myrdal, who reviewed drafts of all the chapters and offered invaluable advice and reading suggestions. I am also immensely grateful to Per Wästberg, who read all the chapters and provided essential information, support, and encouragement that I deeply appreciate.

Gunnar Broberg offered wise insights on the chapters concerning the Emergence of the Welfare State and *An American Dilemma* just a month before his passing, for which I am profoundly thankful. Warm thanks also go to Stefan Fölster, who facilitated my connection with the Myrdal family, and to Kaj Fölster, who engaged in discussions about my drafts and provided insights into the lives of the family members. I am equally grateful to Janken Myrdal for sharing his perspectives on the secret letters between Gunnar, Alva, and Jan Myrdal, and to Sissela Bok for providing information via email.

I extend my sincere thanks to Irene Wennemo, who read the entire manuscript and offered insightful feedback; to Nils Gottfries for his overall comments; to Richard Swedberg for fact-checking the chapter on the Value Premise of Social Scientists; to Claes-Henric Siven for his helpful comments on the chapter on the Macroeconomic Revolution in Theory and Practice; to Birgit Karlsson for fact-checking the chapters on Post-War Planner and Trade Minister and the UN Economic Commission for Europe; to Allan Larsson for reviewing the chapter on how the Swedish Welfare Model was formed after the war; to Lars E.O. Svensson for his comments on the chapter on the Pinnacle of the Swedish Model and the Nobel Prize; to Daniel Waldenström, who reviewed the chapter on the development of the Swedish Welfare State after Myrdal's death; to Martin Kragh for providing information about his research on the Stockholm School; and to Heléne Lööw for fact-checking.

I also wish to thank the staff at the Swedish Labor Movement's Archive and Library for their assistance in retrieving materials from the collections in the Alva and Gunnar Myrdal archives, as well as the Olof Palme archive. Many thanks to Torgny Wadensjö, Barbro Andersson, Patrik Sundström, and Marie Åhman for their assistance with the Swedish edition, and to Benny Carlson, Ann-Marie Lindgren, Mats Lundahl, Lars Jonung, and Bo Sandelin for their comments on that edition. The translation was facilitated by some support of AI tools from OpenAI. I am also grateful for the support provided by the staff at Springer Nature, especially Executive Editor Johannes Glaeser, Production Editor Vijay Kumar Selvaraj and Production Supervisor Sridevi Suriya.

Finally, my heartfelt thanks go to my beloved wife, Adrienne, who read drafts, provided valuable feedback, and has been a tremendous support in every way. Any remaining ambiguities or errors are solely my responsibility.

Stockholm
December 2024

Claes Berg

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Most of the letters written by Gunnar and Alva Myrdal and other information are publicly available at the Swedish Labor Movement's Archives and Library and their use is gratefully acknowledged.

The unpublished work by Stellan Andersson related to Gunnar Myrdal is cited by kind permission.

Author's Endorsements

“At last, Sweden has received a high-quality biography of one of its most important social scientists, Gunnar Myrdal. For much of the twentieth century, he was intensely active in areas ranging from monetary policy and demography to discrimination and development economics. Much of what he did remains astonishingly relevant. The biography is not just a tribute—it provides a comprehensive picture of a complex but brilliant individual by also addressing his inconsistencies, failures, and personal shortcomings.”

Irene Wennemo, Director General at the Mediation Institute and PhD in Sociology

“In Berg’s book, Myrdal’s entire life and work are placed within the context of economic and political history, which the reader receives as a bonus. Much of Alva Myrdal’s career is also included. In other words, the book is a valuable addition to the literature on Gunnar Myrdal.”

Bo Sandelin, Professor Emeritus of Economics, Gothenburg University

“For a layperson and non-economist, it is easy to read, well-written, and in many ways a textbook for a broader audience, rekindling interest in Gunnar Myrdal’s life and work.”

Per Wästberg, author and member of the Swedish Academy

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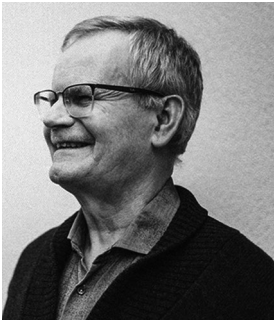
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About the Author



Claes Berg Claes Berg, Photo: Tove Freij. (Photo of Claes Berg in profile)

Claes Berg holds a Ph.D. in Economics from the University of Stockholm. He has served as the Chief Economist of the Swedish Central Bank, as the Publisher of its Economic Review, and as a member of the Monetary Policy Committee of the European System of Central Banks and a member of the High Level Monetary Policy Experts of the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). He has also advised central banks in Asia, and worked as a development coordinator in Southern Africa. He has previously written about economic policy, the Stockholm School of Economics, and authored the textbook *Global ekonomi* (Global Economics).

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Chapter 1

Why Gunnar Myrdal?



An introductory overview of Gunnar Myrdal's significant contributions to social science, the Swedish welfare state, international development, and their relevance today.

Introduction

This is the tale of a man born in 1898 in a small chamber of a cottage in a poor and remote part of Sweden, where people emigrated. He was initially named Karl Gunnar Pettersson, like anyone else in the region. During his early years, he was individualistic, headstrong, and rebellious, with poor school grades. However, after a few years, he buckled down, studied his lessons, and improved his grades. He developed an interest in history and social issues and eventually embraced social science without blinders, freeing it from ingrained prejudices. He used insights from economics, political science, sociology, and psychology to identify and solve major societal problems. He was at the forefront of several ideological and moral battles of the twentieth century and was one of the shapers of the modern view that embodies equal rights and opportunities for all, regardless of family, class, or ethnic background. He also laid behind much of what has long been taken for granted in the welfare state: equalization of living conditions, childcare centers, free school meals, and economic policy for full utilization of both labor and capital. By then, he had changed his name and become known as Gunnar Myrdal, a name he was alone in carrying, fitting for someone aspiring to fame and honor.

The dilemma between ideals and reality was central to his work. He first formulated a dilemma or problem in a way that would be accessible to most people. Then he presented a compelling and convincing solution to the dilemma, one that would gain approval and be considered the best.

Contributions

A dilemma he grappled with throughout his life was the gap between a scientific analysis of actual reality and the values of desirable changes. He concluded that those proposing solutions to societal problems should openly declare the values and selection principles underlying their proposals. According to Myrdal, this would stimulate the pursuit of truth and open discussion about the crucial issues of the time.

Gunnar Myrdal believed that a freely functioning market economy does not automatically lead to economic balance and full employment. The state can and should stabilize the economy with demand-side policies. Moreover, the state should support the business sector's capital formation and the mobility of the workforce with supply-side policies. Myrdal aspired to a dynamic society where a strong state and robust companies and organizations spurred each other. He also introduced households' and businesses' future expectations into social analysis. In all these areas, Myrdal's contributions were pioneering and of lasting value, influencing economic policy to this day.

A noticeable dilemma in the 1930s, Sweden was the insufficient efforts to reduce poverty and the reluctance to have children. Social malpractices needed to be addressed with preventive social reform policies, according to Gunnar Myrdal and his wife and colleague Alva Myrdal, who quickly gained support for several of their ideas. Particularly Gunnar had an exceptional influence on government investigative work, but not all proposals became reality. The powerful social minister Gustav Möller sometimes opposed them, especially after Gunnar Myrdal left Sweden in 1938 to undertake a study of the race issue in the USA.

Gunnar Myrdal's extensive analysis of racial oppression in the USA, *An American Dilemma*, published in 1944, led to his international breakthrough. The Supreme Court cited Gunnar Myrdal's book when it decided in 1954, in the case "Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka," that all segregation of races in schools and other places is against the American Constitution.¹ The decision became a central impulse in the fight for equal rights in the USA and a template for many similar legal cases. Myrdal's in-depth analysis represents the pinnacle of his authorship.

Gunnar Myrdal became a leading politician in Sweden during some of the war years, played a central role in post-war planning, and joined the government after the war, but his time as Minister of Trade was short. In several cases, he was personally criticized and forced to leave the government. In one instance, a veritable hate campaign against Myrdal was led by his old friend Herbert Tingsten, editor-in-chief of the daily newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*; in another, Dag Hammarskjöld, Chairman of the Riksbank's general council and future Secretary-General of the United Nations, was a central figure.

¹Linda Brown, daughter of Oliver Brown, a black welder and church pastor, was denied a place at a nearby white school in Topeka, Kansas, and was forced by the school board to take a bus to a segregated school for black students. Her father pursued the case all the way to the Supreme Court.

The dilemma of the Cold War between the USA and the Soviet Union was central when Gunnar Myrdal in 1947 assumed the position of head of the UN's new Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) in Geneva. Myrdal worked for 10 years with the challenge of coordinating efforts to rebuild all of Europe, which World War II had devastated. After several years of headwind, Myrdal broke the deadlock between East and West with innovative initiatives regarding economic cooperation in Europe. However, Myrdal and Hammarskjöld found themselves in different roles and clashed in several duels. Myrdal primarily wanted to use the ECE in Geneva to build a bridge between East and West. In contrast, Hammarskjöld focused on supporting the reconstruction in Western Europe in the organization set up to handle the American Marshall Plan, the OEEC in Paris. This contributed to his appointment as UN Secretary-General in 1953 instead of the more experienced Myrdal.

Myrdal then spent many years of his life understanding world poverty and proposing measures to eliminate it. He also participated in shaping the Swedish state's development aid policy, with Olof Palme in a central role. A crucial dilemma in poor countries is the contrast between hopes for an increased standard of living and brakes on development: attitudes toward work, weak institutions, authoritarian, and corrupt regimes. His most comprehensive work was *Asian Drama*.

Gunnar Myrdal was awarded the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel in 1974. His work was then carried forward by other researchers in various fields—economics, sociology, and political science—but it happened with a delay; the methods needed to be developed and adapted to his broad perspective.

Alva Myrdal

Alva Myrdal consistently played a central role in her husband's intellectual development, collaborated with him on several books, and participated in the work on both major works, *An American Dilemma* and *Asian Drama*. Conflicts between ideals and reality in their lives and work together developed into crucial dilemmas at several points: once at the beginning of their acquaintance and a second time during the work on the American dilemma. When Gunnar was completely absorbed in his work with Europe's reconstruction at the ECE, Alva's situation became increasingly critical. She then chose to make herself free and accepted a high position at the UN in New York. She left the rest of the family in Geneva but received much collegial support from Gunnar for her new work. Alva Myrdal's upbringing and life are briefly described here, but her contributions are explored in more depth in some areas: work with welfare reforms, refugee work during the war, preparations for Europe's reconstruction, and her role as Swedish ambassador to India.

Personality

Gunnar Myrdal's own personality encompasses several facets. At times, he harbored boundless ambitions; at other times, he fell into a deep depression. He took on many challenging tasks and became wholly absorbed for a while. His work pace was enormous, but his interest in anything other than work was negligible. He liked to delegate tasks to others, but he had difficulty collaborating; he needed to be in control to be content. He had a patented approach to handling setbacks: fleeing to a new, absorbing, and large-scale task. He loved debates on society and politics, especially when he could speak and others listened. Author Sigrid Kahle was present in Cambridge, USA, when Gunnar Myrdal had finished *Asian Drama* and was at his daughter Sissela Bok's home.² Kahle noted that when Myrdal was holding the first copy of *Asian Drama* in his hand, he was flipping through it happily. She thought that it must be a happy moment to hold a book in one's hand that one has worked on for 10 years. Just like that, Myrdal must have stood at Princeton's station with the completed manuscript of *An American Dilemma* in his hand, exclaiming, "Done! Everything I have lived for!" Kahle also noted that she had never met a Swede who had such high thoughts about himself. Yet, she liked him and did not doubt his greatness.

Relevance Today

Several of Gunnar Myrdal's dilemmas are highly relevant today. His plea for openness about one's values and selection principles is a memento in today's polarized social climate. The pursuit of truth and rational discourse would benefit if researchers and debaters declare the value premises underlying their analysis of important social issues. Among the most intensely discussed topics are the cracks in many Western welfare states. In Sweden, there is a sharp contrast between the equality ideals and the segregated reality. In recent decades, new social movements have deepened the fight against racial oppression in the USA and shown that the American dilemma remains significant. The idea of equal rights plays a central role in safeguarding Afro-American culture against White dominance—a theme that recurs in debates about Myrdal's dilemma.

In the last decade, the world has also been hit by a wave of autocratization. Many countries with weak institutions have been taken over by authoritarian regimes. This raises the question of the relationship between different forms of state capacity, underdevelopment, and oppression—a dilemma that Myrdal highlighted earlier. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has sparked a need to study the experiences of World War II and the work on rebuilding Europe during the coldest period of the Cold War. Gunnar Myrdal's contributions from that time are little known but, as we shall see,

² Kahle (2003, p. 723).

worth noting, especially in light of the devastation in Ukraine and the burgeoning Cold War 2.0. Myrdal's work on conflict resolution when an American export embargo was imposed on Eastern countries provides insight into the mechanisms that influence such a conflict and how difficult they can be to manage.

Gunnar Myrdal described his career in economics as spanning three distinct phases. Initially, he was an economic theorist within the neoclassical tradition, aiming to develop theories that surpassed those of his predecessors. Subsequently, the depression of the 1930s led him to evolve into a political and social economist. In the final phase of his career, he emerged as an institutional economist.³ Thus he recognized that even the focus of attention is on specific economic problems, the study must take account of the entire social system, including everything else of importance for what comes to happen in the economic field.⁴

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³Myrdal (1968, p. 17). Exactly when Myrdal became an institutionalist is not clear, as noted by Richard Swedberg (Swedberg 1990, p. xii). But it is clear that he became one during the 1930s. Myrdal noted later that his political work in Sweden on social equality problems could not be handled scientifically except by broadening the approach to all human relations, Myrdal (1978a, p. 772).

⁴Myrdal (1978b, p. 13).

Chapter 2

Childhood, Study Years, Roots, and the Early Years with Alva



Gunnar and Alva Myrdal's childhood and adolescent years in Sweden are placed in a social and historical context. Their upbringing in the first decades of the twentieth century is described against the backdrop of the transformation from an agricultural society to an industrial society, marked by the emergence of democracy and incipient social welfare. Gunnar's early education suffered due to his lack of diligence and frequent relocations, but he eventually excelled after moving to Stockholm and developed an interest in Enlightenment philosophy and political science. Gunnar and Alva's relationship blossomed into a partnership that would later influence Sweden's social reforms. Most influential in Gunnar Myrdal's early career was Gustav Cassel, considered one of the world's leading economists. In a short time, Gunnar established himself as a scientific star and soon he became one of the leading Stockholm economists, alongside Erik Lindahl and Bertil Ohlin. When studying in the USA he met many renowned economists and sociologists, broadening Gunnar Myrdal's focus to encompass a wider range of social sciences.

Childhood

Skattungbyn is located 10 miles northeast of Orsa, nestled on the slopes of the Siljan Ring within the picturesque Swedish region of Dalarna. It boasts views of the expansive forests in the Finnmark to the west and the serene Lake Skattungens to the east. When Linnaeus passed through the village on his journey through Dalarna in 1734, there were 65 farms, but all the people were out on distant meadows harvesting, so he continued his journey toward Orsa church.¹ Most of the day, he had to travel over moors or heaths. In the morning, the north wind blew. After noon, rain

¹Linnaeus (1984, p. 24).

came after strong heat, though thunder was not heard, but it soon passed, according to Linnaeus.

Karl Gunnar Pettersson was born in the chamber of Nissapers Juggas' cottage in Skattungbyn on December 6th 1898. His father, 22-year-old Carl Adolf Pettersson, and mother, 20-year-old Anna Sofia Pettersson, both from Solvarbo, were temporarily residing in Skattungbyn, as the father was constructing the railway station for the Orsa–Bollnäs railway. “Kalle” was his first nickname, but later it became Gunnar, inspired by a poem by Viktor Rydberg.

Carl Adolf Pettersson hailed from simple circumstances at Myresgården in Solvarbo and had completed 6 years of elementary school. After a brief training at a craft seminar in Hedemora, he broke free from farm work by becoming an entrepreneur and building railway stations in the countryside. Pettersson advanced as a building master in his hometown and then moved with his family to Falun, the largest city in Dalarna and the site of Sweden's largest copper mine, in 1902 and then to Stockholm, the capital, in 1905. However, he maintained his interest in the countryside and bought a farm in Västmanland in 1909, later a couple of farms in Uppland, and finally Gesta farm in Södermanland in 1922, where he lived until his death. He was a forceful and noisy man who rose in Swedish society during the great industrialization process by building houses on contract and through speculative deals. Politically, he was conservative and patriarchal in the family. However, his youth's temperance gave way to alcoholism, and he was unfaithful to his wife.

Anna Sofia Pettersson, née Karlsson, was the daughter of a miller. After marrying Carl Adolf, she devoted herself to their eldest son Gunnar and the three children who followed him: Elsa born in 1900, Mela in 1902, and Robert in 1905.² She strived for cleanliness and obedience from the children, and it was she who disciplined them, especially Gunnar, who was considered rebellious.³ She was religious and family-loving. She was uncomfortable with her husband's ambitious nature, his drinking, and his affairs with other women. She disliked the many relocations caused by her husband's business activities. She lamented her unhappy marriage, but divorce was never an option, for religious reasons. However, she took her role in raising her children to be good citizens very seriously. Gunnar, in particular, was considered talented. The mother instilled in her eldest son the importance of high ideals, a strong work ethic, and community spirit.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, Dalarna was a poor and relatively remote region from which people emigrated to America. However, it was vividly remembered that Dalarna had never been occupied by foreign power and that King Gustav Vasa, with the help of the Dalecarlians, had chased the Danes out of the country. Gunnar Myrdal strongly identified with his Dalecarlian lineage and origins. He stated in a newspaper interview in *Aftontidningen* in 1943, quoted in Andersson (1989, p. 7):

I have always imagined that my most honest identification is with this stubborn, individualistic, tradition-stable, ultra-democratic Dalecarlian region.

² Bok (1987, pp. 62–64).

³ Jackson (2021, p. 94).

Gunnar spent his early years in Solvarbo, but when he was 3–4 years old, the family moved to Falun. In the 1943 interview, he recalled how his great curiosity was awakened, quoted in Andersson (1989, p. 10):

One of my childhood memories is that I walk and see a large, large city – I guess it’s Falun – and feel frighteningly curious when I think of all the thousand windows and all the people behind them: men, women, and children, working, eating, and sleeping, arguing and laughing, talking on the phone, and reading newspapers. Where does everyone get their money from? How does everyone get food? Why do people become what they become? Why do they marry each other and have the children they have? Why do they behave the way they do? Why not differently? How would it go then? How does everything fit together?

Study Years

When Gunnar was about 7 years old, the family moved to Stockholm, where they frequently changed residences. The family’s many moves contributed to Gunnar’s initial schooling suffering. After starting at Maria Elementary School in 1905, he attended two different preparatory elementary schools (Maria and Östermalm) before enrolling in Södermalm Higher General School (Södra Latin) in 1908. His grades were weak or very weak. He received remarks for carelessness, lack of diligence, and disruptive behavior. His mother’s admonitions were of little help. He disliked studying for homework. However, he did not need to repeat any class because a teacher said, quoted in Andersson (1989, p. 15): “He does have a little head; it’s a pity to stop him.”

The family moved out of Stockholm to Västmanland in 1911, and Gunnar had to change schools again, now to the State Co-educational School in Köping. His schooling was soon interrupted when he fell from a downspout and injured his hip. He failed and did not receive satisfactory grades in conduct and diligence. His father considered taking him out of school. He missed the autumn term of 1911 and the spring term of 1912. Once he had recovered, he signed a commitment to, quoted in Andersson (1989, p. 14): “be absolutely nice and obedient and willingly and promptly complete all tasks father assigns me.” If he broke the obedience requirement, a severe punishment awaited him with five strokes of a birch rod or stick.

At this time, Gunnar was confirmed, and in his confirmation Bible, his mother had written the priest’s parting words: “Be vigilant, stand firm in faith.” Gunnar remembered much later in that his father, unusually, studied the Bible and found a sentence more to his liking, quoted in Myrdal (1985): “Through idleness, the house’s beams decay, and through neglect, it drips through the roof” (Fig. 2.1).

The father’s stern threats and admonitions had the intended effect. Gunnar began to study seriously in high school. He spent the first year at Västerås High School for Boys, living as a boarder in the city.⁴ After the family moved back to Stockholm, a

⁴He spent the fall of 1914 at the high school in Västerås, but there are no grades from there (Andersson, 1989, p. 16). See also Jackson (2021, p. 99).



Fig. 2.1 Gunnar in 1915. (Courtesy of the Swedish Labor Movement's Archives and Library)

successful study period at the High School on Norrmalm (Norra Real) began in 1915. It was at this time that the father changed the surname of his children from Pettersson to Myrdal. The name came from the family farm in Solvarbo called Myres, meaning the farm at Myrdalen that goes down to the river, situated at the very end.

Gunnar's studies at Norra Real were significant for his social and intellectual development. He met good friends and was taught by knowledgeable teachers, often lecturers with doctorates. He took the time to read a lot on his own. His grades improved significantly, and he was considered very talented.

His teacher in Swedish and history, John Lindqvist, played a particularly important role for the young Gunnar, who talked about him in an interview with Stellan Andersson in 1983, quoted in Andersson (1989, p. 18):

He used to take time to walk in front of the class and talk about the Enlightenment. It was there I got this attitude towards Enlightenment philosophy, which I increasingly came to regard as a view, that people and their society could be reformed and improved.

Lecturer Lindqvist contributed to insights about the interplay between economic interests, domestic politics, strategic military thinking, and diplomacy. It was probably also Lindqvist who first made Myrdal aware of the objectivity problem in historical research.⁵

Gunnar wrote several essays for Lindqvist, often about Swedish history. Some of the essays showed influences from Rudolf Kjellén, a professor in political science and a member of parliament for a right-wing party. Kjellén was internationally recognized. His work *Stormakterna* (the Great Powers), published in 1905, provided a broad institutional analysis of the drivers of development and conflict, where the struggle for resources and territories was placed within a broad analytical framework that included both subjective political values and objective geographical facts, summarized in the concept of *geopolitics*. Gunnar Myrdal retained his appreciation for Kjellén as a political scientist throughout his life.⁶

Gunnar Myrdal and his fellow students also met in a discussion club, *Fraternitas Studiosorum Holmiae*, where they discussed various current issues. In the spring of 1919, 20-year-old Myrdal spoke about “The Mass and Intelligence,” advocating for an intelligence party to solve problems arising in democratic society.⁷ In his speech, Myrdal argued that democratic politics are dumb, dirty, and irresponsible. What was required to gain power was the ability to mesmerize and capture the masses, which were considered almost impervious to rational arguments. As a bulwark against mass suggestion, the intelligence party would defend the general interest against selfishness.

The speech was delivered in a conservative context and contained values that Myrdal would not retain. However, it foreshadowed a departure from classical liberalism and an argument for an enlightened elite to manage the lives of citizens in a democratic society. It has been claimed that Gunnar Myrdal, as a young man, was a member of *Sveriges Nationella Ungdomsförbund* (Sweden’s National Youth Federation), which he has refuted as untrue, but Eric Wärenstam’s book about the organization suggests he was a member in 1919.⁸

It has also been pointed out that the ideas about the role of the elite were present outside the conservative sphere where young Myrdal felt at home.⁹ References are made to “the avant-garde of the labor movement,” to Lenin and the role of

⁵ Andersson (1989, p. 22).

⁶ Kjellén’s work played an important role in Myrdal’s *Asian Drama*. He requisitioned his books to New Delhi in 1957 before starting the work, see Andersson (1989, p. 26). In a note from 1985 about Jan Myrdal’s autobiography *Childhood*, Gunnar Myrdal mentioned that he still appreciated Kjellén, see Myrdal (1985).

⁷ The speech is published in its entirety in Andersson (1989, pp. 26–32).

⁸ Jan Myrdal (1982b) claims this, while Gunnar Myrdal asserts it is untrue in Gunnar Myrdal (1985, Sect. 11). Wärenstam (1965, p. 13), however, notes that law student Gunnar Myrdal, like Eli Heckscher, was a member of the Stockholm branch of Sweden’s National Youth Association in 1919, which was close to the conservatives (General Voters’ Union) but evolved in a far-right and anti-Semitic direction in the 1930s when Gunnar Myrdal was a social democrat and active anti-Nazi.

⁹ Appelqvist and Andersson (1998, p. 368).