Parliament as a Model for Debate – Learning and Adoption of Parliamentary Procedures in the Late Nineteenth-Century Finland

Introduction

In the paper, I am not focusing on a specific concept or its change, but on an aspect of parliamentary procedure that has been more or less neglected in the contemporary parliamentary studies. From a historical point of view, I am interested in the transfer of a notion of debate, whose learning and popularisation took place in Finland in the nineteenth century. The idea of political debate, which emphasised the principle of speaking pro et contra, was studied in Finland in the early nineteenth century through newspaper articles and practiced for example in the mini-parliaments of the university’s student unions. Notion of pro et contra became topical in the Finnish newspaper polemics of the 1860s, and in the beginning of the Finnish Diet work it was seen to find its purest and most structured form in parliamentary rules and practices. Pro et contra served as a guiding principle in the development of the Finnish parliamentary procedures, and was also used as a model for debate in associations, parties, clubs, city councils, communal meetings and church parliaments.

In the nineteenth century the political circumstances of Finland were, as the contemporaries called them, peculiar. In 1809 what had been the eastern part of Sweden1, Finland became a grand duchy of the Russian Empire. In 1809 the Finnish Estates were summoned by Tsar Alexander I for the Diet of Porvoo, but were not convened again for over fifty years until

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1 During the Swedish period, Finland had a modest and varying representation in the Swedish Riksdag of the Estates.
1863. In the Diet of 1863 none of the members of the Estates had experience in parliamentary work and the Estates did not have a consistent set of procedures to ground their work on until the Diet Act of 1869. Before the beginning of the periodical Finnish Diets in the 1860s the newspaper press formed the main arena for political debate where different opinions, arguments and ideas could confront and challenge each other in Finland. Political groups organised around newspapers disputed the manner, style and procedure in which political controversies were to be treated and discussed.

The notion of debate I examine became topical in Finland in the 1860s when the political press became active and the regular Diets began their work. The events coincided with a temporary loosening of Russian censorship in Finland\(^2\), which enabled a freer adoption and acquisition of foreign ideas and literature. The understanding of debate, which was adopted especially by the Finnish liberals, emphasised the need to examine questions on the agenda \textit{pro et contra}, for and against, from opposing points of view. According to the Finnish liberals, this style of debate was the only means to examine the truth thoroughly by shedding light on its different sides. The understanding of debate which implied a perspectivist approach to social and political questions indebted much to John Stuart Mill’s texts and to the study of the British style of parliamentary procedure.\(^3\)

In Finland, the Finnish liberals’ notion of debate was confronted by philosopher and statesman Johan Vilhelm Snellman and his Fennoman\(^4\) followers who understood debate as a mere transitional phase in the realisation of historical reason. In the paper, I examine Snellman’s view on debate in relation to François Guizot. Although drawing from a different theoretical background, Guizot and Snellman are connected by a similar philosophy of history and rejection of the epistemology of debate that the Finnish liberals and Mill shared. The two competing conceptions of debate can be seen to reflect two different understandings and expectations that are given to parliamentary debate even today.

\(^2\) The temporary loosening of the censorship was a result of the Crimean War (1853–56), the coronation of Alexander II after the tight censorship of Nicholas I and the re-organisation of the Finnish censorship system in 1861. In 1861 the Governor-General’s power over censorship was dismantled and given to a censorship committee. In 1865 prepublication censorship was abolished, but re-established in 1867. (Landgren 1988, 276–278; Tommila 1988, 104–105, 178)

\(^3\) Kari Palonen (2010) has examined \textit{pro et contra} and the perspectivism connected to it as a principle of the Renaissance rhetorical culture that has been institutionalised in the British parliament, and analysed it in relation to Max Weber’s concept of ‘objectivity’.

\(^4\) The Fennomans were a Finnish political movement that sought to improve the position of the Finnish language in relation to Swedish, and to raise the status of the Finnish culture in general.
The late nineteenth-century Finnish discussions offer a window to highlight a historical procedural aspect of parliamentarism that has been to a great extent forgotten or ignored in contemporary analyses. The dissensual style of parliamentary procedure and its ability to sharpen and clarify opposition and controversy and encourage invention of arguments and counterarguments contrasts with the consensus-seeking and conflict-smoothing styles often demanded by contemporary deliberative democracy theorists and politicians in public discussion. As understood in the historical Finnish discussions, the parliamentary style of debate offers a means to control and regulate, but also to advance and intensify political dispute in order to reach justifiable conclusions.

**The interest in foreign parliaments in the late nineteenth-century Finland**

Young Finnish intelligentsia’s interest in parliaments was apparent already in the early nineteenth century. For example in the 1820s newspapers such as *Finlands Allmänna Tidning* reported regularly and extensively on the debates of the British and French parliaments. The Finnish university students applied newspapers’ lessons on parliamentary style of debate in the student unions’ mini-parliaments (Klinge 1967, 179).

However, in the early 1860s, when it became apparent that the Estates would be assembled, Finnish interest in parliaments rose to a new level. The interest in parliamentary topics was motivated by a desire to develop the Finnish system towards the principles and procedures of parliamentarism, and consequently, to strengthen Finland’s autonomy. Although efforts were made in order to create forms of parliamentary oversight between the Diet and the Senate of Finland, establishment of a parliamentary government was seen unlikely. Consequently, Finnish parliamentary institutions were developed through procedural modifications within, without touching the forms of the constitution. One of these aspects was the quality of debate, for which models were searched from foreign parliaments.

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5 The first Finnish Diet Act of 1869 set the framework for Finnish parliamentary procedures until the Parliamentary Reform of 1906, in which the Diet of four estates was transformed into a unicameral *Eduskunta* elected by universal suffrage. The Parliament Act of 1906 was to a great extent built on the sections of the Diet Act of 1869. The Diet Act of 1869 was according to Russian instructions to be based on obsolete Swedish *Riksdag* law and practices from the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, the Finnish reformists of the 1860s were able to include more modern procedures in the Diet Act by drawing from a variety of foreign discussions and by using the sections of the Swedish Riksdag Act of 1810.
In addition to foreign literature on parliaments, which was usually subordinated to Russian censorship, the role of the newspaper press was central in the Finnish learning of parliamentary rules and practices. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Finnish newspapers translated long sections of foreign parliamentary debates and presented parliamentary traditions and procedures in extensive series of articles. In the press Finnish political groups continued and provided background for the debates of the Diet and the Eduskunta. As a result of juxtaposing the Finnish and the international, the work of the Diet and the Eduskunta was easily viewed through the prism of foreign models. This was clear in view of the procedures, whose interpretation and application were frequently disputed in newspapers outside the actual parliamentary debates. Presentations on foreign procedures were often published concurrently with Finnish disputes and reforms and thus intended to influence the Finnish discussions. Books, articles, foreign parliamentary debates and their translations introduced ideas, arguments and conceptual tools for Finnish debates.

A group consisting of Finnish political elite, who have been referred to as “liberals” by themselves, some of their contemporaries and later historical research, were prominent in discussing and developing Finnish parliamentary procedures in relation to foreign models. Reforms on the Finnish Diet procedures were high on the Finnish liberals’ agenda from the beginning. A central part of the Diet’s debates on parliamentary rules and practices were based on the proposals of the prominent liberals in the Burghers and Nobility. Examination of the Finnish newspaper material reveals the Finnish liberals’ admiration of the British

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6 I have analysed the Finnish use of foreign parliamentary models in detail in case studies in conference papers and articles. For example for references to the debates on the Irish obstruction in the British House of Commons in the late 1870s and early 1880s, see Pekonen 2012a; references to John Stuart Mill, Edmund Burke and François Guizot’s speeches in the French parliament in the Finnish discussions on free and imperative mandate, see Pekonen 2013; for discussions on unparliamentary language, see Pekonen 2012b.

7 From 1860s to 1880s the Finnish liberals formed a loose group or network instead of an organised political party. Liberals did not name their leaders, did not organise proper agitation or campaigns and did not recognise party discipline. Heterogeneity and diffuseness was characteristic to the movement throughout its history. (Numminen 1950, 164) In 1862 the newly established newspaper Helsingfors Dagblad became the most important cohesive force and chief organ of the Finnish liberal movement. The newspaper held its position as the main arena for liberal thinkers and politicians throughout the liberals’ active years. In the newspaper, the central liberal figures presented their opinions about current political issues and its reporters conducted the recruitment and naming of the liberal candidates for elections. The liberals also held their important meetings at Dagblad’s editorial office and Helsinki-based liberals met there on daily basis. (Numminen 1950, 165, 184) The Finnish liberals as a political group came to its end in the mid-1880s after the unsuccessful establishment of an official Liberal Party and publication of the Liberal Party Programme in 1880. After this a substantial part of the Finnish liberals joined forces with the Svecomans, who supported the Swedish-speaking minority in the language strife. A major reason for the breakdown was the dominance of the language question, in which the liberals tried to remain neutral. The liberals’ stand in between the Svecomans and the pro-Finnish Fennomans led to attacks and critique from both sides, the most significant of which came from Snellman, who attacked the Liberal Party Programme in the newspaper Morgonbladet immediately after its publication in December 1880.
parliament. Whereas foreign parliaments, their debates and decisions were reported actively in Finnish newspapers throughout the political field, the liberal chief organ *Helsingfors Dagblad*, its followers such as Åbo Underrättelser and Östra Finland and the early *Hufvudstadsbladet* published extensive specialised articles on the rules and practices of the British parliament. In addition to the liberal newspapers’ and Diet members’ active participation in Finnish procedure debates, the reforms on parliamentary rules and practices were central in the political programmes and discussions of the Helsinki-based liberal clubs of the 1870s.

John Stuart Mill and the Finnish liberals’ understanding of debate

The liberal group behind *Helsingfors Dagblad* adopted John Stuart Mill’s ideas, arguments and vocabulary from the beginning of the newspaper’s publication in 1862 and fused them as part of the group’s programme. As a sign of the interest in Mill’s works and the wish to propagate his ideas, *On Liberty* and *Considerations on Representative Government* were marketed and sold by Finnish bookshops and discussed by newspapers soon after their first publication.

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8 Robert Castrén’s presentation in a meeting of the liberal club Sextioettan in 1879 was illustrative of the liberal procedure tactics. Castrén proposed that two possible courses of action of parliamentary reform existed in Finland. Finland was either to change over to a bicameral system or to concentrate on developing the existing system step by step. According to Castrén, as the Finnish system had developed during centuries, as part of Sweden, it might be more secure to ground on old foundations as had taken place in England. Castrén argued that “it might seem hopeless to build ruins, but it was better to fix a hut with construction defects than to move to a palace, whose suitability was unknown”. (Robert Castrén’s presentation in Sextioettan, 12 March 1879, in Numminen 1950, 179) In view of developing the existing system, liberals took two different themes: the question of suffrage and eligibility, and the improvement of the parliamentary rules and practices. (Draft for the programme of the National Liberal Club, in Numminen 1950, 179–180)

9 Mill’s *On Liberty* was sold in Finland in 1859, the year it was first published (see the advertisement of the bookshop Frenckell & Sons in Finlands Allmänna Tidning, 12 Aug., 1859, 4). Mill’s ideas from *On Liberty* and *Considerations on Representative Government* were presented in the liberal Finnish newspaper *Papperslyktan* in 1861, the same year *Considerations* was first published (see Papperslyktan, 4 Nov., 1861, 2–6). In 1865 also a Swedish-language translation (Mill 1865 [1859]) of *On Liberty* was printed and published in Helsinki. Finnish bookshops marketed the book actively in Finnish newspapers in the mid-1860s (see e.g. J. D. Palanders bokhandel in Björneborg, 2 Dec., 1865, 4; Wåsenius & korp. in Helsingfors Tidningar, 27 Nov., 1866, 4; Hufvudstadsbladet, 21 Dec., 1865, 3; J. Th. Åkerman in Åbo Underrättelser, 31 Jan., 1867, 4). *On Liberty* was translated into Finnish in 1891 (Mill 1891 [1859]). In 1862 a Swedish translation of *Considerations on Representative Government* (Mill 1862 [1861]) was published in Norrköping, Sweden and sold and marketed by Finnish bookshops from 1863. In 1863 *Helsingfors Dagblad* (21 Jan., 1863, 3) reported that the Swedish translation of Mill’s famous work *Om det representativa styrelsessättet* had been published and that it “was unnecessary to underline the usefulness of the book for the public during the present time in view of the question it discusses.” A month later the book was marketed in Helsinki (Helsingfors Dagblad, 20 Feb., 1863, 4). For advertisements of the book see e.g. Sederholm & Komp. in Helsingfors Dagblad, 9 May, 1863, 3; 18 Feb., 1864, 4; Frenckell & Sons Bokhandel in Finlands Allmänna Tidning, 29 July, 1863, 4; A. Widerströms Bokhandel in Vasabladet, 14 Nov., 1863, 4; Frenckellska Bokhandeln and A. W. Edgren in Åbo Underrättelser, 22 Aug., 1863, 6.
Mill discussed his ideas of antagonism and pluralism, which were fundamental to his other texts as well, in *On Liberty*. According to Mill, Europe’s progressive and many-sided development was a result of the existence of contrasting opinions and their constant tendency to challenge each other. For Mill, the lack of opposition to prevailing opinions signified stagnation (Mill 2001 [1859], 102–103). Similarly, in his essay on Bentham, Mill warned about “despotism of public opinion”\(^\text{10}\), and noted that all countries which had long continued progressive or been durably great, had been so due to the existence of *organised opposition* to the ruling power. In addition, all the greatest men in history had been part of such an opposition\(^\text{11}\). According to Mill, it was to be remembered that the majority had the power not because it was “just in itself”, but because it was “less unjust than any other footing on which the matter can be placed”. Mill argued that it was necessary that the institutions of society made provision for keeping up *a perpetual and standing opposition* to the will of the majority. Identity of position, pursuits, partialities, passions and prejudices had to be counter-balanced by different sorts of the same, otherwise one narrow, mean type of human nature would be made universal and perpetual. This would render any correction of imperfection hopeless and crush the improvement of man’s intellectual and moral nature. (Mill 1859 [1838], 379–380)

In *On Liberty* Mill presented his idea of the truth having different sides to be presented, debated and discovered. Mill argued against suppressing opinions and claimed that all sorts of opinions, whether they were false, partly true or true, benefitted the common good. According to Mill, persons and groups had the tendency to consider their own opinion as superior, and to exclude *other parts of the truth*. Mill noted that the prevailing, popular or general opinion was rarely or never the whole truth. Only by *collision of adverse opinions* the remainder of the truth had any chance of being supplied. (Mill 2001 [1859], 66, 75–76) Mill argued that to refuse a hearing to an opinion and silencing of discussion was to assume infallibility and absolute certainty. (Mill 2001 [1859], 29) Mill claimed that it was the duty of both governments and individuals to carefully form the truest opinions they could, but never to impose them upon others unless they were “quite sure of being right”. However, Mill

\(^{10}\) In the edited version of 1859 “despotism of Public Opinion” was replaced by “absolute authority of the majority”.

\(^{11}\) In *On Liberty* Mill wrote that "Persons of genius are, *ex vi termini, more* individual than any other people – less capable, consequently, of fitting themselves, without hurtful compression, into any of the small number of moulds which society provides in order to save its members the trouble of forming their own character.” In order to benefit from the genius, the society was to let him/her breathe in an atmosphere of freedom. (Mill 2001 [1859], 92)
noted that there was no such thing as “absolute certainty”, only “assurance sufficient for human life” (Mill 2001 [1859], 31). Mill argued that conflicting doctrines often, instead of being one true and the other false, shared the truth between them. The “nonconforming opinion” was needed to “supply the remainder of the truth, of which the received doctrine embodies only part.” (Mill 2001 [1859], 66) According to Mill, man was “capable of rectifying his mistakes by discussion and experience” and emphasised the role of free discussion and open criticism in order to show how experience was to be interpreted (Mill 2001 [1859], 31–32).

The idea of opposition and collision of opinions in order to cover different sides of the truth was central to Mill’s view on education as well. In On Liberty Mill argued that education should be organised to encourage and enforce debating and thinking pro et contra. Mill saw Socrates’ and Plato’s dialectics as prime examples of this mode of discussion. Similarly, according to Mill, in the medieval schools the principle had been used to make pupils understand their own as well as their opponent’s argument, and to invent objections to the opponent’s argument and to strengthen their own. According to Mill, the achievements of today owed much these old practices that were to be recovered. (Mill 2001 [1859], 64–66)

In a passage in On Liberty, Mill presented his idea of antagonism in relation to the procedural aspect of fair play. Mill argued that there should be rules and institutions that secured the different opinions, that is “all sides of truth”, the chance of fair play:

“I am aware that there is not, in this country, any intolerance of differences of opinion on most of these topics. They are adduced to show, by admitted and multiplied examples, the universality of the fact, that only through diversity of opinion is there, in the existing state of human intellect, a chance of fair play to all sides of the truth. When there are persons to be found, who form an exception to the apparent unanimity of the world on any subject, even if the world is in the right, it is always probable that dissentients have something worth hearing to say for themselves, and that truth would lose something by their silence.” (Mill 2001 [1859], 69–70)

Austrian statesman and historian Josef Redlich explicited the procedural aspect of fair play in his The procedure of the House of Commons (1908 [1905]). Similarly to Mill, Redlich connected the idea of fair play to the principle of the protection of the minority, which was essential to the British parliamentary practice. According to Redlich, parliamentary rules were to assure “fair play for each party”, and to give the minority all conceivable rights of
expressing its views and aims and to allow it to use all permissible weapons of speech and political tactics in the parliamentary battle. Redlich argued that the principle of fair play was helpful for the nation as it subjected the majority to a constant test about its existence. According to Redlich, it was not in the interest of the majority to weaken the principle as when the tables were turned, it needed the same rights and means to advocate its own conceptions. (Redlich 1908 [1905], 131)

Although Mill did not engage in a detailed study on parliamentary procedures, it was clear that he understood the parliament as an arena where the principles of pro et contra and fair play were, and were to be, institutionalised and protected. Mill acknowledged the parliament’s role as an arena where the different sides of the truth could be examined according to a procedural setting. In Considerations on Representative Government, Mill described the parliament as “the nation’s Committee of Grievances” and “its Congress of Opinions”, in which the opinions were spoken out in the face of opponents and tested by adverse controversy (Mill 2001 [1861], 104). In addition to the parliament’s task to control and watch the government (Mill 2001 [1861], 103), for Mill, the parliament was

“...an arena in which not only the general opinion of the nation, but that of every section of it, and as far as possible of every eminent individual whom it contains, can produce itself in full light and challenge discussion; where every person in the country may count upon finding somebody who speaks his mind, as well or better than he could speak it himself— not to friends and partisans exclusively, but in the face of opponents, to be tested by adverse controversy; where those whose opinion is overruled, feel satisfied that it is heard, and set aside not by a mere act of will, but for what are thought superior reasons, and commend themselves as such to the representatives of the majority of the nation; where every party or opinion in the country can muster its strength, and be cured of any illusion concerning the number or power of its adherents; where the opinion which prevails in the nation makes itself manifest as prevailing, and marshals its hosts in the presence of the government, which is thus enabled and compelled to give way to it on employment, of its strength; where statesmen can assure themselves, far more certainly than any other signs, what elements of opinion and power are growing, and what declining, and are enabled to shape their measures with some regard not solely to present exigencies, but to tendencies in progress.” (Mill 2001 [1861], 104)

In his defence of the parliament, Mill emphasised it as an arena for debate. Mill noted that representative assemblies were often taunted by their enemies with being places of “mere talk and bavardage”. This was, according to Mill, “a displaced derision”. The reason for the disparagement of representative assemblies was in the false notions on the distribution of
work: parliaments were best suited for debating instead of legislation. (Mill 2001, 89–91, 105–106)

**Pro et contra in the Finnish newspaper polemics of the 1860s**

In the 1860s Mill’s ideas of debate and fair play were advocated by the Finnish liberals in the newspaper polemics between *Helsingfors Dagblad* and the government’s official newspaper *Finlands Allmänna Tidning*. Whereas F. A. T. saw its task mostly as the official organ of the government and published information from top down, *Dagblad* adopted the liberal press ideology according to which the citizens were to be given the possibility to form their opinions independently without government interference based on variety of sources. *Dagblad* argued that the English newspaper press should serve as the model for the Finnish journalistic activity, which was still taking its first steps. (Helsingfors Dagblad, 11 Apr., 1862, 1) In May 1862 *Helsingfors Dagblad* (19 May, 1862, 1) wrote about the status quo of Finnish publicity and the aims of the Finnish newspaper press. *Dagblad* presented an idea of objectivity similar to Mill’s and emphasised the benefits of inviting and holding the different sides of a question in a struggle against each other:

> “The press must investigate a matter from its multiple sides. Within publicity, this takes place so that the different sides are held against each other – or in other words, the different sides are invited in a battle against each other. In such a fight there is nothing dangerous; on the contrary. From this arises the only possible, real and lasting reconciliation.”

(Helsingfors Dagblad, 19 May, 1862, 1)

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12 Mill argued that a representative assembly could not more usefully employ itself than in talk when the subject of talk in the parliament was the great public interests of the country. Every sentence of such talk represented the opinion of either of some important body of persons or of an individual in whom some such body had reposed their confidence. According to Mill, the parliament was “a place where every interest and shade of opinion in the country can have its cause even passionately pleaded, in the face of the government and of all other interests and opinions”. The assemblies did not know and understand that talking and discussion were their proper business, while “doing”, the result of the discussion, was the task of officers, individuals specially trained for it. According to Mill, representative bodies should not administer. Mill noted that the same person or body might be able to control everything, but could not do everything. In many cases a body’s control over everything was more perfect the less it personally attempted to do. The assembly was to oversee that the individuals responsible for “doing” were honestly and intelligently chosen and to interfere their work only with suggestion and criticism. Mill argued that popular assemblies tried to do what they could not, namely to govern and legislate. (Mill 2001, 89–91, 105–106)


14 The editor of F. A. T. was Fredrik Berndtson, who had earlier been the editor of *Morgonbladet*, which was a supporter of Snellman’s newspaper *Saima*, in the 1840s and the beginning of the 1850s (Tommila 1988, 141–142, 145, 172).

15 “Pressen bör ju ‘söka att utreda saken från dess mångfaldiga sidor’. Detta sker inom publiciteten sålunda att de skilda sidorna framhållas hvar emot annan – eller med andra ord framträda till kamp emot hvarandra. Uti
*Dagblad* noted that in Finland people were so unaccustomed to publicity that they felt hurt by the openness through which the newspaper press, according to its nature, operated. *Dagblad* claimed that answering with arguments instead of lamentations and accusations demonstrated god tact. However, *Dagblad* noted that it was a grave mistake to think that some kind of “courtier-speech” (hovmannaspråk), with its cautious insinuations, conditional negotiations, *approchers* and *contra-approchers*, which belonged to the world of diplomacy, could be introduced in the newspaper press. According to *Dagblad*, such a press would be useless. The newspaper argued that the duty of publicity was to state openly and frankly what was on one’s mind (ligger på hjertat). If discontent prevailed it was to be spoken out. According to *Dagblad*, it was the smothered resentment (qväfda harmen) that “tore the heart and drained affection through its roots”. *Dagblad* noted that unfortunately people brooded over feelings for too long and held on to their *one-sided opinions* (ensidig uppfattning). According to *Dagblad*, arguments (skälen) and evidence (bevis) resulted in success and proved to be sustainable in a proper debate. (*Helsingfors Dagblad*, 19 May, 1862, 1)

Similarly to Mill, *Helsingfors Dagblad* emphasised the fallibility of individuals, groups and majorities, and highlighted perspectivism in relation to the truth. *Dagblad* noted that the openness based on which *all* reasons for dissatisfaction were put forward by the free press was a great benefit for the representative government. *Dagblad* admitted that newspaper editors were equally subjects to the human weaknesses of mistake and error; a newspaper could never alone present a *question* (*fråga*) *completely examined and investigated* to the general public. According to *Dagblad*, under the eyes of the general public, the newspapers’ investigations were to take place through articles *for and against* (artiklar för och emot). Otherwise no settled conviction could be won. *Dagblad* argued that this was the only kind of possible “research” and means for “fact-based information” that the newspaper *Finlands Allmänna Tidning* (see below) had called for. (*Helsingfors Dagblad*, 19 May, 1862, 1) *Dagblad* saw that no newspaper could see itself to represent the public opinion or Finland’s opinion. According to the newspaper, only a country’s lawful representation could give itself the credit to speak in the name of the Finnish people. (*Helsingfors Dagblad*, 6 July, 1863, 1)

*sådan strid ligger ingenting vådligt; tvertom. Just derutur framgår den enda möjliga, verkliga och varaktiga försoning.”*
The official newspaper *Finlands Allmänna Tidning*, *Dagblad’s* main opponent\(^{16}\) in the dispute on the role and status of the Finnish newspaper press, shared Finnish liberals’ starting point on character of public debate. However, *F. A. T.* saw that by giving different opinions the possibility to be stated a public (allmänna) or generally applicable (allmängiltiga) reasonable opinion could be reached (*Finlands Allmänna Tidning*, 25 Nov., 1862, 6). Also *F. A. T.* emphasised the need for debating questions *pro et contra* in public, and argued that opinions that newspapers spoke out neither were general, final nor mutual (samfällig). They were mere opinions and convictions on an issue. However, according to *F. A. T.*, publicity of the press was a medium for finding the existing but imperceptible public opinion. According to *F. A. T.*, in a new matter, no general opinion (allmänna mening) could exist before the question had been developed and formulated in public discussion (allmänna diskussion) through different opinions’ appearance against each other (genom olika åsikters uppträdande mot hvarandra) (cf. Snellman below). (*Finlands Allmänna Tidning*, 25 Nov., 1862, 5–6)

*F. A. T.* emphasised that the task of newspaper publicity was by research (forskning) and fact-based information to assist the government similarly to other civilised countries (*Finlands Allmänna Tidning*, 16 May, 1862, 1). According to *F. A. T.*, when the public opinion was brought out publicity had fulfilled its task, a matter had been decided and publicity could hasten to other topical questions. (*Finlands Allmänna Tidning*, 25 Nov., 1862, 6) Whereas the Finnish liberals saw the opposition of different sides of the truth as a necessary means for justified opinions and decisions, in 1863, *F. A. T.* argued that artificial and fleeting opinions were in fact developed and maintained most easily in countries where parties, party interest and divisions between different classes of society were created (cf. Guizot below). According to *F. A. T.*, Finnish liberals had neglected these lessons and Finland’s true aims and hopes as they hastened to bring about their own party matters (partisak). (*Finlands Allmänna Tidning*, 19 Aug., 1863, 2)

What was radical in the Finnish liberals’ notion of debate was that it entailed an epistemology of debate that differed from the ideas of the other Finnish political actors. Although the Fennomans and their mentor philosopher and statesman Johan Vilhelm Snellman spoke for a

\(^{16}\) F. A. T. criticised the newspapers *Helsingfors Dagblad*, *Helsingfors Tidningar* and *Åbo Underrättelser* of blindly adopting and aping the ideals of modern liberalism (den moderna liberalismen). *F. A. T.* criticised the “frivolity”, “thoughtlessness”, bitterness”, “blind arrogance”, “despotic intolerance”, “immature impatience” and “irresoluteness” that characterised liberals’ actions and worked against the existing polity and the common good. *F. A. T.* claimed that the liberals made hasty proposals for exhaustive and impossible reforms based on foreign models. (*Finlands Allmänna Tidning*, 18 Aug., 1863, 2; *Finlands Allmänna Tidning*, 19 Aug., 1863, 2).
multi-voiced society, in the 1860s their conception of political debate and politics included a more stagnant understanding of the truth and knowledge compared to the Finnish liberals. In this relation, F. A. T.’s understanding of the possibilities of public debate was close to Snellman’s. In order point out the differences it is useful to open up Snellman’s thought on the matter.

Snellman developed his ideas of publicity and public opinion in the 1840s and, to a great extent, held them in the 1860s when the questions became again topical. In the 1840s Snellman developed his idea of the nation and wrote in support of the liberal press ideology in his newspaper Saima. According to Snellman, publicity (offentligheten) became public (offentlig) only in the newspaper press. Snellman saw the publicity, which was created in newspapers, as a central mediator that enabled the birth of the nation and a unit in which individuals connected their activity with others. For Snellman, a rational unit was founded on recognised and established principles. Following the ideas of Hegel, Snellman saw that rational was not what an individual thought or a single newspaper stated to be the public opinion (den allmänna opinionen), but what was commonly accepted. Awareness of the accepted principles required publicity, which could not exist without the newspaper press. For Snellman, the press was important in order to overcome the complexity of different opinions and fractions and to integrate them (cf. Guizot on representation below). Snellman argued that as the interests in societies had multiplied, perspectives that looked at the whole had become rare. According to Snellman, a real public opinion could be found through public discussion (den offentliga diskussionen). However, certainty of the opinion could only be found during time when the opinions of a certain time had proceeded to become laws and public institutions. The process was two-stepped: first the newspaper press mediated public matters for the thinking people to participate in. A public that discussed the matters and clarified the differences of opinion was created. In the discussion that took place in newspapers, or in smaller private groups, the most rational opinion won. In the second phase newspapers mediated the communication between the government and law and the public opinion. The government and administration consulted the different parts and classes of the nation about the public matter and received the same answer, which was the result of the public discussion, from each. Snellman saw this task of mediating between the government and law and the general spirit of the nation, as essential for the Finnish newspaper press.

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17 As mentioned, editor of F. A. T. Fredrik Berndtson had edited Snellman’s organ Morgonbladet in the 1840s when Snellman formulated his notion of publicity and public debate. (Tommla 1988, 141–142, 145, 172).
Public discussion in the newspapers forced the discussants to examine their opinions closely and systematically. Snellman saw that while the newspaper press had grown to become a state power in Europe, the press itself was not the source of the power, but the power came from the public opinion (allmänna opinionen), from the wishes and needs of the nation, which every wise government had consulted (rådfråga). (Snellman 1844a; 1846a; 1846b; 1846c)

In the 1860s Snellman participated in the polemics on the role of the Finnish press and restated both his views on publicity and his love for the truth. In 1862, in the periodical *Litteraturblad*, Snellman demanded, with the first Diet of 1863 in mind, freedom of the press, but called for responsibility in its use. Although Snellman emphasised the need for newspapers’ critique and assessment of the status quo, he argued that criticism should always be justified. The critique was to be based on good knowledge and it should always “love the truth”.18 Whereas *Dagblad* argued for an open opposition between different opinions, Snellman complained that Finland lacked the newspapers of European parliamentary governments that supported the government against one-sided criticism of the opposition. According to Snellman, one-sided critique tended to distort and give a false picture of the public opinion (opinionen i landet; den allmänna opinionen), weakened the trust between the government and people and gave a bad start to the Diet work, whose results still rested much in the hands of the government. Snellman criticised Finnish newspapers for their speculative character, ill-mannered temper and frivolity. Snellman argued that the lesson to be learned from foreign countries was that where constitutional political life had been established, political and social development was possible only through mutual and unanimous cooperation between the government and the people. (Snellman 1862)

Whereas the *Dagblad* liberals saw debate as a method to examine the different sides of the truth, Snellman renounced their perspectivism and gave political debate the mission to dig out the rational and real public opinion. Snellman’s approach can be examined in relation to another foreign author and politician, who raised interest in Finland in the 1860s, and who had also influenced Mill, but assumed a different epistemology of debate. The person was François Guizot, whose work Snellman followed closely and discussed in the Finnish newspapers and periodicals. Although Guizot’s early works were considered obsolete and

18 “Än önskligare vore det, att sanningen alltid skulle vara densamma kärl.” (Snellman 1862b, 4)
old-fashioned by many, the publication of his memoirs in the late 1850s and the early 1860s raised interest also in his older books in Finland. Another reason for the Finnish interest was the developments that took place in France during the latter half of the Second Empire. In April 1870, before the downfall of the Second Empire, the Fennoman periodical *Kirjallinen Kuukauslehti* rated Guizot, and the members of his school of thought, as the main authors behind the “real notion of liberty”, the “liberal Napoleonism”, which sought to combine “strong centralisation with liberal democracy” and “the liberal legacy of the Revolution with supremacy in European power politics”. According to the periodical, the recent developments had made France the centre of the European political interest and Guizot one of its influential authors (*Kirjallinen Kuukauslehti*, 4, 1870, 86).

It is notable that in the late nineteenth century Finnish political actors often turned to foreign authors and figures and used them as authority and source of inspiration and argumentation in the Finnish discussions. The Finnish political groups organised around newspapers and periodicals disputed their ideas and programmes by taking sides on foreign debates. Especially Snellman and the Fennomans found support for their ideas in Guizot’s work. For example Snellman and his periodical *Litteraturblad* discussed Guizot’s books on theory of history, society and representative government (e.g. Snellman 1848, 235; Snellman 1856, 177; *Litteraturblad*, no 5, 1858, 223–229; *Litteraturblad*, no 11, 1860, 494–495, pseudonym “G. F.”). In 1870 the Fennoman periodical *Kirjallinen Kuukauslehti* saw it unfortunate that Guizot and his school had been more successful in realising “the Doctrinarian programme, the moderate liberalism”, in historical literature than in history (*Kirjallinen Kuukauslehti*, 4, 1870, 86). Wheras Fennoman periodical *Kirjallinen Kuukauslehti* named Guizot as one of the

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20. In the 1860s, during the reign of Napoleon III, the constitution was modified and the limited powers of the parliamentary assemblies were progressively increased. For example in 1861 the Legislative Body began to publish its debates, in 1867 the right of interpellation was restored, in 1869 the Legislative Body got the right to initiate and amend legislation and on January 2 1870 the first responsible ministry was established. Consequently, the Finnish interpretations of foreign actors did not necessarily do justice or present a fair estimation of their thought and influence.

21. On Snellman’s interest in Guizot’s theory of history, see Rantala 2013.

22. For examination of ‘doctrinary liberals’ and the misleading character of the term ‘doctrinarians’, see e.g. Ankersmit 1996, 130–135.
noblest men of the century (Kirjallinen Kuukauslehti, no 6, 1866, 128, pseudonym “K. B.”) and Litteraturblad as an outstanding man of peace (Litteraturblad, no 6, 1848, 16924), the Finnish liberals took a different stand. In 1861 Papperslyktan, the predecessor of Helsingfors Dagblad, defined Guizot, based on his Mémoires, as an irreconcilable enemy of democracy, who persistently maintained the same rigidity that he had shown as a Doctrinaire (Papperslyktan, 5 Aug., 1861, 246) In 1865 Helsingfors Dagblad shot down the newest volume of Guizot’s Mémoires25 (Helsingfors Dagblad, 23 March, 1865, 3). The controversy between Guizot and the Finnish liberals subsided when Guizot’s influence on Mill became increasingly acknowledged26.

Snellman shared similar ideas to Guizot on the need to oppose absolute power. Guizot presented the idea of constant opposition and struggle in Histoire de la civilisation en Europe, in which he saw the diversity of elements and their constant struggle as a peculiarity of the modern European civilisations compared to the ancient. According to Guizot, whereas elsewhere the predominance of one principle had produced tyranny, in Europe, the variety of elements and the incapability of any principle to exterminate another and their constant struggle had given birth to liberty. (Guizot 1828, 2e leçon, 1–12) In Histoire des origines du gouvernement représentatif Guizot argued that the object of the representative system and its institutions was to provide safeguards against the existence of absolute power. According to Guizot, every power, in order to prove its legitimacy, should be constantly submitted to certain trials, meet with obstacles and undergo opposition in front of the nation. (Guizot 1852 [1822], 441) Guizot saw that in representative government, the right of sovereignty was recognised on the condition that it was continually justified (Guizot 1852 [1822], 61) Guizot emphasised that no individual was infallible, and that the perfect and continued apprehension and fixed and inviolable application of justice and reason did not belong to the imperfect human nature, and argued that true unity could only rise from plurality. In representative government all classes of society were perpetually invited and urged to elevate and perfect themselves and social forces were “brought into competition”. (Guizot 1852 [1822], 61–62, 67)

24 The article was based on a translation of two chapters of Un Hiver à Paris (1843) by Jules Janin.
25 According to Dagblad, the book was not going to be popular as it portrayed Guizot as an infallible person who argued that the popular opinion was rarely right. Dagblad noted sarcastically that the book began with “je” and ended with “moi”. (Helsingfors Dagblad, 23 March, 1865, 3)
26 On Guizot’s influence on Mill and their understanding of historical antagonism in the Finnish discussions see e.g. Perander 1879, 204–205.
Mill’s idea of antagonism was indebted to Guizot’s theory of history. However, in relation to the purposes they gave to representation and parliamentary debate Mill and Guizot differed from each other in a manner similar to the Finnish liberals and Snellman. In *The History of the Origins of Representative Government*, Guizot gave a strong emphasis to the search for the truth. While Guizot stressed that no man, or no body of men, could know and perform fully according to reason, justice, and truth (Guizot 1852 [1822], 64), it was the task of representation to collect and extract public reason and public morality, which were disseminated throughout society, into one focus (Guizot 1852 [1822], 348). According to Guizot, power was legitimate in so far as it was conformed to reason (Guizot 1852 [1822], 349). The representative process, in which publicity, election and responsibility played central roles, gave the public reason its legitimacy. (Guizot 1852 [1822], 348) According to Guizot, representative government invited “the multitude to reduce itself to unity”, and brought forth “unity from the midst of plurality”. Individuals had the faculty to discover reason, justice and truth, and could be brought more and more to conform to it in their conduct. One of the central tasks of political institutions was to promote the progress and facilitate the application of the three in society. (Guizot 1852 [1822], 64)

As Snellman’s, also Guizot’s interest was in breeding consensus from the dissensus of competing and opposing interests by pinning down what was rational. According to Guizot, the principle of right could not be enumerated *a priori* in all its applications to social relations, that is, to recognise and to define all rights and discern the whole extent of rational laws which should regulate within society. However, for Guizot, in each relation in society and in the vicissitudes they underwent, there existed a principle which was their legitimate rule. This principle was to be discovered. (Guizot 1852 [1822], 429–430)

Guizot’s renouncement of perspectivism became apparent in his examination of the British parliamentary procedure. Canadian Professor of Rhetoric James De Mille (1878)\(^27\) has explicated in two sentences the underlying epistemological principle of the British parliamentary procedure that was emphasised by the Finnish liberals and Mill, and to which Guizot presented his objection to. According to De Mille “The aim of parliamentary debate is to investigate the subject from many points of view which are presented from two contrary sides. In no other way can a subject be so exhaustively considered”. (De Mille 1878, 473) In

\(^{27}\) I have found De Mille’s quotations thanks to Kari Palonen’s lectures and presentations.
his examination of the British system of petitions, Guizot took a contrary stand. Guizot saw that it was a great defect of representative government that, as it necessarily led to systematic organisation and permanent conflict of parties, it “divided truth into two parts”, tempted men never to consider questions on more than one side and to see only half of the ideas and facts based on which decisions were made. According to Guizot, representative government, in this sense, was a system of exaggeration and partiality. Guizot argued that these characteristics were to be diminished as much as possible. (Guizot 1852 [1822], 473)

**Introduction of parliamentary forms – parliament as the procedural model for debate**

According to the Finnish liberals and Mill, it was exactly the division of the truth that Guizot criticised that enabled its accurate and persistent examination. As parliamentary procedures organised the debate based on the principle of pro et contra, both sides of the question not only strengthened their narrow one-sided argument, but being familiar with the rules of the parliamentary game, knew the importance of preparing themselves for the opponent’s objection with counterarguments. Thus, imagining, thinking and inventing possible objections strengthened the arguments, raised the quality of debate and guaranteed as close examination of the truth as possible (cf. Mill on pro et contra in education above). As a result of the division of the truth and the principle of fair play, all opinions, sides and arguments on a defined question could get their voices heard in the parliament, or in Mill’s words, in the “committee of grievances” or “congress of opinions”. According to this parliamentary line of thought, subjectivity did not have to be seen as the polar opposite of objectivity, but as an inherent condition of it (see Palonen 2010, 77).

In the Finnish Diets, the liberals took on the task of parliamentarising the Finnish procedures to meet international standards that were presented for example in the Finnish newspaper press. Principles of pro et contra, and fair play as its safeguard, served as guiding principles in the process. The parliamentary calendar was planned in a manner that enabled sufficient time for the invention of arguments, objections and counterarguments in the different phases of the reading. In the parliament the “holding of different sides against each other”, which Helsingfors Dagblad had emphasised as a key feature of debate, was a natural part of the procedure. In the plenaries the orators were seated in the same hall “in the face of opponents” and “tested by adverse controversy” (cf. Mill above). In the context of the Finnish Diet the argument of direct controversy was used in support of the procedures that aimed at
overcoming the division of four estates for example in support of the *plenum plenorum*\(^{28}\) and the swift taking and printing of the Estates verbatim records.

Whereas in the Finnish newspaper disputes the opponents often talked past each other (see e.g. Pulkkinen 1989, 112) and strayed to side issues and irrelevancy, the parliamentary rule of speaking to the question prevented such waste of time and energy and deepened the examination of the different sides of the question by focusing the debate on a limited subject\(^{29}\). The rule of speaking to the question is above all a parliamentary characteristic. This speciality of parliamentary debate has been explicated by James De Mille (1878), who has argued that what distinguishes parliamentary debate from any other controversial debate is that in parliamentary debate “the subject to be examined is presented in a formal statement, called a resolution, or question, to which alone the discussion must refer” (De Mille 1878, 472).

In Finland, the introduction of the rules of parliamentary and unparliamentary language for political disputes signified an important step compared to newspaper polemics. It is describing how in 1863, after the beginning of the first Diet, *Finlands Allmänna Tidning*’s fatigue in the tearing newspaper disputes encouraged the newspaper to turn to the parliament in search of rules for public debate. The newspaper asked: “why would the constitutional right of speech within the daily press be less bound by lawful, moral and personal responsibility than the right of speech within the parliamentary assembly?” *F. A. T.* wondered why the society demanded stronger guarantees and control from persons who discussed and spoke on the matters of the country in the parliament than from the daily press who did the same. (Finlands Allmänna Tidning, 7 Dec., 1863, 2) Parliamentary rules enabled and permitted “open and frank” critique and “speaking out discontent and smothered resentment” demanded by the Finnish liberals (see Helsingfors Dagblad above), but protected the sides of debate from personal insult and undignified language. This helped to reserve all possible time, energy and concentration to the question under discussion. In the Finnish Diets and the

\(^{28}\) I.e. joined sittings of the four estates.

\(^{29}\) Rule of speaking to the question was practiced in Finland from the Diet of 1863–64 and enforced in the Diet Act of 1869, whose § 46 gave the members “the right to speak freely to the question discussed”. (Valtiopäivätärjöystys Suomen Suuriruhtinaanmaalle 1869)
early Eduskunta, the practices on unparliamentary language followed the procedures of foreign model parliaments (see Pekonen 2012b).

In the Diets and the early Eduskunta, the notion of pro et contra and its Finnish and Swedish equivalents became parts of the Finnish parliamentary vocabulary. Similarly, the perspectivism in relation to social and political questions approved to be more than a by-product of the rather short liberal radicalism of the 1860s. However, the same aversion of dissensus, dispute and political fractions that F. A. T., Snellman and the Fennomans presented in the press polemics of the 1860s continued in the Diets in relation to party strife. The Fennoman rhetoric that emphasised the language question and national unity aimed at depoliticising and disposing of party formation. A central feature of this rhetoric was the portraying of the threats and nuisances of party politics in foreign countries. In 1879 Leo Mechelin, the most prominent Finnish liberal member of the Diet, wrote an article titled “The Political Parties” (De politiska partierna), in which he not only argued for the necessity of political parties, but also explicated the Finnish liberal’s idea of debate and its transfer to and suitability for the parliamentary context.

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30 In the Finnish Diets of 1863–64 and 1867 the use of unparliamentary language was forbidden by the Estates rules of procedure. Section 8 of the Diet Act of 1869 required members to be “calm and dignified in their speech and conduct”. Section 46 § of the Diet Act of 1869 authorised the speakers of the Estate to forbid the right of speech from a member who used “insulting, scornful or otherwise inappropriate words of the government or individual persons”. (Valtiopäiväjärjestys Suomen Suuriruhtinaanmaalle 1869)

31 See e.g. Pekonen 2013 for uses of pro et contra as a principle of parliamentary deliberation in the Finnish discussions on free and imperative mandate. In addition, for example in the late 1860s and early 1870s Helsingfors Dagblad published an article series titled “For and Against” (För och mot), in which the newspaper attacked and defended ideas and proposals presented in the Diet and in other newspapers. The Finnish liberals were also the most eager to adopt the vocabulary of debate, debatt in Swedish, in their rhetoric compared to other political groups.

32 In addition to the Finnish liberals, for example in 1876 E. G. Palmén, a moderate Fennoman, presented his explicitly perspectivist view in a discussion about the possibility of objective parliamentary reporting. According to Palmén, it was naïve to think that political purposes and party factions would not affect the objectivity of the Diet reporting. Palmén noted that the usual misconception was that if several reporters had access to the plenaries, at least one of their reports would be truthful. Palmén challenged this view by noting that different newspapers and reporters paid attention to and emphasised different aspects of the debates, and thus none of them could be said to be the correct and the others false. According to Palmén, a political or a social phenomenon (företeelse) could be considered only from different points of view (betraktas ur divergenta synpunkter). Consequently, no newspaper or reporter had the monopoly of the truth (monopol på sanningen). However, Palmén did not see the perspectivism as a necessary evil, and argued that the most truthful conception would be achieved through examination (granskning) and comparison (jemförelse) of several different representations (skildringar). According to Palmén, in creating parliamentary publicity the tasks should be distributed so that newspapers would be given better possibilities and space to present and to carry out their platforms and to fight for the realisation of the opinions they represented (företräda). According to Palmén, this would benefit all sides. (Palmén 1876a; 1876b)
In the article, Mechelin noted that political parties were found in all representative states. According to Mechelin, political parties were means to fight political questions with weapons of words (ordets vapen) in the ballot box, press and speaking rostrum, instead of fire and swords in the battlefield. Mechelin saw party strives as signs of normally pulsating political life. (Mechelin 1879, 116) Mechelin admitted that unregulated party strives could be damaging and lead easily to party dictatorship (partidiktaturer). If disputes developed towards bitterness and temper, the opponents saw each other as enemies and the aim of defeating the opponent became more defining than the desire to benefit the fatherland and the common good (det allmänna bästa) (see on the rules of unparliamentary language above). However, Mechelin saw that political parties were not a mere necessary evil, as it was often seen in the Finnish discussions, but in fact, parties and their competition for advantage benefitted a country’s political development by overcoming one-sidedness, abuse and exaggeration (cf. Guizot above). A healthy and regulated competition could spur the strengths and capacities (sporar krafterna), contribute to strives’ uplift (bidrager att gifva sträfvandena högre lyftning) and forced the participants to clearly and carefully examine (utreda) what they were fighting for. (Mechelin 1879, 118–119)

Mechelin understood the parliament as an arena of debate where political and party disputes could be dealt and regulated according to enacted procedures. Mechelin argued that in parliament political strife took place according to law. The law itself could always be changed, but only in order, according to forms enacted as laws. According to Mechelin, in parliaments where people’s representatives took part in important public matters different opinions collided against each other (bryta sig de olika meningarne mot hvarandra; cf. Mill on the collision of adverse opinions above) and parties measured their strength against each other. (Mechelin 1879, 116) Mechelin saw disagreement in political questions as natural and argued that it was false to expect that a full consensus could be reached by persuasion in a debate. On the contrary, a debate in a representative assembly often clarified and intensified the divergence in opinions. This led to a necessary formation of fractions according to opposing standpoints (gruppering efter motsatta synpunkter) (Mechelin 1879, 119). Mechelin explicated the perspectivism, which the Finnish liberals had underlined in the parliamentary context by stating that “there is no absolute truth, no absolute wisdom in politics; new

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33 Mechelin argued that opposing views were results of differences in upbringing, experience, occupation and world view (verldsåskådning) (Mechelin 1879, 119–120).
opinions and ideas occur constantly, new proposals become defining or are rejected."34 Here, Mechelin manifested the Finnish liberal’s indifference to final truths in politics that bothered the theories and conceptions of the Fennomans. In parliaments the superiority of arguments was defined, not based on their truthfulness and rationality, but primarily in numbers after a thorough and fair debate pro et contra. According to Mechelin, in parliaments victories and defeats were measured in votes (ur omröstningarne framgår seger eller nederlag). In this respect, the disputes in the press and election meetings were only of preparatory kind. (Mechelin 1879, 116, 120)

Conclusions
In the 1860s Finland the newspaper polemics on the procedure, manner and style in which political disputes should be treated and debated brought the principle of pro et contra to the public discussion. Although the principle had been learned and practiced as a form of debate in-built in parliamentary procedures and academic discussion, it was not until the politicisation of the Finnish society and the penetration of foreign discussions in the 1860s that it was notably expressed, discussed and defined.

For the Finnish liberals, who were indebted to John Stuart Mill and the model of the British parliament, debating pro et contra did not signify the mere pluralist inclusion of the variety of elements in the society in the public discussion. The Finnish liberals understood pro et contra as a procedural model that entailed a specific epistemology, which was fundamentally different to Snellman and the Fennomans. Whereas Snellman and Guizot saw many-sided discussion and representation as tools to discover and dig out the existing rational, reason of the state and interest of the nation from the complexity and pluralism of the society, the Finnish liberals saw political debate as a means to thoroughly examine the different sides of the questions that defined the faith of the nation. Compared to the Fennomans, the Finnish liberals had a stronger trust in progress without the need to recognise the existence of absolute philosophical principles35 or historical or political truths. The Finnish liberals saw that progress was to be reached through the development of the forms that best protected an open, free and close examination of questions. Although the Finnish liberals gave very

34 “Den absoluta sanningen, den absoluta klokheten finns ej i politiken; ständigt uppstiga nya meningar, nya förslag för att göra sig gällande eller förkastas.” (Mechelin 1879, 116)
35 For the Finnish liberal’s attack against impractical abstractions and theoreatisation, see e.g. Helsingfors Dagblad, 11 Apr., 1862, 1.
similar character to debate in the press and in the Diet, they saw the parliament as an arena of
debate in which the principle of *pro et contra* was safeguarded, systematised and
institutionalised.


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