

STIG KANGER (1924–1988)

The Mission Covenant Church of Sweden — *Svenska Missionsförbundet*, a free church not part of the Swedish State Church — performed missionary work in China 1890–1951. Its effort was concentrated in Hupei, a province in central China through which flows the great Yangtse. In 1919 two young missionaries joined the mission, Gustav Karlsson, a farm labourer from the south of Sweden, and Sally Svensson, a nurse from Stockholm. Gustav's only education beyond elementary school (*folkskolan*) was four years of mission school; nevertheless he later gained, by correspondence, two academic degrees in theology from Webster University, Atlanta, Georgia: a bachelor's degree in 1936 and a doctorate in 1948. Sally had obtained a midwife's certificate before her two years of mission school.

Gustav and Sally were engaged to be married already before their departure from Sweden, but only three years later were they actually married. Their marriage was blessed with two sons of whom the elder, Stig Gustav, was born on 10 July 1924 in Kuling (short for Ku Niu-ling, the Mountain of the Wild Ox) in the province of Kiangsi, a popular summer resort in the mountains. Stig began school when he was six, and he had six years of schooling before the family returned to Sweden. The first year he was taught by his mother, then by two missionaries: for four years by Ida Pettersson and then one year by Lisa Björkdahl. During Ida Pettersson's time the class consisted first of two (Stig and another boy) and later of four (when their brothers had joined). But during the final year, Stig and his brother, Rune, were the only students.

In 1930 Gustav and Sally Karlsson decided to adopt *Kanger* as their family name. The most common traditional Swedish surnames are of the *Karlsson* type — literally, "Karl's son". So common have these names been that, especially at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, many have preferred to change to a more distinctive, often made-up, name. *Kanger* is such a name, a combination of *Karlsson* and *Hånger*. (The latter was the name of Gustav Karlsson's birth place, a village in Småland in the south of Sweden, where his forebears had been peasants for generations and his father still operated a small farm. Later Stig inherited and used as a

holiday home his grandfather's cottage at Erikslund in a forest a few miles from Hånger, usually referred to by Stig as "the Middle of Nowhere".)

Except for a visit to Sweden in 1927–29, the family remained in China until 1936. In 1939 the parents left for a final sojourn in China, which was to last through World War II until 1946; the sons were left at a home for missionaries' children in Stockholm. (The parents, both born in 1893, both died in 1954.) Stig attended Palmgrenska Samskolan and then Tekniska Läroverket, passing *teknisk studentexamen* in May 1942 and *studentexamen på reallinjen* in December 1944. The latter examination was the formal prerequisite for university entrance, but by the time he sat it, he had already begun informal studies at the University of Stockholm. In 1945 there was a brief interlude of military service: Stig was called up but was discharged after only a short time.

At the university, Kanger followed a normal path, gaining the degree of *filosofie kandidat* in 1949. In those days the requirement was at least seven units of courses in at least three subjects. Kanger's degree consisted of three units of theoretical philosophy, three units of practical philosophy and one unit of statistics. Two years later, in 1951, he received the degree of *filosofie licentiat*, a higher degree for which a thesis was required. In his thesis, entitled "En studie i modal logik, med särskild hänsyn till 'böra'-satser" ["A Study in Modal Logic, with Special Attention to 'Ought'-sentences"], Kanger showed how, in a certain sense, deontic logic is reducible to modal logic plus a new primitive constant. After the thesis was accepted — it received the highest grade — Kanger asked his professor, Anders Wedberg, whether he thought that publication was warranted. Wedberg thought not, and the thesis was never published. But when a few years later an idea equivalent to Kanger's was published by Alan Ross Anderson, it attracted a good deal of attention from philosophical logicians. Unfortunately, no copy of Kanger's thesis seems to have survived. In 1957 he defended his doctoral dissertation, *Provability in Logic*. At that time dissertations were graded: Kanger's was given the second highest grade.

The dissertation earned Kanger a position as *docent* in theoretical philosophy 1957–1963 at the University of Stockholm. The *docentur* was a much coveted research position of a kind unfortunately no longer existing; just about the only obligation was to lecture seventy-five hours a year — thus between two or three hours a week — on subjects freely chosen. The idea was of course to leave the *docent* ample time to develop as a researcher. Kanger made good use of this freedom (even though he spent several terms acting in place of professors on leave, something that was better paid). As a formal logician he may have been limited in his methods, but the applications of his work spanned an impressive array of subjects: meaning theory, measurement theory,

ethics, theory of action, theory of rights, theory of preference, phonematics and even (unpublished) æsthetics. The academic year 1965–66 he spent as a visiting associate professor at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and in the summer of 1966 he taught at Stanford. In 1968–69 he was a visiting professor at the University of California, Berkeley.

The drawback of the position of *docent* was that it was for a limited period only. The future was uncertain, a fact that became even more pressing when the years as *docent* were up. By luck, this coincided with the appointment in 1963 of Erik Stenius to the Swedish language chair of philosophy at the University of Helsinki. Stenius left vacant the chair of philosophy at the Swedish language university in Finland, Åbo Academy in Turku (Åbo), a chair originally created for Edward Westermarck. Here Kanger became acting professor for several years before finally being appointed *professor ordinarius* on 9 February 1968. But by that time his appointment to the chair of theoretical philosophy at the University of Uppsala from 1 July 1968 was well under way.

When after his Berkeley year Kanger took up his duties as the new professor at Uppsala in the fall of 1969, he inaugurated a new era. This was at a time when there was money around, and Kanger was good at getting hold of it. For some years, the Uppsala philosophy department became a thriving hive of activity with visitors coming and going in numbers unprecedented in Sweden. Student numbers, too, rose at all levels. The list of PhDs who wrote their dissertations under Kanger is long by Uppsala standards. Sören Stenlund, Lennart Nordenfelt, Paul Needham, Lars Lindahl, Ingmar Pörn, Lars Gustafsson, Craig Dilworth and Bengt Molander received their degrees during Kanger's lifetime, while Jan Odelstad, Patrick Sibelius, Ghita Holmström-Hintikka, Sven Ove Hansson and Kaj Børge Hansen finished later. Yet another dissertation influenced by Kanger was one written in political science by Helle Kanger. Furthermore, Kanger dispatched several students to Stanford, notably Ingrid Lindström, Sten Lindström and Patrick Sibelius, who received their PhDs there. (Thus Sibelius holds two doctorates, as does Pörn who earned his first doctoral degree from Birmingham.)

Of the many initiatives that Kanger took during his two decades as professor and head of the department, some are worth mentioning here. One was the Hägerström Lectures to be given annually by a philosopher of international repute; the lecturer would spend a week in Uppsala, giving one lecture on each of five days but also being available to meet faculty and graduate students. The first Hägerström lecturer, in 1970, was Konrad Marc-Wogau, Kanger's immediate predecessor as professor in Uppsala, followed by von Wright in 1972 and by Quine in 1973; the number of distinguished

philosophers following in their footsteps is still growing. A second initiative was the Adolf Phalén Annual Memorial Picnic, an informal, three-day affair involving at times considerable numbers of staff and students in the philosophy departments of Uppsala and the two universities of Turku: Åbo Academy and University of Turku (in the early years) as well as Helsinki (later). (Phalén and Hägerström were nationally famous philosophy professors in Uppsala in the first part of the twentieth century.) A third initiative was the Scandinavian Logic Symposium; today it is languishing, but the first few meetings — Turku (Åbo) 1968, Oslo 1970, Uppsala 1973 — were remarkably successful. A fourth initiative, still flourishing, was the revival of the Uppsala Philosophical Studies, an in-house monograph series that was considerably enlarged.

As the years passed, money became less plentiful. Operations at Villavägen 7, later Villavägen 5, lost some of their momentum. Personal problems began to develop. Kanger's output, never massive, dwindled. Even though his personal situation improved during the last few years, he produced little. However, his enthusiasm for philosophy and logic never ceased. He had a repertoire of pet problems that he would bring up in conversation, as a challenge to himself as much as to his listeners. When he died on 13 March 1988, he still had not solved them all.

Kanger was married three times: to Neita Petrini 1949–1960, to Helle Kornerup 1961–1978 and to Dagmar Söderberg from 1980. He had two children with Neita (Elisabeth (Li) and Thomas, born 1950 and 1951, respectively) and one son with Helle (Kim, born 1963). He is buried in the cemetery at Hånger.

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Stig Kanger was a hard man to figure out, a mixture of many contrary qualities: gregarious but a loner; sensitive under a crust of insensitivity; unconventional in some ways, conventional in others. He could be caring, yet was not seldom brusque. He could joke about anything, yet be offended when others did so. He gave an impression of being boisterous, yet he said little; he was one of those people it is awkward to talk to on the telephone. In some ways he changed over the years. In his youth he had a lean and hungry look; later he became substantial. His older friends remember him as devoted to discussion. But in later years he was not very open to the ideas of others, and discussion became one-sided: he was willing to give, not to take.

Among human qualities he admired intelligence the most. Becoming a friend of his, one had a feeling of having been admitted to an ordered set, each member ranked according to intelligence; to be lacking in intelligence was a flaw of character. He was certainly himself intelligent, if the word is used in

the traditional sense with its emphasis on formal or mathematical ability. Yet it is not clear how much Stig had of the other “intelligences” we hear about today, for example, emotional intelligence, knowledge of self and knowledge of others. Apart from occasional remarks, sometimes very perceptive, he did not like to talk about personal matters.

Like all academics, Stig wanted recognition for his work and, like most, felt that he had not got enough of it. In his case the feeling of frustration may have been justified, for Kanger’s work has not had the impact it could have had, had it been better known. Yet the fault was to a certain extent his own. First, he published little; this he saw as a virtue and used to boast that no other Swedish philosophy professor had ever been appointed on so slim a corpus as he had. Second, his publications all appeared in local or at least peripheral venues. Third, his style of writing is off-putting to many readers. Stig loved games, and perhaps he saw writing logic as a game: to give readers as little explanation as possible — but always, in a strict sense, enough — and then challenge them to understand.

It is clear that the years of childhood and adolescence were extremely important in forming the adult Kanger. We know little about this part of his life, but I am certain that it holds the key to understanding this complex man. (One Swedish psychologist — himself a child of missionaries who spent an important part of his childhood in the same missionaries’ children’s home as Stig and his brother — has written about missionaries that “they should not have children”.)

The early years at the University of Stockholm must also have been important. Anders Wedberg (1913–1978), professor of theoretical philosophy at the University of Stockholm from 1949 till his death, was an eminent philosopher; he will be remembered, among other things, for doing history of philosophy in a new way and for being instrumental in bringing formal logic into Swedish philosophy. Wedberg was very gifted but also very critical. There used to be a saying that Wedberg had been able to prove a new theorem: “Almost everything is trivial”. Then (the saying went on) Kanger came along and succeeded in strengthening this result, establishing the definitive Wedberg/Kanger Theorem: “Everything is trivial”. Wedberg was a perfect example of an analytical philosopher — one good at analysis. For his part, Kanger used to deny that he was one, maintaining that it is not clear what *analytic* philosophy is, if anything, and that at any rate he, Kanger, was a *synthetic* philosopher. One wonders what it was like for the young Kanger — intense and vulnerable, probably then as later given to occasional coarseness — to try to find his way under the refined, patrician, ever critical Wedberg. Kanger admired Wedberg’s intellect, perhaps greatly, but his overall attitude

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