

THE LIFE AND TIME OF RAGNAR NURKSE

BY KALEV KUKK, *Ph.D.*

TALLINN, 31 August 2007

[Slides from presentation at the conference “Ragnar Nurkse (1907-2007): Classical Development Economics and Its Relevance for Today”, Tallinn, 31 August – 1 September 2007]

**THE FIRST NOBEL PRICE FOR
ECONOMICS WAS AWARDED TO**

RAGNAR NURKSE

IN 1968

**PROFESSOR MALCOLM GILLIS (RICE
UNIVERSITY, USA)**

ON MARCH 18, 2003

IN HIS INTRODUCTION TO THE

**“ECONOMICS AND THE CHICAGO SCHOOL:
YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW”**

<http://www.professor.rice.edu/professor/03182003.asp?SnID=746597528>

RAGNAR NURKSE – THE GREAT UNKNOWN ESTONIAN

(BEHIND THE “IRON CURTAIN” THEN AND
UNFORTUNATELY EVEN TODAY)

RAGNAR NURKSE'S EARLY YEARS

5 OCTOBER 1907: BORN IN KÄRU (RAPLA COUNTY TODAY)

1917: LEFT KÄRU FOR TALLINN

1918–26: WENT TO THE GERMAN DOM-SCHOOL IN TALLINN

(“In der Schule geht es mir immer gut.” – from his letter to mother from 9 December 1918)

1926–29: STUDENT AT THE TARTU UNIVERSITY

1928: LEFT FOR UK, TO EDINBURGH (WORKED FOR HONORARY CONSUL OF ESTONIA ADOLPH ELLINGSEN IN LEITH)

1929–32: STUDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH, HE TOOK A FIRST CLASS DEGREE IN ECONOMICS UNDER THE PROFESSOR F. W. OGILVIE

Birth and baptismal register of the Church of Käru

Списокъ рожденныхъ и крещенныхъ.

Годъ и мѣсяцъ. <i>1907.</i>		Нумеръ; имя младенца; имя, фамилія и вѣроисповѣданіе родителей; званіе, чинъ или ремесло отца или матери; или представившаго младенца къ крещенію; прозваніе Проповѣдника, совершавшаго Св. Крещеніе, и гдѣ оное совершено; имена, фамиліи и званія, чины или ремесла воспріемниковъ.	Законно-рожденные.		Незаконно-рожденные.		Мертворожд. или умершіе до крещенія.	
			Мужескаго пола.	Женскаго пола.	Мужескаго пола.	Женскаго пола.	Мужескаго пола.	Женскаго пола.
День и часъ рожденія.	День крещенія.		18	8	4	4		
<i>сентября</i>	<i>ноября</i>	<i>№ 35. Кирро Моза.</i>						
<i>двадцать-второго</i>	<i>четвертого</i>	<i>Раткаръ Вильгельмъ Стурксе.</i>	19					
<i>№ 3. 2 по полу дни.</i>		<i>Рагнар Вильхелм Стурксе.</i>						
		<i>Род: Мисингій Вильгельмъ Карлъ Стурксе</i>						
		<i>О. Викторія Имсабитъ ур. Кланмантъ</i>						
		<i>Восприимы. Йоганнесъ Кланмантъ</i>						
		<i>Рудолфъ Стурксе</i>						
		<i>Евфрѣя Пейдѣ</i>						
		<i>Ольга Кланмантъ.</i>						
		<i>Анна Крѣцъ мѣстности на сѣв. сторонѣ.</i>						



Käru. The old manor house. Ragnar Nurkse was born there (?)



Käru. The new manor house. Nurkse family lived there later on.



Ragnar Nurkse with his parents and aunt (1908)

TUNNISTUS.

ZEUGNIS.

Selle tunnistuse omanik

Der Inhaber dieses Zeugnisses

Ragnar Wilhelm Nirkse

Oppis 19.18 aastast septembri kuust

hat die Domschule zu Reval vom

kuni 1926 aastani märtsi kuuni

September 1918 bis zum

März 1926

Tallinna Doomkoolis, mille humanitaar-haru kursuse ta 1926 aastal lõpetas, ordandades sellega 1922 a. 7. det. avalikkude keskkoolide seaduse § 42 põhjal õiguse ilma eksamita astuda ülikooli ja teistesse kõrgematesse õppeasutustesse, kui viimaste kohta ei maksa erimäärused.

und den Kursus der Gymnasialabteilung derselben im Jahre 1926 beendet. Infolgedessen hat er auf Grund des § 42 des Gesetzes der öffentlichen Mittelschulen vom 7. Dezember 1922 das Recht erworben, ohne Prüfung in die Universität und in andere Hochschulen einzutreten, wenn für letztere keine Sonderbestimmungen gelten.

Ragnar Nirkse

Ragnar Nirkse

elukombed olid head ja tema teadmised ning võtmised hinnati lõpukokkuvõttes järgmiselt:

Betragen war gut. Die zusammenfassenden Urteile über seine Kenntnisse und Leistungen lauten:

- | | | | |
|---|-----|--|-----|
| 1. Saksa keeles | hea | 1. Deutsch | gut |
| 2. Matemaatikas | hea | 2. Mathematik | gut |
| 3. Loodusteaduses ühes tervishoiu, füüsika ja keemiaga | hea | 3. Naturkunde, Hygiene, Physik und Chemie | gut |
| 4. Maateaduses ühes kosmograafiaga | hea | 4. Erdkunde und Kosmographie | gut |
| 5. Ajaloos | hea | 5. Geschichte | gut |
| 6. Kodaniku- ja majandusteaduses | hea | 6. Bürgerkunde und Volkswirtschaftslehre | gut |
| 7. Mõtteteaduse eelkursuses ühes hingeteaduse ja eetikaga | hea | 7. Philosophische Propädeutik, Psychologie und Ethik | gut |
| 8. Eesti keeles | hea | 8. Estnisch | gut |
| 9. Ladina keeles | hea | 9. Latein | gut |
| 10. Vene keeles | hea | 10. Russisch | gut |
| 11. Inglise keeles | hea | 11. Englisch | gut |
| 12. Joonistamises ja joonestamises | hea | 12. Zeichnen und Reiben | gut |
| 13. Laulmises | hea | 13. Gesang | gut |
| 14. Võimlemises | - | 14. Turnen | - |



R. Nurkse,
22 Buccleuch Place,
Edinburgh.
12. mail 1929.

Õigusteaduskonna Dekanaat,
E. W. Ülikool,
Tartus.

Olen 1929 a. kevadest saadik õigus-
teaduskonnas ainult ühe eksami sooritanud,
ja määra määruse järele kaotaks ma
niid viis õiguse selles teaduskonnas edasi-
õppida. Mul ei oleks kindagi võimalik
kvadisteks eksamiteks Tartusse jõuda,
kuna mul siin teenistusselised kohustused
on, mis mind praegusel silmepeilgul ei
luba üht lahkuda, ja ma peale selle
Edinburghi ülikoolis ühe kursuse võtan,
mida praegu katkestada oleks raske.

Talun mulle sellepärast täht-
saga pikendada ja õigusteaduskonnas edasi-
õppimiseks mulle lahkelt võimaldada
eksamid sügisel ära anda.

Lootes, et selles reskusi ei
ole ja mu palve täitmist leiab, jään
koige austusega

R. Nurkse,
(stud. inv.: matr. no. 7957).

1932–34: UNIVERSITY OF VIENNA – THE YEARS OF THE SECOND BLOOM OF AUSTRIAN SCHOOL

- **PARTICIPATION OF THE LUDWIG VON MISES'S *PRIVATSEMINAR*; CONTACTS TO FRIEDRICH AUGUST VON HAYEK, GOTTFRIED HABERLER, FRITZ MACHLUP, OSCAR MORGENSTERN *ETC.***
- **THE FIRST MONOGRAPH:
INTERNATIONALE KAPITALBEWEGUNGEN. WIEN:
ÖSTERREICHISCHES INSTITUT FÜR KONJUNKTURFORSCHUNG,
1935.**
Ragnar Nurkse: “This piece of research was an attempt to handle international capital flows in the context of general economic theory in a comprehensive and systematic way.”

Porträt des Inhabers.



Eigenhändige Unterschrift des Inhabers.

Ragnar Nurkse

Wien, den 26. Oktober 1932.

Meldungsbuch

des

ordentlichen Hörers

Ragnar Nurkse

gebürtig aus Estland (Viru).

Inskribiert

in der recht- u. Staatswissensch. Fakultät

der

Universität zu Wien.

1
 Winter Semester. Vom 24. Oktober 1932
 Sommer Semester

Name des Dozenten	Bezeichnung der Vorlesung	Stunden- zahl	Die Quästur bestätigt die Zahlung der Gebühren
Professoren Mayer	Seminare Volkswirtschaftl. Übungen	2	je 5- 3- 1- 4-6
Professoren Mises	Seminare: Die Wirtschaft vom Geld	2.	45- 4- 4-
Haberler Morgenster	Wirtschaftsprobleme d. Nationalökonom. theorie	2.	10- 3- 111-

UNIVERSITÄTSQUÄSTUR WIEK SCHWARZ

Inland 2.11.1932
 Wien, am _____
 Der Dekan:
 Woers

bis Oster 3 1933. Zahl der Semester:

Kurs- nummer im Jahreslaufe	Der Dozent bestätigt eigenhändig		Anmerkungen
	die Inskription	die Frequenz	
	Meyer	Mayer	
	Min	Min	
	Ramus	Habermas	



Verdrof
 d. 3. Dekan.

1934–45: LEAGUE OF NATIONS (FINANCIAL SECTION AND ECONOMIC INTELLIGENCE SERVICE)

ALEXANDER LOVEDAY (22 June 1935):

“... Nurkse is, in my opinion, a real discovery and likely to prove of very real value to the League, once we are placed in a position to be able to give him contract. He has what is, in fact, unexpectedly rare, exactly the quality of mind which is suited to our Intelligence work here, as well as exceptional knowledge of languages and the first-class education. He has proved himself quite unusually useful to me as, on account of his ability and training and also his quickness, I can turn him from one subject to another as pressure of work demands in a manner for which nobody else working in the Section is really fully adapted.”

THE WORLD WAR II

- **17 JULY – 2 AUGUST 1939: THE LAST VISIT TO ESTONIA**
- **17 JUNE 1940: SOWIET UNION OCCUPIED ESTONIA – FOR RAGNAR NURKSE THERE WAS NO WAY BACK TO ESTONIA, HE LOST HIS HOMELAND**
- **SINCE 1940 IN PRINCETON (13 SEPTEMBER 1940 ARRIVAL INTO USA)**

HIS CLASSICS:

- ***International Currency Experience: Lessons of the Inter-War Period. (Series of League of Nations Publications. II, Economic and Financial; 1944, II. A. 4.) Princeton, N.Y.: Princeton University Press.***
- ***The Course and Control of Inflation: A Review of Monetary Experience in Europe after World War I. (Series of League of Nations Publications. II. Economic and Financial; 1946, II. A. 6. [Geneva]: League of Nations.***

THE EVERLASTING DISCUSSION: FLOATING *VERSUS* FIXED EXCHANGE RATES

Hans-Joachim Jarchow, Peter Rühmann:

(Monetäre Außenwirtschaft. II. Internationale Währungspolitik.
3.Auflage. Göttingen: 1993, S. 198)

**“Ausgangspunkt der Diskussion [*fexible versus*
feste Wechselkurse] war eine Kritik flexibler
Wechselkurse von Nurkse.”**

RAGNAR NURKSE AND BRETTON WOODS

RAGNAR NURKSE HAS BEEN ONE OF THE LEADING “ARCHITECTS” OF BRETTON WOODS SYSTEM,

Anthony M. Enders (University of Auckland, New Zealand):

“When Ragnar Nurkse’s study for the League of Nations entitled *International Currency Experience* (1944) was distributed to delegates at the United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference at Bretton Woods in July 1944, his conclusions would have been scarcely surprising and indeed widely accepted. ... The formal Bretton Woods Agreement follows all the elements of Nurkse’s study of *International Currency Experience*.”

Anthony M. Enders. *Great Architects of the International Finance: The Bretton Woods Era*. Routledge: 2005.

See also: A. M. Enders, G. A. Fleming. *International Organizations and the Analysis of Economic Policy, 1919–1950*. Cambridge University Press: 2002, Chapter 7.

UNIVERSITY OF COLUMBIA

- **1945–47 LECTURER AND VISITING PROFESSOR**
- **1947–59 PROFESSOR OF INTERNATIONAL ECONOMICS**

DEVELOPMENT ECONOMICS & RAGNAR NURKSE'S THIRD CLASSIC

Problems of Capital Formation in Underdeveloped Countries. Oxford University Press, 1953.

The New Palgrave (Kaushik Basu):

“Nurkse’s other important (and, in my opinion, more important [than *International Currency Experience*] book was *Problems of Capital Formation in Underdeveloped Countries*.”

HIDED PAGES IN RAGNAR NURKSE´S LIFE

Dennis Nurkse

(Voices Over Water, 1993):

“... ega lapsest, kes oli mu isa,
kes jäi ellu, kelle süda ütles üles:
kõik, mis seal on sellest maailmast, on üks medaljon,
millel on kujutatud **laps-Mozart**, mängimas vaikust
tillukesel klavikordil, taustaks mõranenud klaas.”

Translated by Kajar Pruul

RAGNAR NURKSE & MUSIC

- **1927: GRADUATED FROM CONSERVATORY OF TALLINN (MAIN DISCIPLINE – PIANO UNDER PROFESSOR PEETER RAMUL)**
- ***LONDON TIMES*, 13 May 1959 (from the obituary):**
“Nurkse was unusually gifted, no less as a musician than as an economist. In his early years he studied music at the Conservatoire of Music at Tallinn and later in Edinburgh under Professor Donald Tovey: he was himself a very fine pianist.”

From the register of diplomas of the Conservatory of Tallinn

26
#26.
15. V 1927a.

Kurkse Ragnar
sünd: 22. X. 1907a.

Diplom.

Pääaines:	klaver - prof. S. Tamuli klass	r. lea (5)
Kõrvalained:	entsüklopeedias	r. lea (5)
	instrumentide teadmised	r. lea (5)
	muusikaajaloo	r. lea (5)
	estetiikas	r. lea (5)
	muusikal. kirjandus	r. lea (5)

Kõrvalained: Tallinna Soomkaoli lõputunnistus
27. V 1926a. N 356.

Admitted two Douglas H. Dubson

SEASON 1931-1932

PROGRAMME

ADMITTING THE DEERER TO

CONCERT

TO BE GIVEN IN THE

NELSON HALL
HAMILTON PLACE

OR

WEDNESDAY EVENING 25th November 1931

BEGINNING AT EIGHT O'CLOCK

PERFORMERS

The Northern Singers

ELIZABETH MELLOR JOHN ADAMS
ANNE WOOD GEORGE PARKER

At the Harpsichord

RAGNAR NURKSE

Capt. J. H. F. McEWEN, M.P. - - - Chairman

PROGRAMME

I. Chorales:—

- (a) Wachet auf - - - - -
(b) Puer natus - - - - -
(c) An Wasserflüssen Babylon } - - - - - J. S. Bach (1685-1750)
(d) Ein' feste Burg - - - - -

II. Four Pieces for Harpsichord:—

- (a) Le Coucou - - - - - Daquin (1694-1772)
(b) Les Trois Mains - - - - - Rameau (1683-1764)
(c) Le Tic-Toc-Choc - - - - - Couperin (1668-1733)
(d) Fugitive Vision—op. 22, No. 6 - - - - - Prokofieff (1891—)

III. Old English Madrigals:—

- (a) Come again - - - - - John Dowland (1563-1626)
(b) Come, Shepherds, follow me - - - - - John Bennet (15—16—)
(c) Weep You no more - - - - - John Dowland (1563-1626)
(d) Diaphenia - - - - - Francis Pilkington (—1638)
(e) In going to my naked bed - - - - - Richard Edwards (1523-1566)
(f) Now is the month of maying - - - - - Thomas Morley (1557-1603)

IV. Three Sonatas for Harpsichord:—

- (a) in F minor (b) in C minor and (c) in C minor
(Nos. 436, 356, 402 Longo Edition) - - - - - Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757)

V. Folk Songs:—

- (a) The Dark-eyed Sailor - - - - -
(b) Just as the tide was flowing } - - - - - arr. by Vaughan Williams (1872—)
(c) Bushes and briars - - - - -
(d) The Poacher - - - - - arr. by W. G. Whittaker (1876—)

VI. Six Pieces for Harpsichord:—

- (a) Prelude - - - - - Orlando Gibbons (1583-1625)
(b) Ground in Gamut - - - - - Henry Purcell (1658-1695)
(c) A Toy - - - - - Giles Farnaby (1560-1600)
(d) The Primerose - - - - - Martin Peerson (1580-1650)
(e) Gigg, Tower Hill - - - - - Anonymous
(f) The Kinges Hunt - - - - - Ben Cosyn (1565-1644)

VII. Scots Folk Songs and Shanties:—

- (a) My heart is sair - - - - -
(b) She's fair and fause } - - - - - arr. by R. F. McEw
(c) Gala Water - - - - -
(d) Drummer and Cook
(e) Tom's gone to Hil-
(f) Bally Bow

SCOTTISH BROADCASTING HOUSE

A
PROMENADE CONCERT

MONA BENSON . . . Contralto
STUART ROBERTSON . . . Bass
RAGNAR NURKSE . . . Harpsichord

A SCOTTISH ORCHESTRA

Conductor - STEWART DEAS

Leader . ISAAC LOSOWSKY

SATURDAY, MAY 2nd, 1931, at 8 p.m.

PROGRAMME

PART I.

God Save the King

THE ORCHESTRA

Overture, The Hebrides (Fingal's Cave) - - - Mendelssohn

STUART ROBERTSON and THE ORCHESTRA

Drake's Drum } - - - - - Stanford
The Old Superb }

RAGNAR NURKSE

A Toye - - - - - Giles Farnaby
(1560-1600)
The Primerose - - - - - Martin Peerson
(1580-1650)
Two Toys - - - - - Harry Hodge
The Kinges Hunt - - - - - Ben Cosyn
(1622)

THE ORCHESTRA

Overture and Ballet Music, Rosamunde - - - Schubert

MONA BENSON

Du bist die Ruh - - - - - Schubert
Therese
Dort in den Weiden } - - - - - Brahms

MONA BENSON and STUART ROBERTSON

It was a lover and his lass - - - - - Roger Quilter

Accompanist—Andrew Bryson

THE ORCHESTRA

Two Choral Preludes for Strings - - - Bach (arr. Harry Hodge)

INTERVAL.

PROGRAMME

PART II.

THE ORCHESTRA

Symphony in E flat (K. 543) - - - - - Mozart

STUART ROBERTSON

The Vagabond - - - - - Vaughan Williams
Spring Sorrow - - - - - John Ireland
A Lover's Garland - - - - - Parry
Five Eyes - - - - - Armstrong Gibbs

Accompanist—Andrew Bryson

RAGNAR NURKSE (Pianoforte)

Passepied - - - - - Debussy
Consolation, No. 1 - - - - - Liszt
Caprice Bohémien - - - - - Smetana

MONA BENSON

(RAGNAR NURKSE at the Harpsichord)

Douce dame jolie - }
Belle qui tiens ma vie } - - - - - Old French (arr. Weckerlin)
Mes belles amourcttes }

THE ORCHESTRA

Overture, The Merry Wives of Windsor - - - - - Nicolai

- **In April 1959 Ragnar Nurkse delivered his last lectures in Stockholm – Wicksell Memorial Lectures**

See: Patterns of Trade and Development. Stockholm: 1959

- **In May 2007 former Governor of the Bank of Estonia Siim Kallas delivered the first Memorial Lecture dedicated to the internationally renowned Estonian economist Professor Ragnar Nurkse in Tallinn**

**RAGNAR NURKSE DIED ON 6 MAY 1959
ON MONT PELERIN (SWITZERLAND).
HE IS BURRIED IN THE CEMETERY OF ST.
MARTIN IN VEVEY.**



The gravestone of Ragnar and Henriette Nurkse

MEMORIAL MINUTE BY PROF. J. W. ANGELL

(COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, MAY 1960)

“Few academic men of his age were as widely and favorably known. But it was Nurkse’s personal qualities that particularly endeared him to his hosts of friends in all parts of the world, and for which he will be especially remembered. He was lucid, patient and encouraging to his students; generously helpful with his colleagues; modest and almost apologetic about his own achievements and honors. A gentle man and a lover of beauty, it was not unfitting that he should fall in a sunny field of flowers, walking upward toward a favourite grove of trees.”

VABA EESTI SÕNA / FREE ESTONIAN WORD:

(NEW YORK, 28 MAY 1959)

“Professor Nurkse was not just highly-rated by his students but also an economist of outstanding international renown. It is evident that there has to be an underlying reason for such domestic and international fame – a reason sweeping along crowds of students, a reason differentiating one researcher from another. In brief, we can say that the reasons include in-depth knowledge of international economic theory and practice, original ideas, clear and authentic vision of problems, bold and constructive prognosis, logical presentation skills, and last but not least – his attractive personality.”

PROFESSOR JACOB VINER:

(PRINCETON UNIVERSITY)

(EQUILIBRIUM AND GROWTH IN THE WORLD ECONOMY, 1961)

“Everything Nurkse wrote had distinction. He has contributed to the international economics field special qualities of novel insights, enlightening balancing of speculative reasoning with empirical evidence, original applications of the standard analytical tools. His ideas have had marked influence on other workers in the international aspects of the economic development field, and have been made the center of discussion for much of the recent literature.”

In 1965 a Professorship named after Ragnar Nurkse was found at Columbia University

Charles P. Issawi (1965–1977)

Ronald E. Findlay (1977–)

... have been named for Ragnar Nurkse Professor for Economics

- **RAGNAR NURKSE – THE NOBEL PRICE FOR ECONOMICS IN 197..., but ...**

- For his work in the fields of international economics and development economics

- Jan Tinbergen was 66 when he was awarded the Nobel Price (1969), Friedrich August von Hayek 75 (1974), Tjalling Koopmans 65 (1975), James E. Meade 70 (1977), Bertil Ohlin 78 (1977), Trygve Haavelmo 78 (1989)



THANK YOU!