

# Recensioner

**Anders Hylmö, *Disciplined reasoning: Styles of reasoning and the mainstream-heterodoxy divide in Swedish economics.***

**Lunds Universitet, 2018**

As home of the Nobel Prize in economics—or as some would remind us, the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel—Sweden plays a distinctive role in the transnational discipline of economics. Though a small country, its importance is nevertheless assured through the prize committee's annual selection of laureates, based on having made discoveries of the greatest benefit to humankind. Thus Sweden punches above its weight when it comes to determining what kind of economics will be recognized as excellent in the global discipline.

But not all who study economics, broadly defined, are recognized as excellent by the discipline itself, or even as actually doing economics. To a greater extent than most social scientific fields, economics is comprised of an orthodoxy—mainstream, neoclassical economics of the sort taught in large university economics departments—and various heterodox challengers, located mostly in more marginal departments, assorted other disciplines, and sometimes outside academia altogether.

In *Disciplined Reasoning*, Anders Hylmö seeks to understand this divide—between what is “mainstream” and what is not, and how the division is produced and reproduced—in the context of Swedish economics. Drawing on insights from the sociology of science and science & technology studies, he uses interviews with economists (both mainstream and heterodox) as well as external evaluation reports for candidates for full professor positions in top Swedish economics departments to explore this question. Hylmö uses this data to develop the concept of “relational disciplinary style”—a style of reasoning, in Ian Hacking's sense, but ones that is produced within an academic discipline, in relation to external groups (other disciplines, heterodox economists), and changes over time. That is, Hylmö historicizes Hacking's concept, by drawing attention to the evolution of the economic style, while also drawing attention to the boundary work (to switch from Hacking to Gieryn) that is necessary to reproduce it. Hylmö argues that economics is productive because of its robust style, not despite it, and that while its strong epistemological and ontological assumptions exclude many questions and types of answers, they also offer lessons for other, less unified disciplines.

The interview excerpts with economists are fascinating to read. Asking mainstream economists directly about heterodox economics, for example, produces “a slight irritation” or “a clear and curious reluctance to talk,” as if “this is something that doesn't really exist” (p. 240).

They are rich in insight into the process of socialization into the discipline, the central role of modeling, and the critique from outside.

But I found the analysis of evaluation reports to contain some of the most interesting findings. In these reports, senior representatives of the discipline evaluate and rank the quality of the full body of work of their peers, in reports of perhaps thirty pages in length. Here, we get a sense of economists' intellectual taste: for ambitious questions, simple models, and technical mastery. And we also get a sense of how that taste has evolved over the twenty-five years covered in the sample.

In particular, the last few decades have seen Swedish economics pulled increasingly into a global, rather than national, disciplinary field, at the same time that journal rankings—particularly the top journals—have become a “judgment device” that takes the place of independent evaluation of colleagues' work. Prior to 1995, evaluations of quality start with the work itself, then move to reference to its publication in “good international journals” almost as an afterthought. But after that, the focus increasingly becomes not the qualities of the work, but of the rankings of its outlets. References to “top 5” and “top 10” economics journals become central, and candidates who lack, for example, a “top 5” publication must be justified: “he does have a forthcoming article in the *Journal of Economic Theory* which is viewed by many economists as close to the level of the top 5 journals” (pp. 283–284). Thus meaningful evaluation has, in a sense, been outsourced: to the (presumably non-Swedish) reviewers of top (U.S.-published) journals, whose decisions about quality replace those once made within the national disciplinary field.

I learned a great deal from engaging with *Disciplined Reasoning*, which is well-written, well-executed and, particularly for a dissertation, quite readable. Like all such works, though, it has its limitations. The main findings are, in the end, primarily descriptive, and not entirely surprising—though full of welcome new empirical detail. Yet while description is undervalued, I did find myself wishing for a larger takeaway beyond the concept of “relational disciplinary styles”. To some extent, this may be the result of economists having less meaningful things to say about heterodoxy, a primary question of the dissertation, than one might have anticipated. In the absence of other kinds of data on how disciplinary boundaries are produced and policed, the motivating question about heterodoxy does not, in the end, remain central. And while the volume is rich in insights into the changing relationship of the Swedish economics profession to the global field and its judgment devices (i.e. journal rankings), these are confined mostly to the empirical chapter on evaluation reports. More generally, the thesis is heavy on review of theory and existing literature relative to data analysis. Though the former is so clearly written I am sure I will return to it for reference, I nevertheless wanted more discussion and analysis of the empirical research itself.

These are nevertheless limited criticisms of a fascinating and well-executed dissertation, which is well-positioned to launch its author toward a successful academic career and an exciting research program. After reading *Disciplined Reasoning*, I will certainly be looking forward to hearing what else Anders Hylmö has to say.

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