

Abstract

Rangnar Nilsson: *Good science: How researchers' conceptions of science expressed in peer review documents change in three different disciplines (God vetenskap: Hur forskares vetenskapsuppfattningar uttryckta i sakkunnigutlåtanden förändras i tre skilda discipliner)*. Ph.D. Dissertation in Swedish, with a summary in English. Department of Literature, History of Ideas and Religion, University of Gothenburg, 2009. ISBN: 978-91-7346-638-7.

This dissertation examines the variety in perceptions of science and research in the academic communities of political science, literature studies and physics in Sweden 1950-1995 as expressed in expert evaluations of professorship candidates.

The study relates commonalities as well as differences in these perceptions to internal conditions of the research field, and to the extramural settings and conditions of Swedish academia. Research is thus considered as a historically situated, socially entangled and contingent societal activity that produces knowledge in close concurrence with the surrounding society. The analysis of quality assessments for each discipline examines which of the following aspects of the works reviewed by expert panels are focused in their evaluation reports: *problem, method, theory, object, results, writing*, the *totality* of the work or the *researcher* him- or herself. Based on the panelists' treatment of these aspects the thesis highlights the concomitant internal perceptions of science and research in each case.

It is found that early on in expert evaluations, political science tends to be depicted as a research field largely focused on the research methods. The methods frequently define areas of research, and credibility is typically attained through proper use of reliable methods. Towards the end of the 1900s, political scientists took a new interest in theory, while the knowledge produced was described in less definitive or absolute words.

Expert panels reviewing literature studies were traditionally more inclined to focus on the *object* of research or its *material*, whereas the *methods* used were rarely diagnosed. With time, however, one finds a theoretical turn, in as much as *theory* gained a new appreciation in this discipline as well, and it is, moreover, clearly considered as an active ingredient in knowledge production in the 1990s. As in political science, the descriptions of results - as depicted in evaluations - change from rather final pronouncements to ones that are more tentative.

Such a trend may also be seen in the physicists' evaluations. In that case evaluation reports largely home in on the results in general, but they also - when actual results are described - make explicit references to linkages with external actors or industry. The respective differences identified are analyzed as products of the history of each discipline, inherent requirements and differential relationships to the society outside of the academia.

Key words: History of ideas, history of science, university history, Swedish university history, political science, literature studies, physics, concepts of science, perceptions of research, peer review, quality in science, research quality.