

## Abstract

Ann-Christine Dellnäs, *On Economic Imperialism – a study of Gary S Becker's ideas on human capital, family and criminality* [Om ekonomisk imperialism. En studie av Gary S Beckers idéer om humankapital, familj och kriminalitet]. ISBN: 91-628-5299-X

This dissertation concerns a critical analyze of the ideas of the American economist Gary S Becker (1930–). Nobel Laureate Becker is most known for his classic work *Human Capital: A theoretical and Empirical Analysis with Special Reference to Education* (1964, 1993) and *A Treatise on the Family* (1981, 1991).

The tradition in which Becker is active, the Chicago School of Economics, has become a very important tradition in neo-classical economic theory. The dissertation is centrally concerned with Becker's use of the economic approach which consists in, with Becker's words, "maximizing behavior, market equilibrium, and stable preferences, used relentlessly and unflinchingly". The approach cover areas as; racial and sexual discrimination, investment in human capital, crime and punishment, marriage, divorce, fertility (the quantity and quality of children), drugs and addictions, and is often called economic imperialism. Becker also tries to incorporate the social environment as argument, along with goods and services, in a stable extended utility function.

The dissertation analyzes Becker's human capital theory and his important distinction of general and specific knowledge. In the extended human capital theory Becker incorporates personal and social capital. In *A Treatise* Becker tries to incorporate altruism, guilt and marriage into the individual's rational utility-maximizing behavior. The dissertation also contains wide-ranging discussion of wheter the assumption from neo-classical economic theory that individuals rationally maximize utility is tenable when taken togheter with Becker's conclusions concerning the nature of human behavior. For this critical discussion I have used a perspective on economic theory from Martha C Nussbaum and Amartya Sen.

*Key Words:* Becker, Nussbaum, Sen, Aristoteles, Weber, Chicago School of Economics, human capital, investment, economic approach, economic imperialism, utility, utility-maximizing behavior, rationality, knowledge, liberal education, capability approach, personal capital, social capital.

The dissertation is written in Swedish.