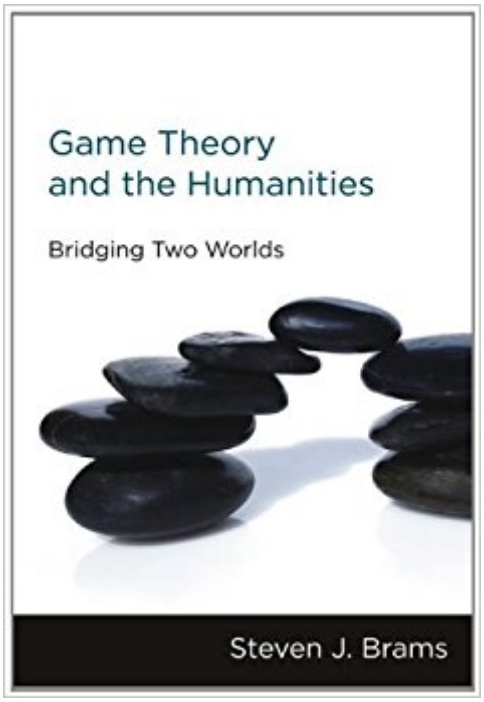
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Game Theory And The Humanities: Bridging Two Worlds (MIT Press)



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Synopsis

Game theory models are ubiquitous in economics, common in political science, and increasingly used in psychology and sociology; in evolutionary biology, they offer compelling explanations for competition in nature. But game theory has been only sporadically applied to the humanities; indeed, we almost never associate mathematical calculations of strategic choice with the worlds of literature, history, and philosophy. And yet, as Steven Brams shows, game theory can illuminate the rational choices made by characters in texts ranging from the Bible to Joseph Heller's Catch-22 and can explicate strategic questions in law, history, and philosophy. Much of Brams's analysis is based on the theory of moves (TOM), which is grounded in game theory, and which he develops gradually and applies systematically throughout. TOM illuminates the dynamics of player choices, including their misperceptions, deceptions, and uses of different kinds of power. Brams examines such topics as the outcome and payoff matrix of Pascal's wager on the existence of God; the strategic games played by presidents and Supreme Court justices; and how information was slowly uncovered in the game played by Hamlet and Claudius. The reader gains not just new insights into the actions of certain literary and historical characters but also a larger strategic perspective on the choices that make us human.

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Customer Reviews

This is a wonderful book, deserving to be used as a basic reference for students in the humanities, but also of interest to any intellectual eager to understand how today's culture is transgressing old

dichotomies such as Blasie Pascal's esprit de gÃƒÂ©omÃƒÂ©trie -- esprit de finesse and C.P.Snow's two cultures. (Mathematical Reviews)Brams's latest book is manifestly the product of original and sound scholarship and is written at a level that advanced undergraduates can readily understand. It offers an elegant overview of how game theory can deepen our appreciation of literature--and of how literature can enrich our understanding of game theory. (Philip Tetlock, Mitchell Professor of Organizational Behavior, Haas School of Business, University of California, Berkeley, and author of Expert Political Judgment: How Good Is It? How Can We Know?) Game Theory and the Humanities makes a significant contribution to literary theory, theology, political theory, philosophy of mind, and history. This book has the potential to inspire a literary theory revolution like that of feminism or post-colonial interpretation. (Ann Cudd, Professor of Philosophy, University of Kansas)This imaginative and innovative book should appeal not only to those with an interest in the individual cases, stories, and plays, but also to philosophers, historians, theologians, literary critics, and some specialists in international politics whose concerns are broader. (Frank C. Zagare, Distinguished Professor of Political Science, University at Buffalo, and author of The Games of July: Explaining the Great War)

Steven J. Brams is Professor of Politics at New York University. He is the author of Biblical Games: Game Theory and the Hebrew Bible (revised edition, MIT Press) and other books.

Steven Brams work is a collection of analyses of various literary and historical subjects. I have to admire his audacity for applying game theory models to Biblical stories, like Abraham's sacrifice, and Moses' decisions after coming down from the mount. He does apply game theory to more traditional activities like jury selection and the Cuban Missile Crisis.While Brams asserts that he is illuminating game theory (a worthy endeavour), I think it is more accurate to say that he is dissecting and analyzing the humanities with a novel scapel; game theory. Taken this way, the book actually works much better for me. While on dubious theological ground, the interpretation of Old Testament stories through game theory was both entertaining and enlightening, and possibly heretical (not that there is anything wrong with that).While this book is not the first book on game theory you should read, it would be an excellent second book on game theory, as it provides interesting and unconventional applications of game theory. While I despise LitCrit, this is the most tolerable literary analysis I have ever read. I can but hope that this catches on among English departments, but, sadly, the folks who write LitCrit tend not to apply themselves to such rigorous and structured disciplines as game theory.E. M. Van Court

First, the math: if you can handle integers 1, 2, 3, and 4, and can deal with 'greater than' and 'less than' relationships, you've got all you need. "I'm not a math person" is no excuse. Second, the relevance: Brams touches on examples from Samson and Delilah, to the Nixon tapes, to Macbeth, to Abraham and the Old Testament god, to the American civil war, to Catch-22. Just about every interaction between to two agents, each seeking benefits of their own, can be phrased in these terms.Most importantly: why bother? I mean, literary analysis has been doing quite nicely all these years without it. And doesn't all that mathy stuff deaden the real emotional impact of a story? Absolutely not. Personal drives, motivations, and goals form the critical inputs to these analyses. This offers a framework for playing one actor's urges and preferred outcomes against the other's. There's no assumption of an economist's insanely rational agent acting with perfect knowledge, just real people (or other beings) with things they want and things they want not to have happen. Then with just a little thought about each character's available options and desired results, this analytic framework shows why the two interact as they do. It shows how each can change their interaction, and whether they should. If you've ever had the feeling that some fictional characters just aren't behaving realistically, this can show why. Or, if a character acts in unexpected ways, game theory can suggest where to look to see what the reader has missed in undestanding the motivations. And, since we're dealing with basically subjective feelings, preferences, and choices, game theory offers a range of alternative analyses. Once you see how the characters stand, relative to each other, you can try out different ideas about their motivations until you come up with an understanding that explains the action as it stands. Even threats and bribes fall neatly into the basic framework.Human (and other) interactions hold endless complexity. Each one has its outcome, though, or evolving series of outcomes. And, at a high enough level, there are only so many broad categories of outcomes. Putting a name to that outcome does nothing to reduce its drama, joy, or pain. Instead, it can deepen a reader's appreciation of how it came about, and what made that outcome inevitable (if it was). Rational thought and real feeling aren't opposites. This book shows how rigorous logic can help in understanding unique personalities and how they work together - or don't.-- wiredweird

Very interesting work on Game Theory as applied to other areas of interest, such as classical literature and world politics.

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