



Biblical Games: A Strategic Analysis of Stories in the Old Testament

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upon which the lessons of Shakespeare's works are demonstrated in terms so direct and clear that ordinary readers today will share with the rough audience of the original performances the same immediate and vivid sense of being both delighted and instructed.

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Biblical Games: A Strategic Analysis of Stories in the Old Testament. By Steven J. Brams. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1980. Pp. xi + 195. \$15.00.)

You may be asking yourself what game theory could possibly have to do with the Bible, but it is the chief aim of this book to convince you that many of the more interesting stories in the Old Testament can be interpreted and illuminated using the logic of strategic interaction. I approached the book with skepticism but emerged, as has often been the case for me with other works by this author, both convinced and charmed.

The book consists of 7 substantive chapters with introductory and concluding chapters. It starts, logically, with the Creation and the temptation of Eve. Subsequent chapters are organized by themes. For example, chapter 3 compares Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac (an offer which God mercifully rejects) with Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter (unfortunately accepted). The next chapter is on "family conflict" and covers the stories of Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, and Joseph and his brothers. Moses has his own chapter because of his "protracted conflict" with God. The sixth is a chapter on pacts and deception (Rahab and the spies, Joshua and the Gibeonites, Solomon and the two women who claim to be mothers of the same child). The seventh deals with royalty: Saul, David, and Ahasuerus; the eighth focuses on "conflict between the sexes" (David and Abigail, Samson and Delila, Ahasuerus and Vashti).

The method employed is to (1) determine who are the players in each of the stories (no mean trick where God has "hardened hearts" or otherwise directly intervened to reduce the range of choice of mortals), (2) identify their possible strategic choices, (3) describe the situation confronting the players as either game trees or matrices (depending on the situation), (4) estimate the ordinal preferences of the players with respect to outcomes, and (5) to predict behavior on the basis of equilibrium solutions.

On the basis of this general method, it is possible to retell almost all of the stories as games. None of the games fails to have a dominant

strategy. Many of the stories are consistent with 2 X 4 expansions of ordinal 2 X 2 games, which always yield a dominant strategy for the second-moving player (as demonstrated in Nigel Howard's *Paradoxes of Rationality* [MIT Press 1971]). Brams suggests that this means that players of Biblical games are rational and that faith does not necessarily play as central a role in the behavior of Biblical mortals as is sometimes suggested by theologians. He argues that God Himself seems to have a strong preference for demonstrating His power, sometimes at the expense of appearing to play favorites or of appearing somewhat arbitrary in His meting out of punishments to transgressors. The image of God which emerges from Brams's analysis is a very interesting one, which in my view makes the whole enterprise quite worthwhile. The book will probably not be used for assigned readings at Bob Jones University, however, because the author uses such a refreshingly familiar and generally irreverent tone in describing God's behavior and implied intentions.

While I enjoyed reading this book immensely, there were a few distracting features that could bear mentioning. Most importantly, I felt that the author had confused somewhat the purpose of applying social-science models to humanistic subjects, especially in the final chapter, by highlighting the ability of the models to "explain" Biblical outcomes. It seemed to me that game theory provided some very helpful interpretive techniques but did not credibly add to the explanation of Biblical phenomena. It is not clear what such an explanation would be. The real issue concerns the difference in the purposes of humanistic and social scientific inquiry.

Second the author mixed the Apocryphal version of the story of Esther (which is based on a later Greek version of the story) with the Old Testament (Hebrew) version. How this could have happened given his use of the wonderful translations of the Jewish Publication Society for America I do not know. Even though the Apocryphal version is more colorful, it would have been more consistent to stick with the Hebrew version throughout the book.

Third, Brams's notion that there must be an inverse relationship between faith and rationality in the behavior of Biblical characters (p. 53) strikes me as somewhat missing the point. Since faith helps to determine the mortal players' preferences, then it is the combination of faith and rationality that explains Biblical strategic outcomes. The moral lesson that the Bible may be trying to get across is that faith and prudence should lead one along the path of righteousness, especially if God is as masterful a gamesman as Brams would have us believe.

These are, of course, pretty minor quibbles and should not deter anyone with an interest either in games or the Bible from rushing out to purchase the book. The book is delightful. The writing in the book is extremely lucid. The uses of such a book in political science courses would depend somewhat on the level of student familiarity with ordinal game theory, as there is no material in it to tell the uninitiated reader what, for example, a dominant strategy is. As a supplementary text for undergraduates with a minimal background in 2 X 2 games and a strong interest in the Bible, it would be ideal.

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The Concept of Ideology and Political Analysis: A Critical Examination of Its Usage by Marx, Lenin and Mannheim. By Walter Carlsnaes. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981. Pp. xii + 274. \$32.50.)

Although it is a relatively recent invention (coined by Antoine Destutt de Tracy at the beginning of the nineteenth century) the term ideology has achieved a certain prominence within both popular political discourse and the academic world. This development, however, has also been characterized by a growing ambiguity and confusion concerning the term's precise meaning and import. Indeed, the concept of ideology is threatened with becoming useless as a category of social analysis. By signifying almost everything in general, it is in danger of referring to almost nothing in particular.

In part, Walter Carlsnaes's book is written in response to this situation. The author analyzes the concept of ideology by focusing upon the work of three theorists in particular: Marx, Lenin, and Mannheim. In each case, Carlsnaes examines a specific usage of the term in order to determine whether it "will yield a fruitful and significant conceptualization of 'ideology' for present day explanatory purposes within political science" (pp. 16-17). Borrowing from the works of such philosophers as Abraham Kaplan and Carl Hempel, Carlsnaes argues that in order to be scientifically useful the concept of ideology must be both substantive (i.e., distinctive and necessary) and significant (i.e., semantically adequate and systematically important). Yet in applying these criteria to the work of Marx, Lenin, and Mannheim, the author is led to the conclusion that as they developed it "these usages—past and present—will have to be rejected as unsound on methodological and philosophical grounds" (p. 17).

This book is organized into 3 main chapters,

each devoted to an examination of the works of a single theorist. In each instance the author summarizes the particular usage developed by the theorist under consideration and then proceeds to a critical examination of the philosophical assumptions upon which the concept is based. This critical-historical analysis is the major achievement of the book and is extremely well done. Carlsnaes is skilled at depicting the historical and intellectual context within which the original arguments were developed. Students in particular will find these summaries helpful. Similarly Carlsnaes's philosophical critique of the methodological and theoretical assumptions behind the use of ideology within Marxism, Leninism, and the sociology of knowledge is done with great care and attention to scholarly detail. Political theorists, especially those trained in linguistic and conceptual analysis, will find these sections particularly interesting.

Carlsnaes concludes that, given the philosophical ambiguities and epistemological difficulties necessarily associated with the concept of ideology, it would be best if we did not admit it "into philosophical discourse within which it seems to serve no other function than that of obfuscation" (p. 236). Indeed, according to the author, if the concept is to retain any scientific utility at all, its use must be limited to the classification of empirical reality—an example of which can be found in Lenin's functional analysis of ideology as an agent of mass mobilization. Although this restriction would strip the concept of ideology of precisely those methodological and theoretical attributes which such thinkers as Marx, Lenin, and Mannheim intended to give it, it would, according to the author, preserve the term's utility as an explanatory concept within empirical political science.

In general, Carlsnaes's treatment of the *concept* of ideology is most persuasive. Yet at the same time, by treating ideology strictly as a concept, and thus by judging its value primarily in terms of its contribution to empirical political analysis, the author may be overlooking an important theoretical issue. Ideology is not only a concept but also a symbol. As such, it was created by its authors to give expression to certain experiences. Indeed, one may suggest that as a symbol ideology was meant to express a rejection of the rational and moral claims of modern Western civilization. As such its theoretical importance may be due more to its symbolic meaning within bourgeois culture than its conceptual validity for scientific analysis.

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