

Review of Steven J. Brams : *Game Theory and the Humanities*. (2011). The MIT Press. 336 pages

Let's have a game of 2 players of which both have 2 strategies. While it is almost impossible to imagine a situation which would seem more simple than such a game with  $2 \times 2 = 4$  possible outcomes, the whole thing gets much more complex when one realizes that even under assumption that both players do not attribute to diverse outcomes some absolute cardinal utilities but only four simple mutually relative ordinal ranks (i.e. 1: worst outcome, 2: next-worst, 3:next-best and 4: best outcome), there exist a variety of 78 diverse  $2 \times 2$  « games » for players with different preferences.

Steven J. Brams' « **Game Theory and the Humanities – Bridging Two Worlds**» offers concrete historical or fictitious examples of more than a dozen of such games. Starting with interpretation of Abrahams' son-sacrificing dilemma as a possibly *intrapsychic* game which the old shepherd played with a somewhat sadic god character; continuing through intricacies of Pascal's wager towards more mundane games played between Nixon and Supreme Court after the Watergate crisis or the game played between Khomeini & Carter during 1979 Iran hostage crisis ; and ending with the famous Catch-22 case between Yossarian and the war machinery – almost everywhere in his book Brams makes a non-negligible step in direction of unification of law, history, politology, literary critics or even theology under the mathematically sound *clef de voute* offered by the game theory.

Such an act in itself would be worthy of praise but luckily for science, Brams goes much further. Introduction of a Theory of Moves framework allows him to extend the classical notion of Nash equilibrium into a notion of a « nonmyopic equilibrium » which takes into account the players' faculty of «anticipating all possible rational moves and countermoves from the initial state ». Structural similarities among Shakespeare's MacBeth or Aristophanes' Λυσιστράτη are subsumed into a generic category of (Self-)Frustration games while other concrete instances of  $2 \times 2$  conflicts (e.g. the American Civil War) are presented in order to illustrate other generic categories like « Magnanimity games » or « King-on-the-mountain games ».

Topics like deception, games where some players have incomplete or false information, rationality of emotions or the « paradox of omniscience » demonstrating that « in certain games it is more advantageous not to know everything than the contrary » are introduced with erudition of a scholar with almost half-century of practice in the field. To summarize: the interdisciplinary paradigm presented in the glossary, appendix, 11 chapters, and 35 figures of Brams' book is not only intellectually pleasing but could also furnish practically exploitable insights for experts in domains as distant as comparative mythology, evolutionary psychology, roboethics, or - if the Turing Test can be collapsed into a  $2 \times 2$  game – even in the domain of hard-core AI.

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