Abstract

In recent years cultural anthropology, sociology and psychology have been deployed with great effect in Biblical studies. Contemporary mainstream economics has not been much utilised by Biblical scholars, despite having a large impact in other fields such as ancient history and the sociology of religion. The theoretical tools of economics include rational choice theory, game theory, information economics, and behavioural economics, as well as the some of the best developed empirical techniques in the contemporary social sciences.

Economics can engage with Biblical studies at several levels:

**Level 1** - Using economics to deepen and sharpen our understanding of the background of the Biblical texts. This adds economics to the toolkit of the historical critical method.

**Level 2** - Illuminating the actions of the characters in Biblical texts, including God.

**Level 3** - Illuminating the design and purposes of the text.

Several objections to an economic approach are considered:

1) The tools are not neutral.
2) The rationality concept is specific to modern Western cultures, and inapplicable to the world of the Bible.
3) We are not dealing with market societies
4) If there are markets, the goods traded (like honour) are not subject to economic analysis.

The paper concludes with an assessment of the promise and pitfalls of using economics in biblical studies.
References


