

Social Sciences and Biology

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There are numerous approaches to assimilate approaches from different sciences to questions that at the first glance have little to do with each other.

Traditionally there are quite a few authors that are hard to classify as economists or sociologists, like [14 - Coleman 1990 Foundations of Socia...] who tries to utilize microeconomic mathematical tools to sociological questions, like the conditions under which a group will turn into a mob. On the other hand, economists try to explain economic actions by sociological categories, like [2 - Akerlof 1980 A Theory of Social C...], [4 - Aoki 1984 The co-operative gam...] or [11 - Booth 1984 A public choice mode...]. The latter tries to explain trade union membership motives not by club goods or closed shop arrangements but rather by group pressure, which seems to be a dominant force in various European countries.

A very promising approach that has become more popular recently is to blend aspects of social sciences with biology. On the one hand, economics deal with questions of efficiency which is of great interest to evolutionary biologists, since inefficient behaviour increases the risk of species extinction¹. On the other hand, social scientists may profit from biologists since animal behaviour in groups has a lot in common with human behaviour. An evolutionary approach may lead to new insights, for instance on the emergence of altruism [24 - Trivers 1971 The Evolution of Rec...] which economists have a hard time to understand, employing their a-historic model of the homo oeconomicus [17 - Frank 1987 If Homo Economicus C...].

¹ See [26 - Wilson 1980 Sociobiology...] for details.