

Ariely, Dan. Predictably irrational: the hidden forces that shape our decisions. HarperCollins, 2008. 280p bibl index ISBN 9780061353239, \$25.95 One of the exciting, controversial research frontiers in recent years has been the intersection of economics and psychology. Behavioral economists, as they are dubbed and of which Ariely is one, have jumped into the fray to take issue with the economist's traditional assumption of the rational "economic man" who, whether making decisions about buying a product or a stock, or getting married (or divorced), responds predictably and purposefully to incentives. With teaser subtitles--"Why We Often Pay Too Much When We Pay Nothing," "Why We Are Dishonest, and What We Can Do about It"--the author leads readers through a plethora of applications in a baker's dozen of largely stand-alone chapters. In the current century, the Nobel committee has already made economic laureates of economists and psychologists who traffic in these "boundary waters," e.g., Daniel Kahneman, Vernon Smith, George Akerlof, and Daniel McFadden; others, such as Robert Shiller and Richard Thaler, are well-known academic compatriots. The debate will continue over whether the fact that we are forgetful, bad at math, emotional, overconfident, and stubborn simply produces intriguing anomalies, or whether there is something of true substance to explore. Either way, reading Ariely is certainly an entertaining, valuable way to spend a few hours. Summing Up: Highly recommended. All collections. -- A. R. Sanderson, University of Chicago