
Following his popular 2008 volume, Predictably Irrational (CH, Oct’08, 46-0969), Ariely (Duke Univ.) returns to the intersection of psychology and economics (aka behavioral economics) with Upside. He plants his rational economist straw man and then uses field and lab experiments to test (and debunk) basic theoretical models and assumptions. Part 1 is devoted to ferreting out the positive side of what the author alleges are irrational human behaviors--this rational economist reviewer begs to differ--in the workplace; part 2 focuses on how all this influences decision making at home. Topics include big employee bonuses and compensation schemes, IKEA, online dating, justice and revenge, charitable giving, interpersonal relations, and emotions. But mostly Ariely is telling stories, many highly personal in nature and derived from his own tragic, life-threatening accident as a teen and his experiences and odyssey as an adult. Unfortunately, in many instances what may simply be human frailties come across as a value-laden, normative, and almost chip-on-the-shoulder judgments and disdain for markets, bankers, corporate employees, and situations Ariely has confronted. A well-referenced, engaging, and entertaining book, but not to be considered the last--or even correct--word on these subjects by any means. Summing Up: Recommended. General readers; students, lower-division undergraduate and up; faculty. -- A. R. Sanderson, University of Chicago