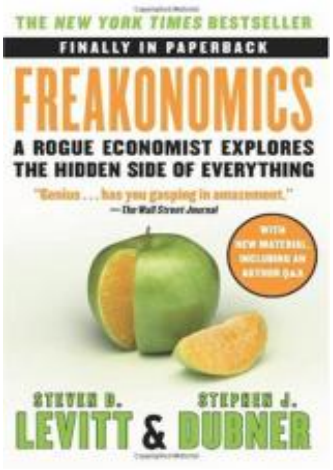
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Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything

Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner



About the Book

Which is more dangerous, a gun or a swimming pool? What do schoolteachers and sumo wrestlers have in common? Why do drug dealers still live with their moms? How much do parents really matter? What kind of impact did Roe v. Wade have on violent crime?

These may not sound like typical questions for an economist to ask. But Steven D. Levitt is not a typical economist. He is a much heralded scholar who studies the stuff and riddles of everyday life -- from cheating and crime to sports and child rearing -- and whose conclusions regularly turn the conventional wisdom on its head. He usually begins with a mountain of data and a simple, unasked question. Some of these questions concern life-and-death issues; others have an admittedly freakish quality. Thus the new field of study contained in this book: freakonomics.

Through forceful storytelling and wry insight, Levitt and co-author Stephen J. Dubner show that economics is, at root, the study of incentives -- how people get what they want, or need, especially when other people want or need the same thing. In **Freakonomics**, they set out to explore the hidden side of ... well, everything. The inner workings of a crack gang. The truth about real-estate agents. The myths of campaign finance. The telltale marks of a cheating schoolteacher. The secrets of the Ku Klux Klan.

What unites all these stories is a belief that the modern world, despite a surfeit of obfuscation, complication, and downright deceit, is not impenetrable, is not unknowable, and -- if the right questions are asked -- is even more intriguing than we think. All it takes is a new way of looking. Steven Levitt, through devilishly clever and clear-eyed thinking, shows how to see through all the clutter.

Freakonomics establishes this unconventional premise: If morality represents how we would like the world to work, then economics represents how it actually does work. It is true that readers of this book will be armed with enough

riddles and stories to last a thousand cocktail parties. But **Freakonomics** can provide more than that. It will literally redefine the way we view the modern world.

Discussion Guide

1. Most people think of economics as a dry subject matter concerning monetary and fiscal matters. How does **Freakonomics** change this definition?

2. Freakonomics argues that morality represent the way we'd like the world to work, whereas economics can show how the world really does work. Do you agree?

3. Freakonomics lists three varieties of incentives: social, moral, and financial. Can you think of others?

4. Freakonomics shows how the conventional wisdom is often shoddily formed. What are some instances of conventional wisdom that you've always doubted?

5. Does it seem as though "experts" truly hold too much power in the modern world, or are we lucky to have them?

6. What are some issues in your daily life toward which you can apply some **Freakonomics**-style thinking?

7. What were some of the most convincing arguments put forth in **Freakonomics**? What were some of the least convincing?

8. How does the argument linking Roe v. Wade to a drop in crime change your thinking about abortion?

9. How does the view of parenting in **Freakonomics** jibe with your own view?

10. After reading **Freakonomics**, do you think that cheating is more prevalent or less prevalent than you thought it was before you read the book?

Author Bio

Steven D. Levitt, a professor of economics at the University of Chicago, was awarded the John Bates Clark medal, given to the most influential American economist under the age of forty. He is also a founder of The Greatest Good, which applies Freakonomics-style thinking to business and philanthropy.

Photo Credit: Sigrid Estrada

Critical Praise

"Steven Levitt has the most interesting mind in America... Prepare to be dazzled."

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