

## *Book reviews*

*Freakonomics*, Steven D. Levitt & Stephen J. Dubner, Harper Collins, New York, 2005. 242 pages.

It takes an extraordinary economics book to surf the bestseller lists for a year but then, as *Freakonomics* repeatedly reminds us, Steven D. Levitt does not see himself as ordinary. Writing with journalist Stephen J. Dubner, University of Chicago economist Levitt sets out to “explore the hidden side of everything” by finding evidence of economic theory where he thinks you’d least expect it.

Suffice to say the pair do not achieve their somewhat ambitious target, not least because Levitt is not quite the nonconformist Dubner trumpets. He is concerned with information problems, self-motivation biases and income-maximisation. Why are sumo wrestlers like school teachers? Both are self-interested agents. What do the Ku Klux Klan and real estate firms have in common? Each exploits information asymmetries. Did you know that Chicago crack dealers share a management structure with McDonalds? You do now.

This is all good fun, but the success of *Freakonomics* is born from something other than concise prose and more-interesting-than-usual illustrations of basic econ. Positioned in the front row is Levitt’s 2001 claim, made with John Donohue, that the fall in US crime rates during the 1990s owed less to a healthy economy and zero-tolerance policing than it did to *Roe v Wade*. The idea, briefly, is that thousands of would-be ‘90s criminals were neither at work nor in prison during the drop-off but rather had been terminated two decades previously following the Supreme Court’s 1973 legalisation of abortion. Political fury and academic criticism duly followed but, despite well-publicised reservations concerning both underlying assumptions and applied methodology, Levitt builds his book on the assertion without any convincing attempt to respond to his opponents.

This approach makes it difficult to take pleasure in some neat work elsewhere and, given the theory’s infamy, the authors must have been expecting

this effect from day one. Dubner offers regular reminders of his friends' impeccable credentials (Sen, A and Nozick, R perform brief cameos on pages 1 and 2 respectively) as if to suggest that any findings are flawless. So why begin a quest for the truth with some highly contentious speculation guaranteed to undermine all accompanying work and attract immense controversy?

Among other things, the authors set out to show that agents often seek to maximise their income at the expense of other, more laudable, goals while ensuring that such unpalatable preferences remain hidden. There are a number of good examples of this phenomenon in *Freakonomics*, including the suspicion that - whether or not he is an unusual economist - Levitt is a text-book economic agent.

Peter May

*Logical Pluralism*, J.C. Beall & Greg Restall, Oxford University Press, 2005. 151 pages.

We cannot logically deduce that London buses are coloured just because they are red. We all know what a valid argument is, and it is obvious that this argument wouldn't be valid. Obvious, that is, until you consider that there is a way in which we know that all red things are indeed coloured. Such considerations have led philosophers to propose modifications to our interpretation of logical conse-

quence. *Logical Pluralism* arrives at the bolder claim: what counts as a valid argument depends on which logic we are using and many logical schemes are equally acceptable. So we can deduce that London buses are coloured from the fact that they are red within one framework but not in another. Validity depends on what we need it for.

J.C. Beall (University of Connecticut) and Greg Restall (University of Melbourne) identify the link between truth preservation and validity as the core notion upon which all accounts of logic must agree. They stipulate that an argument is valid if the consequence is true in all cases in which the premises are true. Pluralism rears its head in the specification of what 'case' means. *Logical Pluralism* surveys the major trends in logic and proposes that the Tarskian models of classical logic, the possible worlds of modal logic, the situations of relevant logic and the constructions of constructive logic all provide suitable instances of 'cases'. Furthermore, it claims that each provides a different and yet satisfactory account of logical consequence. The argument is this simple: see that there are multiple successful notions of logical consequence; see that taking a pluralist approach has virtues, for we have a much more flexible approach to analysing argument. The authors then ask, "Well, why not?"

Beall and Restall are experienced at defending their thesis. One of the