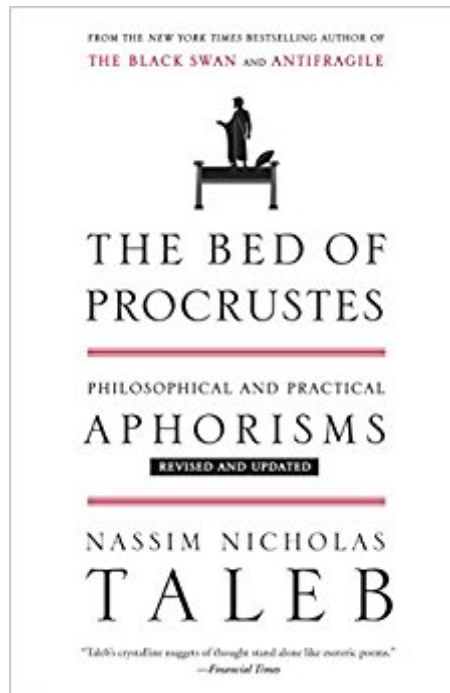


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The Bed Of Procrustes: Philosophical And Practical Aphorisms (Incerto)



Synopsis

With fifty percent more material than the hardcover, this expanded edition of *The Bed of Procrustes* is a standalone book in Nassim Nicholas Taleb's landmark *Incerto* series, an investigation of opacity, luck, uncertainty, probability, human error, risk, and decision-making in a world we don't understand. The other books in the series are *Fooled by Randomness*, *The Black Swan*, and *Antifragile*. By the author of the modern classic *The Black Swan*, this collection of aphorisms and meditations expresses his major ideas in ways you least expect. *The Bed of Procrustes* takes its title from Greek mythology: the story of a man who made his visitors fit his bed to perfection by either stretching them or cutting their limbs. It represents Taleb's view of modern civilization's hubristic side effects—modifying humans to satisfy technology, blaming reality for not fitting economic models, inventing diseases to sell drugs, defining intelligence as what can be tested in a classroom, and convincing people that employment is not slavery. Playful and irreverent, these aphorisms will surprise you by exposing self-delusions you have been living with but never recognized. With a rare combination of pointed wit and potent wisdom, Taleb plows through human illusions, contrasting the classical values of courage, elegance, and erudition against the modern diseases of nerdiness, philistinism, and phoniness. Taleb's crystalline nuggets of thought stand alone like esoteric poems.

—Financial Times

From the Trade Paperback edition.

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Customer Reviews

In 2007 Nassim Taleb depicted the then current financial situation in America as a brittle house of cards. The subsequent economic crash and burn made his reputation as a seer, though Taleb would never claim prophesy in any form. "I know nothing about the future," he told the Long Now Foundation in February, 2008. He deals not with prediction, but with the unknown, or how humans fail to deal with the unknown, throw it under the carpet and pretend it doesn't exist. "The Black Swan" has become Taleb's symbol for the world's inherent unpredictability. The runaway best seller of the same name has seemingly redefined reality itself for some. From this point on the world looks fuzzier. Taleb has since spread his Black Swan-ism everywhere, and people are listening. But how to follow up such a magnum opus? As if to prove the unpredictability of the world, Taleb releases a thin volume of... aphorisms. Could anyone have expected this? The previously verbose wizard of the unknown takes on the most laconic textual genre next to haiku. Didn't aphorisms go out with Cioran? Not to mention that the book's title sounds right out of 1890: "The Bed of Procrustes: Philosophical and Practical Aphorisms." In recent speeches Taleb has announced that he's now a philosopher. He apparently meant it. But he's still not predicting the future. This very tiny volume, readable in a short sitting, delineates Taleb's thought in a very different manner than his previous books. It also takes on some new subjects. A short introduction frames the aphorisms to follow. Here the charming tale of Procrustes gets juxtaposed with our modern sensibilities. But the comparison seems appropriate.

Taleb's book of Philosophical and Practical Aphorisms is annoyingly brilliant. I am aware of no other intellect who can offer truisms in such an offensive, condescending, righteous, and elitist manner while also endearing, educating, enlightening, and inspiring. The one word that has always come to mind when I think of Nassim Taleb is ARROGANT. Based on his aphorism, it sounds like I'm not the only one: "People reserve standard compliments for those who do not threaten their pride; the others they often praise by calling 'arrogant.'" And he's right. Again. Fooled by Randomness and The Black Swan made it clear to the world that Taleb is a first class thinker who can KNOW, to paraphrase one of his sayings, a priori what most can only learn a posteriori. The Bed of Procrustes offers readers a much more robust insight into Taleb's world view and process which is ultimately quite useful for those who seek to find a deeper understanding of the complex world we live in. It may not be surprising that this deeper understanding that Taleb possesses stems from a pursuit that is at odds

with the modern, scientific, technological approach to knowledge, but is rooted in one's ability to remove oneself from constraints, biases, artificial effort, and political and societal norms. Taleb's aphorisms (short form writings which contain deep meaning) manage to tell us how to generate ideas without thinking, achieve progress without working, and reveal mysteries without looking. His targets include fields which rely heavily on the idea that what we know is more robust than what we don't (economics, medicine, academia), those which rely on popular acceptance to be considered influential (politics, journalism, literature) and all who are enslaved by a predictable existence.

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