For all the great authors or for the most part of creative of contemporary authors, their origins, families and friendships confer or give a special “silhouette” to understand the roots of their scientific personality. Nassim Nicholas Taleb remains a unique spirit and a multidisciplinary personality of the 21st century. NNT - as the author abbreviates his own name in the text of his books - was born in Lebanon, in a family composed from a physician and an anthropology researcher, holding French citizenship and profound Antiochian Greek origins. In his latest and remarkable book entitled Skin in the Game: Hidden Asymmetries in Daily Life (2018).

He recognizes the classic cultural influences, and the proof of this truth is on the first page of the work, as dedication to his brave friends Ron Paul and Ralph Nader, the first as “Roman among Greeks” and the second as “Phoenician Greek spirit”. Book after book, the NNT’s amplitude of creativity or his scientific personality is permanently expanded beyond the stability of the classical or ancient values being associated with the profound discernment of his scientific opinions and with the perspective of his modern multidisciplinary approaches.

The most difficult aspect in the life of an author of scientific literature is not to become famous, but to keep all his works as bestseller. I believe that you can imagine how difficult it was for Nassim Nicholas Taleb to write again such an incredible and valuable book about uncertainty and risks - as level of probability of the success of a writer in modern world - after his exceptional and almost brilliant collection of bestsellers, translated in 40 languages and entitled Incerto - A Philosophical Essay on Uncertainty, a collection including Fooled by Randomness (2001), The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable (2007), The Bed of Procrustes Philosophical and Practical Aphorisms (2010) and Antifragile: Things That Gain From Disorder (2012)…

After reading the text of Skin in the Game: Hidden Asymmetries in Daily Life, you will know that he put not only his skin but also his soul again in the game inside the pages of his unique book to reach such a high level of probability of success.

But, before you read the first words of this memorable book, do not forget to reserve a special place in your mind for Taleb’s own words as a doubled virtual motto: “The symmetry of Skin in the game is a simple rule that’s necessary for fairness or justice” together with “Never trust anyone who doesn’t have skin in the game. Without it, fools and crooks will benefit, and their mistakes will never come back to haunt them.” This dual or ambivalent motto helps anyone to understand how an excellent mathematician can solve apparently in a philosophical manner, but essentially in a practical view, a great variety of the risks and probability problems after a two decades process of meditating about how to think in uncertainty conditions specified in the real business and life…

A bestseller should always be a book that is both well-written and well-structured, from each section of it, the author being always with eyes focused on the reader. NNT introduces an additional criterion of the “two
“Le style c’est l’homme”, one of the most used quotation in the process of delimitation of the writers’ universe, belonging to the Comte de Buffon, usually translated as “you may know a man through his writing”, is the most adequate frame to personality of NNT, an amazing writer with a natural hobby as a philologist, in fact not only a connoisseur of ancient Greek, Classical Arabic, Latin, Aramaic, Syriac, Hebrew languages, but also of the modern ones as French, English, Spanish, Italian etc. A deep sense of self-irony characterizes NNT style and this aspect is similar as impact of his exceptional humor, and also by his necessary cynicism, which interweaves with the precision of language specific to a rigorous mathematician and statistician, that remains difficult to be defeated on the field of terminological correctness and applied issues. In the end, all of these style elements give birth to a writer’s most valuable scientific personality, expanding his conceptual creativity, proving to the readers his unimaginable paradoxes, metaphors, aphorisms etc. I quote some synthetic phrases or syncretic statements, a few texts able indeed to make him more well-known in spite of the fact that is famous already, based on his expressions really able to underline the uniqueness of NNT’s style, both scientific and literary, full of self - irony and humor, a style that clarifies the meaning of his ideas and emphasizes the truth of his prophetic phrases and the veracity of his ideas, in the following lines:

“Beware of the person who gives advice, telling you that a certain action on your part is “good for you” while it is also good for him, while the harm to you doesn’t directly affect him.”

“Let us return to pathemata mathemata (learning through pain) and consider its reverse: learning through thrills and pleasure. People have two brains, one when there is skin in the game, one when there is none. Skin in the game can make boring things less boring. When you have skin in the game, dull things like checking the safety of the aircraft because you may be forced to be a passenger in it cease to be boring. If you are an investor in a company, doing ultra-boring things like reading the footnotes of a financial statement (where the real information is to be found) becomes, well, almost not boring.”
“Thirty-nine percent of Americans will spend a year in the top 5 percent of the income distribution, 56 percent will find themselves in the top 10 percent, and 73 percent will spend a year in the top 20 percent.”

“Freedom is always associated with risk taking, whether it leads to it or comes from it.”

“Science isn’t the sum of what scientists think, but exactly as with markets. Had science operated by majority consensus, we would be still stuck in the Middle Ages.”

“The market is like a large movie theater with a small door.”

“The knowledge we get by tinkering, via trial and error, experience, and the workings of time, in other words, contact with the earth, is vastly superior to that obtained through reasoning, something self-serving institutions have been very busy hiding from us.”

“If you can’t put your soul into something, give it up and leave that stuff to someone else.”

“You will never fully convince someone that he is wrong; only reality can.”

“The good is not as good as the absence of bad.”

(Excerpts from Nassim Nicholas Taleb, 2018., Random House & Penguin, New York City)

If you want to select and understand with a better accuracy many of the specific applied research methods or adequate manner of reasoning in Taleb’s perceptions take into account the importance of a complete sense of morality of what you will read inside his work. Reading the book, do not forget to identify in the general behaviour in business the dual solutions of ethics well known as the golden rule of benevolence based on ancient statement “do unto others as you would have them do unto you”, as a major text in the Christian faith, and the silver rule of reciprocity, based on a relative contrary option formulated as “don’t do to others what you wouldn’t want done to you”, advocated first by Confucius(1992), and after by Cicero (1971) (Tullberg, 2012). NNT’s option for a robust silver rule as final solution in a real life or business is more than obvious inside his book and many times justified as a mandatory negative expression: “do not treat others the way you would not like them to treat you”.

Both force and originality of NNT’s books come from his permanent inter-, trans-, cross- and multidisciplinary approaches. It is only sufficient to find out how he extends a sociophysics method, used by Serge Galam (2012) and known as a renormalization group, when he explains the domination of the intolerant minority, or how he structures the inequality in the static and the dynamic, based on the conceptualization of the mathematical statistics of the ergodicity, in order to completely and simply delete or abolish Thomas Piketty’s (2014) controversial arguments, from the economy of inequality etc.

Telling me with who do you really look similar and, in this way, understanding better who you really are and what value your ideas have for your audience or common readers, could ultimately be a way to get to know more profoundly not only Taleb but also his books. Reading the works of NNT, including Black Swan and Antifragile, but especially those concepts or text fragments referring to the Mediocristan, Bureaucristan, markets without intelligence, the lucky fool or the guy called robber, thief or villain who transfers all the risks to a stupid person, my first thought flew to Carlo Cipolla (1978) and especially to the comparable creativity as an impact of his last book, entitled The basic Laws of Human Stupidity. NNT’s pragmatic conclusions are remarkable and the distance between Taleb and Cipolla becomes huge when he states that if a thing declared wrong works or a fool produces money then they will cease to be described by expressions related to human imbecility or human stupidity and non-creativity. In fact, NNT confirm that markets without intelligence are just as efficient as those with excess intelligence.

Instead of an epilogue about what NNT told me about in Skin in the Game: Hidden Asymmetries in Daily Life, I prefer an answer structured as half question / half conclusion. What remains after one forgets everything he has read a lifetime is culture or his mind training to survive, and after you will read this latest book by Nassim Nicholas Taleb, the sensations of the freshness of the language, careful investigation, scientific realism, and exceptional philosophical and moral rigor will amplify your remaining active memory on a higher scientific knowledge level and will transform even your personality in a Lindy effect...
REFERENCES


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