

Additional Aphorisms, Rules, and Heuristics (Added to the *Incerto*)

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I 1. People are much less interested in what you are trying to show them than what you are trying to hide.

I 2. Erudition without bullshit, intellect without cowardice, courage without imprudence, mathematics without nerdiness, scholarship without academia, intelligence without shrewdness, religiosity without intolerance, elegance without softness, sociality without dependence, enjoyment without addiction, and, above all, nothing without skin in the game.

II 3. A government stating "we will not stand idle in front of atrocities committed by (foreign dictator) XYZ" is typically trying to mitigate the guilt for standing idle in front of more atrocities committed by said XYZ.

II 4. Almost all those caught making a logical fallacy interpret it as a "disagreement".

II 5. France took Algeria, hoping for a country to eat cassoulet and instead France is now eating couscous.¹

II 6. If powerful assholes don't find you "arrogant", it means you are doing something wrong.

II 7. If someone is making an effort to ignore you, he is not ignoring you.

II 8. In your prayers substitute "protect us from evil" with "protect us from those who *improve* things for a salary".

II 9. Most mistakes get worse when you try to correct them.

II 10. Much of the difference between what is heaven and what is hell is branding.

II 11. Never read a book review written by an author whose books you wouldn't read.

II 12. One of life's machinations is to make some people both rich and unhappy, that is, jointly fragile and deprived of hope.

II 13. People don't like it when you ask them for help; they also feel left out when you don't ask them for help.

II 14. The dream of having computers behave like humans is coming true, with the transformation, in a single generation, of humans into computers.

II 15. The first one who uses "but", has lost the argument.

II 16. The main reason to go to school is to learn **how not** to think like a professor.

¹ Inverse effects.

II 17. The modern hypocrite gives the designation "respect" to what is nothing but fear of the powerful.

II 18. We invented language to be vague, if you can sort of see what I mean.

II 19. We tend to define "rude" less by the words used (what is said) than by the status of the recipient (to whom it is addressed).

II 20. When someone starts a sentence with the first half containing "I", "not", and "but", the "not" should be removed and the "but" replaced with "therefore."

II 21. When someone writes "I dislike you but I agree with you", I read "I dislike you because I agree with you."

III 22. Automation makes otherwise pleasant activities turn into "work".

III 23. For life to be really fun, what you fear should line up with what you desire.

III 24. If you get easily bored, it means that your BS detector is functioning properly; if you forget (some) things, it means that your mind knows how to filter; and if you feel sadness, it means that you are human.

III 25. It is not possible to have fun when you try.

III 26. Life is about execution rather than purpose.

III 27. The good life -the *vita beata* - is like reading a Russian novel: it takes 200 pages of struggling with the characters before one can start enjoying things. Then the agitation starts to make sense.

III 28. The ultimate freedom lies in not having to explain "why" you did something.

III 29. Thinking that all individuals pursue "selfish" interest is equivalent to assuming that all random variables have zero covariance.

III 30. We need to feel a little bit lost somewhere, physically or intellectually, at least once a day.

IV 31. Atheists are just modern versions of religious fundamentalists: they both take religion too literally.

IV 32. Monotheistic religion isn't so much about telling man that there is one God, so much preventing man from thinking that *he is* God.

IV 33. Paganism is decentralized theology.

IV 34. The ancient Mediterranean : before monotheism, people changed and exchanged rites and gods as we do with ethnic food.

V 35. Never hire an A student unless it is to take exams.

V 36. Business wars are typically lost by both parties, academic wars are won by both sides.

V 37. *Corollary:* If you socialize with someone with a smaller bank account than yours, you are obligated to converse exactly as if you had the same means, eat in the places where he eats, at no point in time show the pictures of your vacation in Provence or anything that hints at the differential in means.

V 38. Did you notice that collecting art is to hobby-painting as watching pornography is to doing the real thing? Only difference is status.

V 39. Do not socialize with people much richer than you; but if you do, do it in your own territory (restaurants you can afford, wine, etc.)

V 40. I wonder how many people would seek excessive wealth if it did not carry a measure of *status* with it.

V 41. In the days of Suetonius, 60% of prominent educators (grammarians) were slaves. Today the ratio is 97.1%, and growing.

V 42. It is good to not feel envy; but better to neither envy nor be envied.

V 43. Success in all endeavors is requires absence of specific qualities. 1) To succeed in crime requires absence of empathy, 2) To succeed in banking you need absence of shame at hiding risks, 3) To succeed in school requires absence of common sense, 4) To succeed in economics requires absence of understanding of probability, risk, or 2nd order effects and about anything, 5) To succeed in journalism requires inability to think about matters that have an infinitesimal small chance of being relevant next January, ...6) But to succeed in life requires a total inability to do anything that makes you uncomfortable when you look at yourself in the mirror.

V 44. The alpha person at a gathering of "high status" persons is often, detectably, the waiter.

V 45. The natural benefit of a cell phone, laptop, and other indispensable modern items is the joy one gets finding the object after losing it. Lose your wallet full of credit cards and you will have a chance to have a great day.

V 46. The only way you can ascertain that you are really rich is if you prefer to drive a slightly beaten nondescript car, without feeling compelled to let others know that you are doing it "by choice".

V 47. There is no more unmistakable sign of failure than that of a middle-aged man boasting of his successes in college.

V 48. What we commonly call "success" (rewards, status, recognition, some new metric) is a consolation prize for those both unhappy and not good at what they do.

V 49. You can tell how poor someone feels by the number of times he references "money" in his conversation.

V 50. You will never know if someone is an asshole until he becomes rich.

VI 51. All rumors about a public figure are to be deemed untrue until he threatens to sue.

VI 52. Bureaucracy is a construction designed to maximize the distance between a decision-maker and the risks of the decision.

VI 53. Executive programs allow us to watch people who have never worked lecturing those who have never pondered.

VI 54. Never get into a business partnership with a retired lawyer unless he has another hobby.

VI 55. Never show a risk number, even if it is right.

VI 56. People tend to whisper when they say the truth and raise their voice when they lie.

VI 57. The problem with academics is that they really think that nonacademics find them more intelligent than themselves.

VI 58. The rational heuristic is to avoid any market commentary from anyone who has to work for a living.

VI 59. Under opacity, incomplete information, and partial understanding, much of what we don't understand is labeled "irrational".

VI 60. Universities have been progressing from providing scholarship for a small fee into selling degrees at a large cost.

VI 61. When people say "I am investing for the long term", it means they are losing money.

VI 62. The fact that people in countries with cold weather tend to be harder working, richer, less relaxed, less amicable, less tolerant of idleness, more (over)organized and more harried than those in hotter climates should make us wonder whether wealth is mere indemnification, and motivation is just overcompensation, for not having a real life.

VII 63. A good book gets better at the second reading. A great book at the third. Any book not worth rereading isn't worth reading.

VII 64. A heuristic on whether you have control of your life: can you take naps?

VII 65. Fasting: every human should learn to read, write, respect the weak, take risks in voicing disrespect for the powerful when warranted, and fast.

VII 66. High Modernity: routine in place of physical effort, physical effort in place of mental expenditure, and mental expenditure in place of mental clarity.

VII 67. In real life exams someone gives you an answer and you have to find the best corresponding questions.

VII 68. It used to take 7 years to figure out if a book is a book or journalism between covers. Now all one needs is wait two years. Soon, a few months.

VII 69. Life is about early detection of the reversal point beyond which your own belongings (say a house, country house, car, or business) start owning you.

VII 70. Real life (*vita beata*) is when your choices correspond to your duties.

VII 71. Some ideas are born as you write then down, others become dead.

VII 72. The longest book I've ever read was 205 pages.

VII 73. One of the shortest books I've ever read had 745 pages.

VII 74. Formal education is credentials plus negative knowledge so it sort of works out on balance.

VII 75. It is a curse to have ideas that people understand only when it is too late.

VII 76. The most important aspect of fasting is that you feel deep undirected gratitude when you break the fast.

VIII 77. A risk you run when you write a book calling journalists BS vendors is that *all* your reviewers will be BS vendors.²

VIII 78. I was told to write medium sized books. Yet of the two most successful French novels in history: one is very short (*Le Petit Prince*, 80 p), other extra long (*Proust's Recherche*, 3200 p), following the Arcsine law.

VIII 79. A writer told me "I didn't get anything done today". Answer: try to do nothing. The best way to have only good days is to not *aim at* getting anything done. Actually almost everything I've written that has survived was written when I didn't *try to* get anything done.

VIII 80. Authors deplete their soul when the marginal contribution of a new book is smaller than that of the previous one.

VIII 81. I want to write books that only those who read them claim they did.

VIII 82. I wonder why newssuckers don't realize that if news had the slightest predictive & nonanecdotal value journalists would be monstrously rich. And if journalists were really not interested in money they would be writing literary essays.

VIII 83. If the professor is not capable of giving a class without preparation, don't attend. People should only teach what they have learned organically, through experience and curiosity... or get another job.

VIII 84. If you don't feel that you haven't read enough, you haven't read enough.

VIII 85. Journalists reporting on journalism (such as the recent *New York Times* boardroom intrigue) are involved in an unconscious form of onanism.

VIII 86. Newspapers used to be written by journalists; they are now written for journalists. (Avalanche of headlines about the NYT intrigue)

VIII 87. Journalists reporting on journalism (such as the NYT intrigue) is an unconscious form of onanism.

² Reply to Bill Easterly who wrote : "A risk you run when you write a book criticizing experts is that some of your reviewers will be experts."

VIII88. Remove all empty words from writings, resume, conversation, except when they aim at courtesy.

IX 89. For an honest man, freedom requires having no friends; and, one step above, sainthood requires having no family.

X 90. God created Monte Carlo and similar places so extremely rich people would come experience extreme envy.

X 91. A hotshot is someone temporarily perceived to be of some importance, rather than perceived to be of some temporary importance.

X 92. An academic (say Krugman or Piketty) cannot lose his tenure, but a businessman and risk-taker, poor or rich can go bankrupt. That is the infuriating inequality.

X 93. If a pilot crashes a plane, $N=1$ is not anecdote, if he doesn't crash the plane, $N=100$ is anecdote.

X 94. It is very difficult to argue with salaried people that the simple can be important and the important can be simple.

X 95. Journalists cannot grasp that what is interesting is not necessarily important; most cannot even grasp that what is sensational is not necessarily interesting.

X 96. Never rid anyone of an illusion unless you can replace it in his mind with another illusion.

X 97. Polemic is a lucrative form of entertainment, as the media can employ unpaid and fiercely motivated actors.

X 98. Probability is the intersection of the most rigorous mathematics and the messiest of life.

X 99. To rephrase, every human should at all times have equality in probability (which we can control), not equality in outcome.

X 100. Just as statisticians understand the risks of roulette sequences better than carpenters, probabilists understand systemic ecological risks better than biologists.

X 101. Nitpicking is the unmistakable mark of cluelessness.

XI 102. A golden saddle on a sick horse makes the problem feel worse; pomp and slickness in form (TED-conference style) makes absence of substance nauseating

XI 103. My impression of Las Vegas: mostly prediabetic men wearing shorts.

XI 104. Since its inception, academia has been grounded in the idea that knowledge of the chemical composition of ink will improve one's writing.

XI 105. Studying neurobiology to understand humans is like studying ink to understand literature.

XI 106. There is nothing more hideous than excessive refinement (in food, dress, lifestyle, etc.)

XI 107. Silence is only informational if you can speak skillfully.

XII 108. If we are the only animal with a sense of justice, it would clearly be because we also are about the only animal with a sense of cruelty.

XII 109. A good man is warm and respectful towards the waiter or people of supposedly lower financial and social condition.

XII 110. A prostitute who sells her body (temporarily) is vastly more honorable than someone who sells his opinion for promotion or job tenure.

XII 111. Accept the rationality of time, never its fairness and morality.

XII 112. Another marker for charlatans: they don't voice opinions that can get them in trouble.

XII 113. Any action one does with the aim of winning an award, any award, corrupts to the core.

XII 114. Anything people do, write, or say to enhance their status beyond what they give others shows like a mark on their foreheads, visible to others but not to them.

XII 115. Envy, like thirst for revenge, is the wicked person's version of our natural sense of injustice.

XII 116. Every angel is an asshole somewhere.

XII 117. Every asshole is an angel somewhere.

XII 118. For social mobility to work, it needs to be a two-way highway, with a large number of pre-rich and an almost as large one of post-rich.

XII 119. I am rather fed up with those who tell me to be nice & try to convince charlatans. The FBI didn't "try to convince" the mafia to abandon its activities.

XII 120. It is a great compliment for an honest person to be mistaken for a crook by a crook.

XII 121. It is easy for others, but not for you, to detect the asymmetry between what you gain and what you give by doing, writing or saying.

XII 122. It is quite a predicament to be both evil and risk averse.

XII 123. It takes a lot of skills to be virtuous without being boring.

XII 124. Multiplicative generosity: limit your generosity to those who, in turn, given the circumstances, would be equally generous towards others.

XII 125. Never buy a product that the owner of the company that makes it doesn't use, or, in the case of, say, medication, wouldn't contingently use.

XII 126. Never call someone an imbecile (or fucking idiot) unless he causes harm to others/system; there must be a moral dimension to insults.

XII 127. Never take an advice from a salesman, or any advice that benefits the advice giver.

XII 128. Never trust a journalist unless she's your mother.

XII 129. People reveal much more about themselves while lying.

XII 130. Something shoddy: citizenship of convenience, holding the passport of a country for ease of travel/tax without committing to its community.

XII 131. Supposedly, if you are uncompromising/intolerant with BS you lose friends. But you will also make friends, better friends.

XII 132. The bottom half has been typically screwed by the middle class. That's the entire story of Rome.

XII 133. Trust those who are greedy for money a thousand times more than those who are greedy for credentials.

XII 134. Trust those who trust you and distrust those who are suspicious of others.

XII 135. Virtue is when the income you wish to show the tax agency exceeds what you wish to show your neighbor.

XII 136. Distributive justice isn't taking from a risk taker who earned honorably, it is keeping his probability of losing it very high.

XII 137. I feel robbed by those who make money with no skin in the game (Rubin, Geithner, & bankers) but I despise attacks on inequality based on envy. [CUT]

XII 138. Your duty is to scream those truths that one should shout but that are merely whispered.

XIII 139. Failure-proof is achievable; failure-free is not. [CUT?]

XIII 140. General Principle: the solutions (on balance) need to be simpler than the problems.

XIII 141. Increasingly, people don't become academics because of intelligence, rather because of lower grasp of disorder.

XIII 142. The only valid political system is one that can handle an imbecile in power without suffering from it.

XIII 143. The problem with the idea of "learning from one's mistakes" is that most of what people call mistakes aren't mistakes.

XIII 144. There is this prevailing illusion that debt is a renewable resource.

XIII 145. To say it bluntly, *all* the critics of my tail risk ideas and strategies still work and *have to* work for a living.

XIII 146. To understand how something works, figure out how to break it.

XIII 147. You can expect blowups and explosive errors in fields where there is a penalty for simplicity.

XIII 148. Competitive academia, sports, and journalism: persons and groups both vulnerable to reputational changes and pushed to the limit of their competence, sitting in a state of insecurity as one single error can wreck their careers, yet pushed to operate at that margin owing to the competitive framework. [CUT?]

XIII 149. For a free person, the optimal - most opportunistic - route between two points should never be the shortest one.

XIV 150. A lot of what we call work is noise.

XIV 151. A lot of what we call signal is noise.

XIV 152. I recently had a meal in a fancy restaurant with complicated dishes with fancy names (\$125 per person), then enjoyed a pizza afterwards (straight out of the oven), \$7.95. I wondered why the pizza isn't 20 times the price of the complicated dish, since I'd rather have the former —at any price— over the latter.

XIV 153. Just as eating cow-meat doesn't turn you into a cow, studying philosophy doesn't make you wiser.

XIV 154. Mistakes detected by copy editors are not likely to be noticed by readers, and vice versa.

XIV 155. Most can't figure out why one can like rigorous knowledge & despise academics: yet they understand that one can like food & hate canned tuna.

XIV 156. People like to eat fish by the water even if the fish was caught far away and transported by trucks.

XIV 157. The saying goes "those who can, do; those who can't do, teach". But I've shown that those who can't do shouldn't teach.

XIX 158. a- You are free in inverse proportion to the number of people to whom you can't say "fuck you". b- You are honorable in proportion to the number of people to whom you can say "fuck you" with impunity but don't.

XIX 159. Contra the prevailing belief, "success" isn't being on top of a hierarchy, it is standing outside all hierarchies.³

XIX 160. I never trust a man who doesn't have enemies.

XIX 161. If you are only bad-mouthed by people who prefer your company over those of many others, only critiqued by those who scrutinize your work, and only insulted by persons who open your email as soon as they see it, then you are doing the right thing.

XIX 162. Intellect without balls is like a racecar without tires.

XIX 163. It is a sign of weakness to avoid showing signs of weakness.

XIX 164. It takes some humanity to feel sympathy for those less fortunate than us; but it takes honor to avoid envying those who are much luckier.

XIX 165. Risk takers never complain. They do.

XIX 166. Someone said "We need more women in academic philosophy." But we also need more men in academic philosophy.

XIX 167. The first, and hardest, step to wisdom: avert the standard assumption that people know what they want.

XIX 168. The idea is to be virtuous without being boring.

XIX 169. To be a person of virtue you need to be boringly virtuous in every single small action. To be a person of honor all you need is be honorable in a few important things (say risk your life or career or reputation for a just cause, or live up to your word when nobody else has guts to do so.)

³ Or, even better, for those who can, not being aware of, or not giving a f*** about hierarchy.

XIX 170. Virtue is sequence of small acts of omission. Honor and Grandeur can be a single gutsy, momentous, and self-sacrificial act of commission.

XIX 171. When I die, I want the highest number of firemen, risk takers, & other real people and the smallest number of academics to attend my funeral

XIX 172. When you cite some old wisdom-style quote and add "important truth", "to remember" or "something to live by", you are not doing so because it is good, only because it is inapplicable. Had it been both good and applicable you would not have had to cite it. Wisdom that is hard to execute isn't really wisdom.

XIX 173. You are as good as how nice you are to people you don't have to be nice to.

XIX 174. Magnificence is defined by the intersection of reluctant praise by your enemies and criticism by your friends; greatness by their union.

XIX 175. We viciously accept narcissism in nation-states, while repressing it in individuals: complexity exposes the system's shaky moral foundations.

XIX 176. Be polite, courteous, and gentle, but ignore comments, praise, and criticism from people you wouldn't hire.

XV 177. Change anchor to what did not happen rather than to what did happen.

XV 178. In a conflict, the middle ground is least likely to be correct.

XV 179. In the medical and social domains, treatment should never be equivalent to silencing symptoms.

XVII 180. It is perplexing, but amusing to observe people getting extremely excited about things you don't care about; it is sinister to watch them ignore things you believe are fundamental.

XVII 181. A philosopher uses logic without statistics, an economist uses statistics without logic, a physicist uses both.

XVII 182. For many people, it takes a lot of preparation to learn to become ordinary.

XVII 183. If your approach to mathematics is mechanical not mystical, you're not going to go anywhere.

XVII 184. Let us find what risks we can measure and these are the risks we should be taking

XVII 185. Mathematics demands an uncontrolled hunger for abstraction, philosophy a very controlled one.

XVII 186. Salaried people are just stepparents. They can be good stepparents but it never matches the biological.

XVIII 187. An economist is a mixture of 1) a businessman without common sense, 2) a physicist without brain, and 3) a speculator without balls.

XVIII 188. Anyone who likes meetings should be banned from attending meetings. (Heuristic)

XVIII 189. Being an entrepreneur is an existential, not just a financial thing.

XVIII 190. Bring the good news in trickles, the bad news in lumps.

XVIII 191. Financial inequalities are ephemeral, one crash away from reallocation; inequalities of status and academic-bureaucratic "elite" are there to stay.

XVIII 192. If something (say, a stock) looks slightly out of line, it is out of line. If it looks way out of line, you are wrong in your method of evaluation.

XVIII 193. Money corrupts those who talk (& write) about it more than those who earn it.

XVIII 194. Never ask your client for advice.

XVIII 195. Never take investment advice from someone who has to work for a living.

XVIII 196. Saying someone good at making profits but not good at managing risk is like saying someone is a great surgeon except for cases when the patients die.

XVIII 197. Three types of large corporations: those about to go bankrupt, those that are bankrupt and hide it, those that are bankrupt and don't know it.

XVIII 198. A trader listened to the firm's "chief" economist's predictions about gold, then lost a bundle. The trader was asked to leave the firm. He then angrily asked his boss who was firing him: "Why do you fire me alone not the economist? He too is responsible for the loss." The Boss: "You idiot, we are not firing you for losing money; we are firing you for listening to the economist."

XVIII 199. Economics is about making simple things more complicated, mathematics about making complicated things simpler.

XVIII 200. If you detect a repressed smile on the salesperson's face, you paid too much for it.

XVIII 201. It is easier to macrobullshit than to microbullshit.

XVIII 202. Stiglitz understands everything about economics except for tail risks: like knowing everything about flight safety except for crashes.

XVIII 203. Those with brains no balls become mathematicians, those with balls no brains join the mafia, those with no balls no brains become economists.⁴

XVIII 204. To have a great day: 1) Smile at a stranger, 2) Surprise someone by saying something unexpectedly nice, 3) Give some genuine attention to an elderly, 4) Invite someone who doesn't have many friends for

⁴ And those with brains and balls become artisans/entrepreneurs.

coffee, 5) Humiliate an economist, publicly, or create deep anxiety inside a Harvard professor.

XVIII 205. When positive, show net, when negative, show gross.

XX 206. A happier world is one in which everyone realizes that 1) it is not what you tell people, it is how you say it that makes them feel bad, 2) it is not what you do to them but how you make them look that gets them angry, 3) they should be the ones putting themselves in a specific category.

XX 207. Complaints don't deliver complaints, they mostly reveal your weakness.

XX 208. If something looks irrational —and has been so for a long time —odds are you have a wrong definition of rationality.

XX 209. If your beard is gray, produce heuristics/advice but explain the "why". If your beard is white, skip the why, just say what should be done.

XX 210. People laugh out loud and broadcast their laughter when they're worried about the statement that they purportedly find funny. They would smile - perhaps surreptitiously -otherwise.

XX 211. Swearing on the occasion, amid rich vocabulary, is costly signaling that you are self-owned.

XX 212. The general principle of antifragility: it is much better to do things you cannot explain than explain things you cannot do.

XX 213. The rules you explain are less convincing than the ones you don't explain- or have to explain.

XX 214. To insult a barbarian, use his own language: *Cum care carizas, rustice agis cum rustico, barbare loqueris barbaro ,crasse cum crasso.*

XX 215. When you say something you think are just saying something, but you are largely communicating *why* you had to say it.)

XX 216. You can almost certainly extract a "yes" from someone who says "no" to you, never from someone who says nothing.

XX 217. Sophisticated is almost always pseudo-sophisticated.

XX 218. The only people who think that real world experience doesn't matter are those who never had real world experience.

XX 219. Welfare is largely money spent on the nonproductive classes (economists, academico-bureaucrats, corporate executives, policymakers empty suits).

XXI 220. An enemy who becomes a friend will always be a friend; a friend turned enemy will remain so forever.

XXI 221. Humans need to complain just as they need to breathe. Never stop them; just manipulate them by controlling *what* they complain about & supply them with reasons to complain. They will complain but will be thankful.

XXI 222. Injuries done to us by others tend to be acute; the self-inflicted ones tend to be chronic.

You may eventually forgive and befriend someone who harmed you, never someone who bored you.

XXI 223. Journalists feel contempt for those who fear them and a deep resentment for those who don't.

XXI 224. The ones who refer to you repeatedly as "my friend" are most likely to betray you.

XXI 225. Used skillfully, a compliment will be much more offensive than any disparagement.

XXI 226. What counts is not *what* people say about you, it is how much energy they spend saying it.

XXI 227. When people call you intelligent it is almost always because they agree with you. Otherwise they just call you arrogant.

XXI 228. For most professional researchers, other people's ideas are like other people's children.

XXI229. We often benefit from harm done to us by others; almost never from self-inflicted injuries.

XXII 230. The only problem with the last laugh is that the winner has to laugh alone.

XXII 231. Wisdom isn't about understanding things (& people); it is knowing what they can do to you.
