



Empire of the Fund: The Way We Save Now

William A. Birdthistle

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Empire of the Fund is an exposé and examination of the way we save now. With the rise of the 401(k) and demise of the pension, the United States has embarked upon the richest and riskiest experiment in our financial history. Over the next twenty years, nearly eighty million baby boomers will retire at a pace of ten thousand per day. The hypothesis of our experiment is that millions of ordinary, untrained, busy citizens can successfully manage trillions of dollars in a financial system dominated by wealthy, skilled, and powerful financial institutions, many of which have a record of treating individual investors shabbily.

The key tools in our 401(k) plans and individual retirement accounts are mutual funds, which have ballooned to hold more than \$16 trillion. But these funds pose dangers to our savings in three ways: through structural vulnerabilities that give money managers the incentive to focus on marketing over investing; through the very human challenges of managing our savings decades into the future; and through the peril of financial professionals behaving badly, to our economic harm.

Though Americans often hear of the importance of low fees in fund investing, few are aware of the astonishing panoply of ways that some financial advisers have illegally diverted money out of mutual funds: from abetting hedge funds to trade after the legal deadline, to inflating the assets on which they are paid a percentage, to paying kickbacks for brokers to sell their funds. This book will forewarn and forearm Americans by illustrating the structural flaws, perverse incentives, and litany of scandals that have bedeviled mutual funds.

And by setting forth a pair of policy solutions to improve Americans' financial literacy and bargaining power, it will also attempt to safeguard our individual financial destinies and our nation's fiscal strength.

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