

## ANTIFRAGILE

Things that Gain from Disorder

By Nassim Nicholas Taleb

544 pp. Random House Trade Paperbacks. Reprint ed. 2014, first published in 2012.

Renegade, polyglot, scholar, and former options trader Nassim Nicholas Taleb coined a word that didn't exist in any language — antifragile — to explain what no one understood — some things gain from disorder — and then, wrote a book about its ubiquity. *Antifragile: Things that Gain from Disorder* is a narrow definition with broad applications, the third of his four books in the Incerto series (1,568 pp., 2016) investigating uncertainty, opacity, human error, and luck. Under stress, fragile breaks, resilient doesn't budge, and antifragile grows. The supreme antifragilista is Mother Nature, the "best expert at rare events" (7). She doesn't predict calamity, or Black Swan events, but always returns from it, and manages risk through built-in redundancies, such as our two kidneys. In contrast, aspects of medicine are considered fragile, as interventions can disrupt natural healing and treatments can have hidden and serious side effects. Taleb also discusses systems that confer antifragility on one party by transferring fragility onto others. As in the 2007–10 subprime mortgage crisis, the bailouts transferred fragility "from the unfit to the collective" (75). The last of the book's seven parts, gratefully, pivots to ethics. The author concludes that fragility is mitigated by having skin in the game. "Reduce the antifragility of some at the expense of others [and] the rest will take care of itself" (420). In other words, have soul in the game, embrace randomness, and don't be a sucker. —Lisa Thaler, author of *Look Up: The Life and Art of Sacha Kolin*, 26 June 2020