



Against Happiness: In Praise of Melancholy

By Eric G. Wilson

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We are addicted to happiness. More than any other generation, Americans today believe in the power of positive thinking. But who says we're supposed to be happy? In *Against Happiness*, the scholar Eric G. Wilson argues that melancholia is necessary to any thriving culture, that it is the muse of great literature, painting, music, and innovation?and that it is the force underlying original insights.

So enough Prozac-ing of our brains. Let's embrace our depressive side as the wellspring of creativity. It's time to throw off the shackles of positivity and relish the blues thatmake us human.

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Against Happiness: In Praise of Melancholy By Eric G. Wilson Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

This slender, powerful salvo offers a sure-to-be controversial alternative to the recent cottage industry of high-brow happiness books. Wilson, chair of Wake Forest University's English Department, claims that Americans today are too interested in being happy. (He points to the widespread use of antidepressants as exhibit A.) It is inauthentic and shallow, charges Wilson, to relentlessly seek happiness in a world full of tragedy. While he does not want to romanticize clinical depression, Wilson argues forcefully that melancholia is a necessary ingredient of any culture that wishes to be innovative or inventive. In particular, we need melancholy if we want to make true, beautiful art. Though others have written on the possible connections between creativity and melancholy, Wilson's meditations about artists ranging from Melville to John Lennon are stirring. Wilson calls for Americans to recognize and embrace melancholy, and he praises as bold radicals those who already live with the truth of melancholy. Wilson's somewhat affected writing style is at times distracting: his prose is quirky, and he tends toward alliteration (To be a patriot is to be peppy a person seeking slick comfort in this mysteriously mottled world). Still, beneath the rococo wordsmithing lies provocative cultural analysis. (Feb.)

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From [Booklist](#)

Enough with the power of positive thinking, says literature professor and self-confessed melancholic Wilson in this ardent entreaty for the honesty and beauty of gloom. Exasperated by the shallow consumerist contentment pursued by "American happy types," Wilson aches for the roller coaster of intensified feeling and heightened creativity that often arises from the "somber and weird depths of the melancholy imagination." It is thus fitting that his narrative is profoundly turbulent, lurching from bile-spitting condemnations of gated communities and shopping malls to self-absorbed reveries on rusty radiators and rotting leaves, to brilliant, soaring celebrations of melancholic geniuses such as Coleridge and Springsteen (two among many famous melancholic artists noted by the author). But beneath the many trappings of polemic lies the passionate soul of a nineteenth-century romantic who, made wise by encounters with his own personal darkness, invites readers to share his reverence for nature and exuberance for life. Providing a powerful literary complement to recent psychological discussions of melancholy, such as Joshua Wolf Shenk's *Lincoln's Melancholy* (2005), this treatment is variously gloomy and ecstatic, infuriating and even inspiring. --Brendan Driscoll

Review

"Mr. Wilson's case for the dark night of the soul brings a much needed corrective to today's mania for cheerfulness. One would almost say that, in its eloquent contrarianism and earnest search for meaning, *Against Happiness* lifts the spirits." ?Colin McGinn, *The Wall Street Journal*

"[Wilson has] the passionate soul of a nineteenth-century romantic who, made wise by encounters with his own personal darkness, invites readers to share his reverence for nature and exuberance for life. Providing a powerful literary complement to recent psychological discussions of melancholy . . . this treatment is variously gloomy and ecstatic, infuriating and even inspiring." ?*Booklist*

"An impassioned, compelling, dare I say poetic, argument on behalf of those who 'labor in the fields of sadness'. . . a loose and compelling argument for fully embracing one's existence, for it is a miracle itself -- a call to live hard and full, to participate in the great rondure of life and to be aware of the fact that no one

perspective on the world is ever finally true.” ?*Minneapolis Star Tribune*

“[A] lively, reasoned call for the preservation of melancholy in the face of all-too-rampant cheerfulness. . . . pithy and epigrammatic.” ?*Bookforum*

“Wilson's argument is important, and he makes it with passion.” ?*Raleigh News and Observer*

“Gleefully peevish . . .” ?*New York Review of Books*

“[A] potent little polemic . . . poetic prose . . . If you think the world is being overrun by zombie Pollyannas intent on spreading their insidious joy, *Against Happiness* will gladden your heart.” ?*Globe and Mail*

“[A] deeply philosophical polemic . . . lucid and engaging prose.” ?*Playboy.com*

“I have never been Mr. Happy, but after reading *Against Happiness*, I felt a lot better about myself. It almost made me happy. An important book and a stunning reminder, in these troubled times, that there are important lessons in our pain and that a smile may make a better moment, but not a better world.” ?*Lewis Black*

“A lucid, literate defense of feeling like hell--and, in fact, of feeling itself.” ?*David Gates, author of Jernigan*

“With his merry diatribe and his spiritual wisdom, Eric Wilson brings us to our senses and gives us a book that *really* helps. Dare to be against mere contentment and you can end up embracing ecstasy.” ?*Robert D. Richardson, author of William James: In the Maelstrom of American Modernism*

“This book will change your mind, and maybe your life, with its pitiless account of the value of happiness and the price we Americans pay for pursuing it so compulsively. Almost every American claims to be happy, and yet we are a nation increasingly benumbed by drugs, opiated by messianic religion and buffed smooth by surgery, as we chase the illusions of perpetual youth, of life without death and joy without pain. This movingly written book may help us stand up before it's too late and face our demons, by learning to love the melancholy realism and the creative powers that arise out of the darkness in our hearts.” ?*Richard Klein, author of Cigarettes Are Sublime*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Dorothy Byers:

Now a day people that Living in the era exactly where everything reachable by connect with the internet and the resources included can be true or not involve people to be aware of each data they get. How many people to be smart in having any information nowadays? Of course the solution is reading a book. Examining a book can help men and women out of this uncertainty Information specially this *Against Happiness: In Praise of Melancholy* book because this book offers you rich facts and knowledge. Of course the data in this book hundred pct guarantees there is no doubt in it as you know.

Clair Lemanski:

Hey guys, do you would like to finds a new book you just read? May be the book with the concept *Against*

Happiness: In Praise of Melancholy suitable to you? The particular book was written by renowned writer in this era. The book untitled Against Happiness: In Praise of Melancholy is the main one of several books this everyone read now. This kind of book was inspired many men and women in the world. When you read this publication you will enter the new dimensions that you ever know ahead of. The author explained their thought in the simple way, so all of people can easily to be aware of the core of this publication. This book will give you a wide range of information about this world now. So that you can see the represented of the world on this book.

Patrick Austin:

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Corey Mason:

What is your hobby? Have you heard that will question when you got pupils? We believe that that question was given by teacher to their students. Many kinds of hobby, All people has different hobby. And you also know that little person including reading or as reading become their hobby. You must know that reading is very important along with book as to be the factor. Book is important thing to increase you knowledge, except your own personal teacher or lecturer. You find good news or update about something by book. Many kinds of books that can you decide to try be your object. One of them is Against Happiness: In Praise of Melancholy.

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