



# 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 that make 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 melancholia, 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:**

#### **Tony Caldwell:**

What do you regarding book? It is not important to you? Or just adding material when you need something to explain what the ones you have problem? How about your free time? Or are you busy man? If you don't have spare time to complete others business, it is give you a sense of feeling bored faster. And you have extra time? What did you do? Everybody has many questions above. They have to answer that question mainly because just their can do in which. It said that about guide. Book is familiar in each person. Yes, it is right. Because start from on guardería until university need this *Against Happiness: In Praise of Melancholy* to read.

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As people who live in often the modest era should be change about what going on or details even knowledge to make these individuals keep up with the era and that is always change and progress. Some of you maybe will certainly update themselves by studying books. It is a good choice for yourself but the problems coming to an individual is you don't know which you should start with. This Against Happiness: In Praise of Melancholy is our recommendation to make you keep up with the world. Why, because this book serves what you want and wish in this era.

**Chester Hassel:**

Information is provisions for folks to get better life, information nowadays can get by anyone with everywhere. The information can be a knowledge or any news even a concern. What people must be consider if those information which is from the former life are challenging be find than now is taking seriously which one is appropriate to believe or which one typically the resource are convinced. If you find the unstable resource then you have it as your main information there will be huge disadvantage for you. All of those possibilities will not happen with you if you take Against Happiness: In Praise of Melancholy as the daily resource information.

**Robert Mayo:**

People live in this new morning of lifestyle always try to and must have the spare time or they will get great deal of stress from both daily life and work. So , when we ask do people have extra time, we will say absolutely without a doubt. People is human not really a huge robot. Then we request again, what kind of activity have you got when the spare time coming to you actually of course your answer will unlimited right. Then ever try this one, reading publications. It can be your alternative inside spending your spare time, typically the book you have read is Against Happiness: In Praise of Melancholy.

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