



# **The Upside of Your Dark Side: Why Being Your Whole Self--Not Just Your "Good" Self--Drives Success and Fulfillment**

*Todd Kashdan , Robert Biswas-Diener*

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In *The Upside of Your Dark Side*, two pioneering researchers in the field of psychology show that while mindfulness, kindness, and positivity can take us far, they cannot take us all the way. Sometimes, they can even hold us back. Emotions such as anger, anxiety, guilt, and sadness might feel uncomfortable, but it turns out that they are also incredibly useful. For instance:

- Anger fuels creativity
- Guilt sparks improvement
- Self-doubt enhances performance

In the same vein, we can become wiser and more effective when we harness the darker parts of our personality in certain situations. For instance:

- Selfishness increases courage
- Mindlessness leads to better decisions

The key lies in what the authors call “emotional, social, and mental agility,” the ability to access our full range of emotions and behavior—not just the “good” ones—in order to respond most effectively to whatever situation we might encounter.

Drawing on years of scientific research and a wide array of real-life examples including sports, the military, parenting, education, romance, business, and more, *The Upside of Your Dark Side* is a refreshing reality check that shows us how we can truly maximize our potential. With an appreciation of our entire psychological toolkit, we become whole—which allows us to climb the highest peaks and handle the deepest valleys.

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## **From Reader Review The Upside of Your Dark Side: Why Being Your Whole Self--Not Just Your "Good" Self--Drives Success and Fulfillment for online ebook**

### **ScienceOfSuccess says**

This book consists of some well-known ideas from books like Thinking Fast and Slow, prince and a few others, but the author makes it simple and easy to read.

It's probably one of the best books to start with when you are looking for answers about how people mind works, but you don't want to get too technical.

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### **Terry Quist says**

I think overall for the average person this is a decent reminder that we should not forget about the entire experience of human life. The lows are important as are the highs. Yet the authors tend to review the negative emotions ( and really they only discuss basic things like anger, anxiety, depression and guilt) as surface emotions. Their discussion of depression is really about feeling sad, and there is a big difference. When they discuss anxiety they are talking about nerves, not true anxiety. The argument that we shouldn't worry about depression because "only" 38 out of 100 times will it turn into multiple bouts of depression - a situation that can literally kill you - is laughable.

For the most part there are some good reminders, but the fact that Kashdan has published more than 125 articles on how to gain more happiness, and up until now Biswas-diener has touted himself as a similar positive psychology expert, leads me to believe this is a contrarian attempt for publicity. Just last year Kashdan was selling us a treatise on why we should all be mindful. In this book he claims now we are obsessed with it unnecessarily.

. Readers should keep in mind their examples deal with the every day versions of these negative emotions, not the deeper, more dangerous aspects of shame, depression, grief and others. It would have been a much more interesting book had it dealt with the transformation that occurs for humans when they do delve into and attempt to recover from those deeper and more problematic emotions. Unfortunately neither author has the background in clinical psychology or direct therapy experience to write such a book.

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### **Jacob says**

"Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows..."

I was kind of hoping this book would be about the existence of evil within people and maybe how some evil can be good for a person, or how evil actions by a few in society can be good for society overall. But this isn't about how society needs murderers, or even about how your instincts to trip your brother are actually good for you (and him. I'm pretty sure). It's more about garden variety negative emotions, like fear, shame, and anxiety. Anger is included, which is getting there, but it's dealt with strictly in a non-evil way. Hmph.

So if you were of the opinion feelings that make you uncomfortable are bad and to be avoided at all costs, you will either receive an education or hate the authors for completely contradicting you. I happen to agree with them: negative emotions and feelings have their uses, both for helping us identify / avoid dangerous situations and for spurring us to become better people. Also, even though bad feelings make you feel... well, bad, they help give you perspective so that you feel even better when things are okay, or even mildly good.

The authors have a bit of a chip on their shoulder that the focus on "positive psychology" has made the negative emotions into bad guys. I think it's a bit of a straw man argument, and that positive psychology hasn't made people feel that way more than they already did. But it's still useful to read what they have to say.

Still looking for a book on the positive side effects of actual eeeevil...

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### **Aaron says**

This book is essentially a giant asterisk on all of modern pop, TED-talk psychology: Yes, being happy will make you more productive, but it will also make you slightly more racist. Yes, being anxious can be harmful to your health, but it can also energize you to action to cover details you'd otherwise let slip by. In other words, moderation is key and when we try to optimize our personalities, characters, or habits we risk destabilizing the aspects of life that make life worth living.

It's a good read.

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### **Lindsay Nixon says**

3.75 stars.

The title of this book is terrible, but the content is good, and the ideas interesting, it just felt too stretched out and should have been more tidy.

The overall concept is that life can't be only happiness. That "dark" feelings have utility and value; and we should utilize them rather than avoid.

For example, try imaging the civil rights movement progressing without anger. Equally important is how politeness can actually be harmful. It can cause miscommunication but more often than not when we try to be polite, we actually end up offending the person more and people who witness the encounter think we're rude.

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### **Renee says**

With all the books on positive psychology that I have read, this one was a good, different perspective. Good reminder to focus on the whole person.

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### **Pierre Lafortune says**

These guys stamp out the idea that you should steer clear of negative emotions. A real eye-opener. I was dedicated to straight positivity before reading this, I don't think I can look at the idea the same now. Great read. Highly recommended.

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### **Cara says**

I think if I'd read less in this genre it may have been a 4 star book, but for me, there's nothing really new in here. However it's well written and does have real value in providing an alternative to the happy clappy eternal joyfulness approach to happiness, which can leave you feeling more of a failure by the end of a book than when you started... The book provides a plethora of examples where the darker side of one's personality does have tangible benefits and can improve the way we function in the world and it definitely a worthwhile read for people wanting to get a different perspective on Western society's strive for happiness... However despite many interesting bits of information, and a book which mostly adhered to my world view, the book didn't quite grab me in or want me to keep going, I was quite happy to just have it on the backburner... which ironically enough, is a shame, cos I'd really like to love it...

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### **Fallon Goodman says**

A hallmark of good book, especially in psychology, is one that sparks the lightbulb moment of "hm, I never thought about it like that". A hallmark of a great book is one that shifts your worldview. *The Upside of Your Darkside* is one of the few books that belongs in this club.

Bookstores are overflowing with self-help books claiming to have the secret to a good life. What sets the *Upside* apart? Two things- 1) the authors move away from the obsessive pursuit of happiness, and 2) they don't pick their favorite pet construct (optimism, mindfulness, flow, positivity, grit, etc) as the key ingredient for living well. We are reminded that we are complex humans with a range of emotions. We should live our lives accordingly. This book teaches us how to do just that. And with a good dose of humor.

Interesting science is weaved with insightful stories to appeal to readers of all backgrounds. As a researcher in psychology, I am familiar with this field of work. And yet, each chapter left me with an aha-moment, a shift in thinking about well-being, and new research ideas.

This book gives people permission to feel the range of emotions we were designed to have. Anger can be helpful. Anxiety can be helpful. The authors teach us how to take advantage of these emotions to lead fulfilling, meaningful lives.

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## **Melissa says**

Lots to unpack in this book, but I greatly enjoyed it and appreciated the academic rigor as well as anecdotal references (anyone else an Aquaman fan?) throughout. Some points I made sure to pause the audiobook to note down:

- Slow a situation down, especially when angry. Think of slow anger vs fast anger. Take a moment to breathe before making a decision when angry.
- Is what you are currently doing helping or hurting the given situation? Ask yourself this regularly.
- Guilt and shame are different. Guilt is helpful; shame is not. Guilt is localized and specific; shame is global and about something inherent in you.
- In not avoiding negative emotion, we gain emotional agility, the ability to use the full range of emotion in every day situations.
- We are typically in a different mental state when making a choice than when we are living with the results of that choice... wanting and liking something utilize different areas of the brain and often don't necessarily line up.
- Schedule time to mentally meander...it is clear that mindful thinking alone is insufficient to reach the best decision in a sea of choices. We need to take advantage of the relative strengths of both conscious and unconscious thinking.

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## **Toppy says**

Perhaps this may have been a 4 star book if it didn't take me 8 months to finish. It contained some good 'against the grain' facts on the benefits of our darker side. I enjoyed it repeatedly pointing out the fact that it's abnormal to be, or to strive to be, happy all the time. People pursuing this are as insane as economists and politicians who are of the belief that we can have continuing economic growth in a world of finite resources.

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## **Vince Darcangelo says**

<http://ensuingchapters.com/2014/10/16...>

So, I'm not exactly the target audience for this book, as I long ago embraced my Upside of Your Dark Sidedark side, but I'm glad that Kashdan and Biswas-Diener, a pair of psychologists and professors at George Mason and Portland State Universities respectively, are promoting widespread awareness.

And no, this isn't a Darth Vader-style enticement to evil, but rather a commitment to intellectual and emotional honesty. Embracing the dark side is being an anti-Pollyanna, acknowledging negative states of consciousness rather than suppressing them. Realizing that feeling bad is inevitable and natural.

Or, to let the scientists speak for themselves, "...we, the authors, reject the notion that positivity is the only place to search for answers. We reject the belief that being healthy is marked by a life with as little pain as possible."

Perhaps it's my love of Eastern philosophy, but I've always subscribed to an elastic emotional outlook: the greater the highs, the greater the lows. Inoculating oneself from pain only serves to numb one's experience of joy.

It's a conundrum that dates at least as far back as the dueling philosophies of the Cynics and the Stoics, but has become especially germane in the decades of post-WWII prosperity. At some point in the past 50 years, the fantasy that you could enjoy the thrills without enduring the chills became an accepted philosophy.

To seek comfort and happiness is natural, but now, the authors argue, it has become an addiction.

The self-help and pharmaceutical industries, along with positive psychology (to a lesser extent), have cultivated a bubble-wrapped culture where discomfort is treated as an abnormal condition. Not only is this unrealistic, it's not healthy. There's nothing wrong with feeling down sometimes, feeling angry sometimes.

"People who are whole, those of us who are willing and able to shift to the upside or the downside to get the best possible outcomes in a given situation, are the healthiest, most successful, best learners, and enjoy the deepest well-being."

I'm reminded of my own experiences in therapy. I was the difficult patient who used my session time to challenge my therapist with my grim view of humanity. I would rattle off atrocities and injustice and point out that our culture rewards the worst kind of people and punishes the good. No, not just our culture—our species. Then I would grin triumphantly as the counselor struggled to argue against that.

I knew I'd finally found the right therapist when, during our first session, I gave her my misanthropy spiel. Her response: "Yeah, you're right. So what?" Sometimes things are shitty.

This was the jolt I needed to crack my defiant shell and get to work on getting better.

Kashdan and Biswas-Diener hope to provide the same jolt to readers acclimated to a self-help mantra of "I'm OK, You're OK," and hopefully they are successful in this task.

They should be, as this is a very interesting read. What I like about *The Upside of Your Dark Side* is how the authors incorporate scientific research, positive psychology theory and personal anecdote to construct a cogent warts-and-all perspective of the human experience. Even though it features plenty of scientific research, the narrative is very accessible to lay-readers.

The shortcoming of the book, for me, is that the authors can be overly expository—they do a good job of illustrating a point, but then summarize said point as though they don't trust the reader to draw the correct conclusion. But I wouldn't mark down a letter grade for that. That's the inherent risk with science writing. The authors have to take arcane material and present it to an audience that, for the most part, doesn't share the authors' background or familiarity with the topic.

Kashdan and Biswas-Diener by and large hit the sweet spot between academic and accessible. This is a book to be enjoyed by all—and to some a revelation.

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## **Nick says**

This book is really a primer how to use psychology to dominate others. "Everyone, without exception, manipulates others. Doing so effectively is a matter of dosage and timing." I was hoping for more evidence-based justification that it is healthy to present yourself fully and openly, not to merely use your dark side to your personal advantage. Kashdan uses Napoleon, Jack Welch, and Henry Ford as exemplars and thus

clearly suffers from survivor bias as well as blatant selection bias. A whole chapter is dedicated to the notion that the pursuit of happiness can weaken you. That notion is better presented as antifragility theory by Nassim Taleb, in his incredibly well-argued and scientific contribution "Antifragile". Kashdan spends a lot of time on the "Teddy Roosevelt Effect", which is a cocktail of Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy. He argues that: Machiavellianism allows people to be emotionally detached when making everyday decisions so that the short term pursuit of happiness doesn't derail long term plans; narcissism allows people to pursue lofty aspirations others might dismiss as foolish, self absorbed, or impossible; and psychopathy can be beneficial when it is used to dial down the flow of emotions. These arguments aren't well supported with evidence or research, so although I understand them, I am not fully convinced. To the extent I am taking anything away from the book, it is to quit labeling inner states as good or bad or positive or negative, and start thinking about them as useful or not useful for any given situation. e.g. Boredom (mindlessness) can be a precursor to insight and discovery as per the Hindu and Buddhist traditions.

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### **Roisin says**

Let me be clear. I LOVE Todd Kashdan's work. He is an amazing researcher. He does interesting and important research. He writes scientific articles that are actually enjoyable to read. I love his writing on Psychology Today. I periodically peruse the list of academic publications on his website. I'm even using one of the measures he developed in my PhD. But, I didn't enjoy this book. The first four chapters of this book have great information and I was totally into the topic (I have written similar stuff on my blog in the past). I just did not enjoy the writing style. This is a common problem for me and may stem from being too picky. But, in this case (and many others), I chose not to finish the book because of it.

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### **Deb (Readerbuzz) Nance says**

Okay. Quite the title, isn't it?! Long but perfect, as that's exactly what this book is about.

I must report that reading this book has resulted in a slight shift in my ideas about happiness, and that's a good thing. Happiness doesn't always have to be about refocusing on positive things; happiness can also be acceptance of negative feelings and behaviors as sometimes necessary for change. Interesting.

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