



## The Noonday Demon: An Atlas of Depression

*Andrew Solomon*

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Sometimes, the legacy of depression includes a wisdom beyond one's years, a depth of passion unexperienced by those who haven't traveled to hell and back. Off the charts in its enlightening, comprehensive analysis of this pervasive yet misunderstood condition, *The Noonday Demon* forges a long, brambly path through the subject of depression--exposing all the discordant views and "answers" offered by science, philosophy, law, psychology, literature, art, and history. The result is a sprawling and thoroughly engrossing study, brilliantly synthesized by author Andrew Solomon.

Deceptively simple chapter titles (including "Breakdowns," "Treatments," "Addiction," "Suicide") each sit modestly atop a virtual avalanche of Solomon's intellect. This is not a book to be skimmed. But Solomon commands the language--and his topic--with such grace and empathy that the constant flow of references, poems, and quotations in his paragraphs arrive like welcome dinner guests. A longtime sufferer of severe depression himself, Solomon willingly shares his life story with readers. He discusses updated information on various drugs and treatment approaches while detailing his own trials with them. He describes a pharmaceutical company's surreal stage production (involving Pink Floyd, kick dancers, and an opener à la *Cats*) promoting a new antidepressant to their sales team. He chronicles his research visits to assorted mental institutions, which left him feeling he would "much rather engage with every manner of private despair than spend a protracted time" there. Under Solomon's care, however, such tales offer much more than shock value. They show that depression knows no social boundaries, manifests itself quite differently in each person, and has become political. And, while it may worsen or improve, depression will never be eradicated. Hope lies in finding ways--as Solomon clearly has--to harness its powerful lessons. --Liane Thomas

## The Noonday Demon: An Atlas of Depression Details

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## **From Reader Review The Noonday Demon: An Atlas of Depression for online ebook**

**Leo . says**

Down, so down, oh! The sorrow, I could drown  
Overwhelming emotions, crowding my mind  
It gets me down, this mundane grind  
Like groundhog day, perpetual recurrence  
Day in, day out, such annoyance  
I'm starting with the man in the mirror, the Abyss  
Lose the Ego, and find my bliss

Depression sucks! I suffer with acute insomnia as a symptom. This is when I do a great deal of my writing during the witching hours. Here is one of my many rhymes:

Insomnia:

Tick Tock... Tick Tock...Tick Tock

In my head or simply on the wall the sound of the clock

Watching the hands go round and round

The constant repetition of that sound

Thoughts reverberating through my head

Over and over feelings of dread

Never ending like a silent pest

Will I ever get some needful rest

A crescendo of noise like a freight train through the night racing

A caged Tiger maddened and continuously pacing

An orchestra of voices distracting for sure

Falling asleep is such a chore

Oh! My sanity is waning for goodness sake

This feeling of being forever awake

Will I ever fall into slumber? Just a little sleep

And dream nice dreams and have memories to keep

The walls are watching, the ceiling, the floor

Oh! Is there anything that can cure?

This Insomnia that plagues me through the night

Eyes wide awake until it gets light

It's Four O'clock and outside birds are singing

And still in my mind bells are ringing

Yet deafening the silence around and within

Sleep! Sleep! Sleep! My consciousness needs healing

Just a snooze, even if fleeting

But all I can hear is my own heart beating

Eyes are sore and forehead throbbing

It's a forlorn melancholy like a Baby sobbing

My cat opens one eye with a curious look

As I churn through another chapter of a book

Yet tiredness does not descend on me still

Only a shudder from a sudden chill

Insomnia eats away at one's Soul

Black and endless like an ever expanding hole

It's the Witching Hour as I write this verse

I'll only sleep when I am lead in a Hearse

In a few hours it'll be time to rise...Oh! the emptiness and pain

And when the day is through...I'll do it all over again

By Leo.??

Depression: Man it sucks!

My soul, it is broken, will it ever be mended

I was once happy go lucky but, it has all ended

An empty shell, a void, a deep blue, a dried up husk

Once the life and soul of the party, from dawn to dusk

Now a sad-sack, melancholy, forlorn, no self esteem

Worthless, useless, no bloody good, unloved, without

No matter how I try, there is no doubt

I will fail, always, cos' that is what I do

Everything, every outcome, no hope it is true

I only hurt the ones I love, my family and my friends

This feeling of despair, repetition, it never ends

No sleep at night, thoughts racing through my mind

Monkey chatter, worries, scenarios of every kind

What if this? What if that? What will I do? Is it real?

If this happens, or that happens, fills me with a chill

A panic attack, a meltdown, spiraling out of control

Manic, incoherent, embarrassed, left feeling a fool

Stuck in a cycle, a box, a chasm, a rut

A recluse, the crazy old man, a loner, a nut

Watching the clock, tick, tock, tick, tock

Wasting away, no inspiration, or motivation, writers block

Hoping to escape the mediocrity, get recognition, the ball rolling, a start

Show my prose, the way I write, exclusively from my Heart

By Leo???

I remember an extreme episode of bipolar when a friend was criticising a book I like, no memory of the book but my response I will never forget.

"May I suggest try reading the book again only this time backwards. It might undo the heartache you have suffered."

I can be quite cutting and it really hits home. Can't see the woods for the trees or have no reason.

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### **Sunny says**

Another incredible book by a clearly incredible soul. I read "far from the tree" by Andrew Solomon first and was blown away by the granularity of his detail and clearly erudite research that had gone into that absolute tome of a book and this was no different. He writes in an incredibly detailed way and yet his writing is totally engaging and readable. Andrew is a pretty interesting person himself. He had 3, I believe, catastrophic depression incidences during his life and maybe one even during the writing of the book which clearly increased the tone of honesty that seeps through the pages. Andrew had 3 angles to him. He was openly gay, Jewish and depressed. They were 3 identities that he related to and consequently the world reacted to in many ways also.

I guess the key theme to the book was his triumvirate with which he recommended that one could fight the demon of depression. 1. drugs and use of ECT type techniques. 2. talking and the benefit that therapy could bring to anyone who is suffering. 3. belief in a God or whatever higher form you believed in. A combination of those three Andrew proposes is one of the best techniques to combat depression. Some of the best bits from this 570 page book are:

- "Listen to the people who love you. Believe that they are worth living for even when you don't believe it.

Seek out the memories depression takes away and project them into the future. Be brave; be strong; take your pills. Exercise because it's good for you even if every step weighs a thousand pounds. Eat when food itself disgusts you. Reason with yourself when you have lost your reason."

- A lady who survived the Khmer Rouge helped other women / men who were suffering from lots of depression. She had 3 simple steps to help them. 1. She taught them to try to forget what had happened. 2. When they had forgotten she taught them to work. 3. When they had mastered work, she taught them to love.
- An experiment done on baboons found that those ones with high cortisol levels. What this means is that they can't work out the difference between a mild threat and a major one. They were as likely to fight as fiercely over a banana as they were over their life.
- Psychotherapy sees depression as something aligned to the character of a person while psychopharmacology looks at depression as something that can be cured quite separately from the effect that it has on the personality.
- "Imagine a society that subjects people to conditions that make them terribly unhappy then gives them the drugs to take away their unhappiness. This isn't science fiction. It is already happening to some extent in our own society. Instead of removing the conditions that make people depressed modern society gives them antidepressant drugs. In effect antidepressants are a means of modifying an individual's internal state in such a way as to enable him to tolerate social conditions that he would otherwise find intolerable." Kaczynski
- EMDR therapy (eye movement desensitization and reprocessing) was an incredible new method of dealing with depression. I still don't fully understand how this works but it sounds incredible – check it out: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eye\\_movement\\_desensitization\\_and\\_reprocessing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eye_movement_desensitization_and_reprocessing)...
- 18,000 Americans killed themselves in 1997. Seriously, what the fecking feck is all that about.
- The Greek words for black bile are "malaina chole".
- Hippocrates was also a bit of a psychologist, he believed in the curative properties of advice and action. He cured the depression of King Perdiccas 2 by analysing his character and persuading him to marry the woman he loved.
- The best remedy for all these evils is exercise / labour. One of the reasons I advocate boxing so strongly. Doing 10x3 min rounds on a punching bag with one minute rest in-between each round is one of the best helps towards (not cures) for so many mental diseases I personally believe.
- Childhood is an important part of life and goes a long way in forming / deforming the psyche of a child. One study showed that those children that don't have parents don't have a sounding board to gauge their limits against, both physically and mentally. Especially the latter which can be devastating to the psyche of a child. Limitless freedom is no freedom at all.
- "...we live in an era of dazzling, bewildering technologies, and we have no concrete grasp of how most of the things around us work. How does a microwave function? What is a silicon chip? How do you genetically engineer corn? How does my voice travel when I use a cell phone as opposed to a regular phone?"
- "Major depression is far too stern a teacher: you needn't go to the Sahara to avoid frostbite. Most of the psychological pain in the world is unnecessary; and certainly people with major depression experience pain that would be better kept in check. I believe, however, that there is an answer to the question of whether we want total control over our emotional state, a perfect emotional painkiller that would make sorrow as unnecessary as a headache... To give up the essential conflict between what we feel like doing and what we do, to end the dark moods that reflect and its difficulties—this is to give up what it is to be human, of what is good in being human."
- "Do not urge your friends under the disease of melancholy to things which they cannot do. They are as persons whose bones are broken and that are in great pain and anguish and consequently under an incapacity for action ... if it were possible by any means innocently to divert them, you would do them a great kindness" Timothy Rogers

The book also spoke about: breakdowns, treatments, alternatives, populations, addiction, suicide, poverty, politics, evolution and hope.

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## Cari says

After slogging through a large chunk of The Noonday Demon, I've come to accept I just can't see it through to the end. This book is lethal: alternately depressing readers, boring readers, and making readers roll their eyes so hard they pop out of their heads.

First: depression on any level, mild or major, brief or chronic, is a painful, crippling ailment. Anyone who pulls themselves up and fights automatically earns a bit of my respect. I know how hard the attack is and how hopeless it can seem.

Too bad Solomon's battle resulted in this book. Self-absorption is a trademark of the genre; I expect that. But self-absorption is different from (and more tolerable than) self-pity, and Solomon's writing is solidly wallowing in self-pity whenever he's talking about himself. (And try be a little grateful, sir, for your good fortune to be born into privilege. Most of us weren't so damned lucky. Even the self-absorbed know when they've been handed a gift.)

A lot of the science, studies, and numbers discussed in The Noonday Demon are extremely outdated. Solomon used the best information he had at the time, but if you want up-to-date information of that sort, look elsewhere.

While there's nothing wrong with exploring alternative medicine, there's quite a bit of pseudo-science bullshit presented here, mixed in with actual facts, jumbled together in a way that could be downright dangerous. Very concerning.

And beyond all of this? So much of The Noonday Demon is dry and downright boring. The few engaging passages are nice, but a reader has to manage to stay awake first, and even then there's a sense that many of his personal anecdotes are told simply to be shocking, very much in the "Look how fucked up I was! Be amazed!" category. Maybe that works for some readers, but I'm not one of them.

I've learned many things from my own battle with major depression, one of which is appreciating the time I have to experience life. That's why I'm putting Solomon's work to the side: life's too short to waste it on finishing books like this.

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## Anne says

Richard Bernstein of the *New York Times* referred to this book as "All-encompassing, brave, and deeply humane." This is why he gets the big bucks: with those few words, he succinctly captures the essence of Solomon's approach to his subject. "All-encompassing" because Solomon breaks down the science of depression's condition and treatment, unpacks its global history, examines its sociology both via population statistics and cultural context(s), and illustrates all of it with stories of real people with real depression, including himself. The book's well-referenced to a mixture of scholarly articles, world literature, philosophy, and other non-fiction works; he's just as apt to quote Thomas Aquinas's *Summa theologiae* as the *New England Journal of Medicine*. This catholic approach means that If there's an aspect of depression you're specifically interested in, or a mode in which you're accustomed to thinking, Solomon gives you an easy way

in. You probably won't come out the same way.

"Brave" because Solomon tells his own story and that of others with unflinching detail, using real names and direct quotes from conversations and interviews, medical reports and emails. He's not afraid to explore the unconventional with the conventional, undergoing a *ndeup* in Senegal with the same willingness and open mind that he researches ECT and selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs). The *ndeup* highlights a particular bravery: lack of embarrassment. Naked, smeared in animal blood, dancing in a strange land surrounded by strangers, Solomon doesn't waste any time talking about feeling silly. I get the sense that this sparseness isn't natural to a guy who writes with the lushness he does: that depression has taught him where to pare away inessentials, to conserve his resources. He has no energy to spare for embarrassment, a luxury. Shame he's familiar with, the loss of self and agency, but his description of that is almost dispassionate, an assessment of his illness's symptoms, not a reaction in the moment. Moreover, Solomon's unafraid to examine questions of will and character, the intersection of morality and biology, and the difficulty of assessing the working of will in a damaged mind. This is stuff a lot of people wouldn't want to touch.

"Deeply humane" because despite his research into the biological mechanisms and political machinations of depression as an illness and an issue, Solomon has a depth of feeling for those suffering from depression, those he knows personally and the people who might be helped by his book. He takes pains to point out that while some treatments have statistical bases for usefulness, individuals have a wide range of responses to identical therapies. He pooh-poohs nothing.

I recommend it to anyone who wants to understand more about depression and its place in modern culture. To find out if you'd enjoy the book, download the first chapter for free at his website.

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### **Jeff says**

hands-down the best nonfiction book i've ever read, *\_the noonday demon\_* is exhaustive in its examination of depression and mental illness, weaving the author's and others' experiences with "major depressive breakdown" with rigorous research on scientific, anthropological, evolutionary, political, artistic and historical perspectives on the emotion/disease.

solomon engages difficult philosophical questions like whether the blunting of depression by SSRIs is worth its cost in human emotional plasticity; whether depression is a disease of category or degree; whether suicide is a fundamental civil liberty or an action to be prevented at all costs; and how we might best address mental illness from a public health perspective, including why we don't treat it preventatively, as we do some other diseases.

solomon's brutal honesty about his own breakdowns and some of the shocking actions he took in often-misguided attempts to mitigate them is synthesized with heart-wrenching anecdotes drawn from thousands of interviews with depressives across all races, geographies, socioeconomic classes, ages, etc. to create a picture of a disease that is universally experienced and universally destructive, yet deeply individual/personal in its manifestations (social withdrawal being one of its primary symptoms).

written over five years, including the author's third (of three) breakdowns, *\_the noonday demon\_* is not only extremely informative, but deeply elegant as a work of prose, using brilliant analogies, literary quotations,

and an overarching tenor of compassion to explore depression with exceptional nuance.

everyone should read this book.

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### **Thomas says**

A piercing, painful, and oh-so-necessary book, *The Noonday Demon: An Atlas of Depression* examines depression through a cultural, personal, and scientific lens. Andrew Solomon, well-known for his TED Talks and his varied publications, reveals the agonizing depths of the illness as well as its progression through time. His thoughtful and insightful perspective supplements his extensive research, and he analyzes several of depression's facets: how it spans different parts of the world, how it affects the brain and its neurotransmitters, its part in politics, its relation to suicide, and more. Solomon pairs facts with his own experience of depression and discusses the disease in unique ways, ranging from the gender dynamics of depression to its presence in those who live in poverty.

My one qualm with this book comes from Solomon's attitude toward those who face mental illness and commit violent acts. While I feel empathy for those who act out of an anger they cannot control, I repudiate any acceptance of abuse, physical or emotional, toward anyone. Solomon writes that he "[does] not accept" such hurtful behavior, but I wanted more of a stance than that. Despite this issue, Solomon's hope for reform and revitalization impressed me throughout the book, even in the face of bleak circumstances.

Recommended to those with even a remote interest in depression. Read *The Noonday Demon* if you want to understand a friend or family member's plight without asking them or pestering them; read this book if you want to understand a disease that devastates a great number of people. I cannot wait to read more of Solomon's writing.

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### **Randy McDonald says**

Andrew Solomon's 2001 book *The Noonday Demon: An Atlas of Depression* is the book that made Solomon's name internationally, a survey of depression that avoids the survey's flaws of superficially recounting its symptoms, its history, its treatments.

*The Noonday Demon* is a comprehensive survey of the issue that begins powerfully by recounting his own experiences: when his depressions began, what triggered it, what it felt like, what worsened it, what could start to make it better. Without his personal admissions, the book would have been a useful tome, a survey of depression's treatments and history and sociology written in the clear entertaining style one would expect from a writer for *The New Yorker*. Solomon's accounts of his depression made it more than this, describing the subjective experience of depression to his non-depressed readers.

The experience of depression is such a hard thing to communicate to one's well-meaning friends and partners and families, the ways in which life loses its interest and its balance, either accelerated into a frenzy as the sufferer looks for some sort of distraction or decay into the hopeless lethargic passage of painful moments. Depression has been too often been presented in a romantic fashion; Solomon strips the romance away and presents the experience of depression in print perhaps as well as anyone can.

After his feat of autobiography, Solomon goes on to describe the disease in full. Depression, he demonstrates, is fundamentally a biological disease, a product of the failure of neurons and neurotransmitters, and is often very successfully treated on those terms. Depression also has to be understood as a cultural phenomenon, though, as an illness that has often been seen as a cultural artifact—others have seen depression as laziness, as malaise or boredom, even as something fashionable—and as an illness that is the product of isolation of one kind or another. Solomon's examination of the different populations that have been especially prone to depression—the poor, subjected to terrible suffering and isolation; women, treated at best as second-class citizens and more frequently as objects who should know their place and be politely quiet; gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, despised because of the people they happen to love; ethnic and racial minorities, suffering the experience of knowing that they're not wanted by the societies where they live—makes it clear that depression is at least as much a function of its sufferers' social experiences as of their physical ills. Sometimes, there are good reasons for people to be depressed; sometimes, it would be surprising for someone not to be depressed.

That's why I found it heartening that *The Noonday Demon* went on to explore the many different ways in which people can recover from depression, by finding ways to talk about their experiences and to have other people react in constructive ways. Self-help groups led by Inuit community leaders in Greenland, shamanistic rites among Senegal's Wolof, talk therapies like group therapy and cognitive behaviour therapy, public health bureaucracies which identify mental health as a serious problem—there are any number of ways to deal with and to help heal depression, all of which involve recognizing it as a serious but treatable health issue.

My single biggest issue with *The Noonday Demon* is the degree to which Solomon talks about depression itself as a cure of sorts, as something that people can learn from and use to better themselves. Maybe—certainly the treatments available help people understand their psyches better. That's all that they do, however. Some people may survive depression intact, some people might even thrive with the skills they've acquired, but what about all the people who don't make it? Surviving a serious illness like depression might be cause for celebration, but any improvements come at too high a price.

Still, Solomon has succeeded wonderfully. He introduced his readers to depression via his own personal experiences; he examined depression's origins; he examined ways different people coped; he examined the hopes for effective treatment. Solomon succeeded in his project of explaining depression, indeed defining it in a way that the world can understand. I'm so glad that he did that. If you're interested in mental health issues, or even if you're curious about the human mind, pick this book up.

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### **Atila Iamarino says**

Não fazia ideia do quão debilitante a depressão pode ser. Ótimo apanhado de causas, consequências e histórias por trás da depressão, em um embrulho auto-biográfico e com entrevistas que dão o lado humano da depressão. Menos acadêmico do que costumo ler, mas por isso deve interessar mais gente.

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### **?????? ???? says**

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*'The most accurate statement that can be made on the frequency of depression is that it occurs often and, directly or indirectly, affects the lives of everyone.'*

*'You don't think in depression that you've put on a grey veil and are seeing the world through the haze of a bad mood. You think that the veil has been taken away, the veil of happiness, and that now you're seeing truly. You try to pin the truth down and take it apart, and you think that truth is a fixed thing, but the truth is alive and it runs around.'*

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*'It is often said that depression is a thing to which a leisured class falls prey in a developed society; in fact, it is a thing that a certain class has the luxury of articulating and addressing.'*

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„?????? ??????“;

*‘Why do you doubt your senses?’*

'Because,' said Scrooge, 'a little thing affects them. A slight disorder of the stomach makes them cheats. You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato.'

*‘Every day, I choose, sometimes gamely and sometimes against the moment’s reason, to be alive. Is that not a rare joy?’*

**Jenny says**

especially recommended for anyone who has ever dealt personally with depression. the scope that solomon attempts is vast, covering literature, history, psychology, sociology, politics, anthropology, etc etc. though many questions go unanswered, from the start he is honest about the intention of the book and it is not to give answers. if anything it is to raise questions. what we get is a valuable overview of a complex and misunderstood mental illness that can only help to further the dialogue.

Ed says

Probably the best book I have read for a long time. The War and Peace of depression. A compelling, comprehensive, personal, tightly written, passionate and well researched exploration of depression in all its darkness at noon dimensions. I read it too fast in a few sittings, because I found it so compelling. And I found huge insights in his experience; even the most extreme of his experiences, because he writes like a traveler back from a largely unexplored, often denied, uncomfortable not well reported on remote region deep inside at least a third of the population or 80% of Greenland Inuit who are clinically depressed... I particularly liked his insight that while much of our depression is rear-ward facing about past loss and trauma; there is also anxious darkness looking forward. Anxiety as forward looking depression. Seems obvious, but helpful. And the author tried almost every imaginable way to mitigate his massive, recurring depressive mental breakdowns: chemical, talking, spiritual, ECT; you name he tried it. Not a book for the faint-hearted or for those who think that the journey deep inside the self, or deep inside other peoples' horrendous depressions, is somehow self indulgent as I saw one reviewer write. And of course many people could not believe he was devoting years to writing about this topic, though in private, hundreds of people opened up to supply him with incredible accounts of their experiences, despite the societal discomfort with the whole subject. One of his colleagues even denied that he suffered from depression because he had such an obviously 'good life'. Yeh right.

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### **Sara says**

Depression: more complicated than the Lexapro ads would have you believe.

An intelligent and very thorough interdisciplinary introduction, but with a publication date of 2002, it hews pretty close to the serotonin-oriented theories of depression (although Solomon does a nice job of explaining how very little is known about how Prozac-generation antidepressants actually work, even though they clearly DO work). Since then, medical research has gone on to explore models of depression that explore the role of early and repeated stressors -- models with similarities to post-traumatic stress disorder that explore the role of chemicals like adrenaline in depression. None of that is in this book.

Still, Solomon's work on the social contexts of depression is what makes this worth reading. Solomon is at his best when he puts religious notions of the sins of accedia and sloth, and puritan ethics of hard work, careful forethought and stoicism together with the puzzle of a "brain disease" that would render someone incapable of adhering to those standards.

NB: if you're currently experiencing depression, this is not the book for you, both because of its density and because Solomon is drawn to cases of idiomatic or treatment-resistant depression, meaning that the prognosis for depression winds up looking a bit bleaker than it is for the general population.

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### **Sarah says**

I bought this book a few months ago at an amazing used bookstore in New Orleans. I guess it had been improperly shelved in the religion section. Amazing book for anyone who has struggled with clinical depression or has family/friends with depression/bipolar disorder. Addresses the subject partially anecdotally, but also from sociological, biological, economic, and historical perspectives.

There have many eloquent and accurate reviews of this book (by Joyce Carol Oates, William Styron, Edmund White, Harold Bloom, James Watson, Naomi Wolf and many others), however I particularly like Christine Whitehouse of Time Magazine's review: "The book for a generation...Solomon interweaves a personal narrative with scientific, philosophical, historical, political and cultural insights...The result is an elegantly written, meticulously researched book that is empathetic and enlightening, scholarly and useful...Solomon apologizes that 'no book can span the reach of human suffering.' This one comes close."

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### **Kasia says**

And this ladies and gentlemen, is how you write about depression.

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## **Jenny (Reading Envy) says**

"The survivors stay on pills, waiting... We go on. You cannot choose whether you get depressed and you cannot choose when or how you get better, but you can choose what to do with the depression, especially when you come out of it."

This was an incredible book that took me months to read, a dense mighty tome about depression. It weaves together the author's personal experience of multiple breakdowns and decades of treatments with other narratives, scientific research, historical background, and social context (and sometimes- literature!). Rather than try to summarize depression, he lets it stay messy as it really is, different for each person, with no clear path for treatment. I learned a lot, and hopefully my increased understanding will make me a better boss, a better faculty advisor, and a better friend.

This was also discussed on Episode 009 of the Reading Envy Podcast.

Google document of marked bits

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## **Meaghan says**

This was a good book, but I found it more scholarly, less readable and harder to get through than similar books such as Peter Whybrow's *A Mood Apart* and Lewis Wolpert's *Malignant Sadness*. Perhaps this is because Solomon cites a lot of philosophers. He has extensive notes, but the book itself isn't footnoted; you have to go to the back and sort of guess what bits in each chapter the notes are referring to. That's frustrating. I do, however, think this book is valuable, particularly the chapter on illicit drugs and depression (unlike most people, Solomon doesn't just issue a blanket "don't do it" on substances but analyzes each one and what they can and can't do for depression), and his chapter on depression and poor people.

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## **Bleak Mouse says**

Harrowing, fascinating, moving -- and depressing. My sole problem, if indeed it is a problem, is that the author (as he remarks of Robert Burton) embraces the paradoxes and contradictions rather than reconciling them. So prepare to be a bit confused by too much information, although all of it is vital -- in one context or another.

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## **Lily ?? says**

*Before you read on, be aware that the paragraphs I quote could have potentially triggering content, so please skip those if need be. Your mental—and physical—health are what is most important.*

**“Every second of being alive hurt me.”**

Reading *The Noonday Demon* was an incredibly enlightening, educational, ingratiating, and above all *emotional* experience. It is not an easy book to read, and it is definitely not suited for people who aren't willing to commit to the entirety of the ups and downs it so thoroughly presents, the dark situations and mindsets it lays bare, as well as the various stories from different people who have gone through, and/or are still going through depression.

**“(...) it’s dark. You are falling away from the sunlight toward a place where the shadows are black. Inside it, you cannot see, and the dangers are everywhere (it’s neither soft-bottomed nor soft-sided, the abyss). While you are falling, you don’t know how deep you can go, or whether you can in any way stop yourself. You hit invisible things over and over again until you are shredded, and yet your environment is too unstable for you to catch onto anything.”**

Its almost 600 pages contain twelve different chapters that are all rich in detail—often overwhelmingly so—and each examine different aspects of depression, swiftly demonstrating how it is part of *everyone's* lives—not just of that of the depressed person—infiltrating it knowingly, or unknowingly (but predominantly the latter).

Andrew Solomon details his own descents into the depths of his depression, as well as other depressives' stories of their experiences with it, and it made this book so much more than mere scientific research; *The Noonday Demon*'s contents ring true, at times all-consuming with their bleakness.

**“(...) a loss of feeling, a numbness, had infected all my human relations. I didn’t care about love; about my work; about family; about friends. I found myself burdened by social events, even by conversation. It all seemed like more effort than it was worth. I felt my control over my own life slipping.”**

It is so incredibly important that mental illnesses not be stigmatized, and actually *be recognized* as an illness, rather than something “to get over”. People who are sick with the flu, have a broken bone, or suffer from migraines, all elicit sympathy and compassion—people who suffer from depression, or any mental illness for that matter, should, too.

No matter how much of this atlas of depression you read, whether you decide to skip parts—it is so worthwhile. We may not always be able to help someone in the way we want to, and most mental illnesses are here to stay as long as the person who is afflicted with it, but we can always remember to be kind and understanding.

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**Mahmut Homsi says**

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**Joy says**

I first read this shortly after it came out, and I remember liking it then. Apparently I have become a much pickier reader of nonfiction in the last decade, as I liked it much less this time around.

*The Noonday Demon* is unsatisfactory on a number of fronts. As science writing, it's insufficiently rigorous and awfully anecdotal; it tends toward summary and eschews proper footnotes in the name of "readability". I like footnotes and citations; I find most arguments for avoiding them in this kind of writing disingenuous at best. As memoir, it's too self-absorbed. No doubt this is partly a symptom of his condition, but Solomon's frequent blindness to his own privilege doesn't exactly help his case. And I care a lot less about Solomon's sex life than he appears to think I should.

On the other hand, it does succeed in capturing the raw experience of depression. The chronology of

Solomon's breakdowns is especially effective. And Solomon does know how to turn a phrase.

Not a bad read, but not a good one. It's more a memoir than the subtitle might lead you to think; reader, be warned.

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