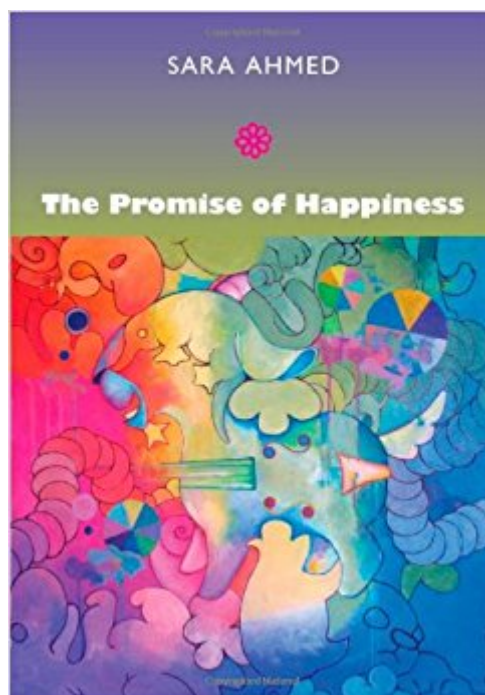


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The Promise Of Happiness



Synopsis

The Promise of Happiness is a provocative cultural critique of the imperative to be happy. It asks what follows when we make our desires and even our own happiness conditional on the happiness of others: "I just want you to be happy"; "I'm happy if you're happy." Combining philosophy and feminist cultural studies, Sara Ahmed reveals the affective and moral work performed by the "happiness duty," the expectation that we will be made happy by taking part in that which is deemed good, and that by being happy ourselves, we will make others happy. Ahmed maintains that happiness is a promise that directs us toward certain life choices and away from others. Happiness is promised to those willing to live their lives in the right way. Ahmed draws on the intellectual history of happiness, from classical accounts of ethics as the good life, through seventeenth-century writings on affect and the passions, eighteenth-century debates on virtue and education, and nineteenth-century utilitarianism. She engages with feminist, antiracist, and queer critics who have shown how happiness is used to justify social oppression, and how challenging oppression causes unhappiness. Reading novels and films including *Mrs. Dalloway*, *The Well of Loneliness*, *Bend It Like Beckham*, and *Children of Men*, Ahmed considers the plight of the figures who challenge and are challenged by the attribution of happiness to particular objects or social ideals: the feminist killjoy, the unhappy queer, the angry black woman, and the melancholic migrant. Through her readings she raises critical questions about the moral order imposed by the injunction to be happy.

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Customer Reviews

An unsettling but also surprisingly comforting book about how happiness is used as a disciplinary strategy in modern western society. Ahmed writes beautifully and incorporates literary and film analysis into her cultural critique seamlessly. I often skip long sections of textual analysis if I haven't read/seen the work being critiqued, but I was able to read through all of Ahmed because of her skillful descriptions and the perfect way she handles incorporating them into her points.

Excellent book for anyone interested in affect theory! Ahmed offers a genealogy of happiness that interrogates the common injunction to "be happy."

Ahmed thoroughly explores happiness - it's meanings and applications. Rare in scholarly work, her writing is Both informative and beautiful.

Such a brilliant critic!!

Had to read this book for a class. It was an excruciating read. While there are some really good nuggets in here, it's just too dense and scholarly of a read to read for pleasure. The book is very thoroughly researched, though. If you enjoy reading theory or philosophy, you'll probably get a lot out of this book.

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