

Herman's notion of "moral salience" (par. 12). What does this term mean? Based on a careful reading of this passage, write a brief explanation of the concept of "moral salience."

Reflection and Response

3. Are some illusions okay, and some not? Come up with two examples of your own — an illusion that seems to you life enhancing and one that seems to you life harming. Explain the difference.
4. Write about a time in your life when you had to face a difficult truth, perhaps one that you'd been avoiding. What was the value of this?

Making Connections

5. Emily Esfahani Smith, in "There's More to Life Than Being Happy" (p. 187), sees a dichotomy between happiness and "meaning," arguing that "happiness is an emotion felt in the here and now. . . . Meaning, on the other hand, is enduring." And she makes a strong case for meaning as something distinct from happiness. How is Bok's view of happiness — and, by implication, of "meaning" — different? How does her approach deal with the apparent dichotomy between happiness and the sometimes brutal hardships in life? Write an essay that carefully compares Esfahani Smith's concept of happiness with Bok's.
6. Noelle Oxenhandler's "Ah, But the Breezes . . ." (p. 261), is a different kind of essay from Sissela Bok's "Illusion" — personal, narrative, meditative. Yet perhaps there are parallels and each work can illuminate the other. Oxenhandler writes, "Inevitably, we fall out of the hammock of bliss, the Garden of Eden. In some form or another, whether subtle or huge, the *but* arrives to thwart our desire." Yet, as her reflections unfold, the "but" turns out to be less negative than it seems at first. Compare Oxenhandler's reflections to Bok's, in particular the "striving for truthfulness" that Bok espouses toward the end of this selection. Then write an essay that, like Oxenhandler's, includes an episode from your own life and reflections on that episode that incorporate the ideas of both Oxenhandler and Bok.

Happiness and Queer Politics

Sara Ahmed

Sara Ahmed, born in 1966, is a writer and independent scholar who works at the intersection of feminist, queer, and race studies. Her research focuses on how power is secured and challenged

in individual lives as well as institutional cultures. She was professor of race and cultural studies at Goldsmiths, University of London, until she resigned in protest at the university's failure to deal with the problem of sexual harassment. She continues her work to fight sexual harassment in her engagement with the 1752 Group. Ahmed is the author of seven books: *Differences That Matter: Feminist Theory and Postmodernism* (1998); *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (2000); *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004); *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (2006); *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), which was awarded the FWSA book prize in 2011 for "ingenuity and scholarship in the fields of feminism, gender or women's studies"; *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (2012); and *Willful Subjects* (2014). She has also edited or coedited seven books and journals and has published more than sixty journal articles and book chapters. As Margrit Shildrick wrote in a review of *Queer Phenomenology for Philosophical Studies*, "Few academic writers working in the UK context today can match Sara Ahmed in her prolific output, and fewer still can maintain the consistently high level of her theoretical explorations." The following selection appeared in *World Picture Journal* in 2009.

Making Others Happy

Robert Heinlein's definition of love "is a condition in which the happiness of another is essential to your own."¹ It is perhaps a truism that to love another is to want their happiness. Whether or not we agree with this truth, we can learn from its status as truth. I want to turn to a text from the eighteenth century, Rousseau's *Émile*, first published in 1762, which was crucial for how it redefined education and for the role it gave to happiness. The story is told in the first person, by a narrator whose duty is to instruct a young orphan Émile, in order that he can take up his place in the world. Rousseau also offers a model of what a good education would do not only for his Émile but also for Émile's would-be wife, Sophie, whom he introduces in the fifth book. Sophie must become a good woman. As Rousseau describes, the good woman:

loves virtue because there is nothing fairer in itself. She loves it because it is a woman's glory and because a virtuous woman is little lower than the angels; she loves virtue as the only road to real

happiness, because she sees nothing but poverty, neglect, unhappiness, shame and disgrace in the life of the bad woman; she loves virtue because it is dear to her revered father, and to her tender and worthy mother; they are not content to be happy in their own virtue, they desire hers; and she finds her chief happiness in the hope of just making them happy!²

The complexity of this statement should not be underestimated. She loves virtue as it is the road to happiness; unhappiness and disgrace follow from being bad. The good woman loves what is good because what is good is what is loved by her parents. The parents desire not only what is good; they desire their daughter to be good. The daughter desires to be good to give them what they desire. For her to be happy, she must be good, as being good is what makes them happy, and she can only be happy if they are happy.

It might seem that what we can call "conditional happiness," when one person's happiness is made conditional on another person's, involves a form of generosity: a refusal to have a share in a happiness that cannot be shared. And yet the terms of conditionality are unequal. If certain people come first—we might say those who are already in place (such as parents, hosts, or citizens)—then their happiness comes first. For those who are positioned as coming after, *happiness means following somebody else's goods*.

I suggested earlier that we might share a social bond if the same objects make us happy. I am now arguing that happiness itself can become the shared object. Or to be more precise, if one person's happiness comes first, then *their happiness becomes a shared object*. Max Scheler's^o differentiation between communities of feeling and fellow-feeling might help explain the significance of this argument. In communities of feeling, we share feelings because we share the same object of feeling. Fellow-feeling would be when I feel sorrow about your grief although I do not share your object of grief: "all fellow-feeling involves *intentional reference* of the feeling of joy or sorrow to the other person's experience."³ I would speculate that in everyday life these different forms of shared feeling can be confused because the object of feeling is sometimes but not always exterior to the feeling that is shared.

Say I am happy about your happiness. Your happiness is with *x*. If I share *x*, then your happiness and my happiness are not only shared but can accumulate through being given out and returned. Or I can simply disregard *x*: if my happiness is directed "just" toward your happiness, and you are happy about *x*, the exteriority of *x* can disappear or cease to matter (although it can reappear). In cases where I am also affected by *x*, and I do not share your happiness with *x*, I might become uneasy and ambivalent: *I am made happy by your happiness, but I am not made happy by what makes you*

Max Ferdinand Scheler (1874–1928): a German philosopher known for his work in phenomenology, ethics, and philosophical anthropology.

happy. The exteriority of *x* would then announce itself as a point of crisis. I might take up what makes you happy as what makes me happy, which may involve compromising my own idea of happiness (so I will go along with *x* in order to make you happy even if *x* does not "really" make me happy). In order to preserve the happiness of all, we might even conceal from ourselves our unhappiness with *x*, or try and persuade ourselves that *x* matters less than the happiness of the other who is made happy by *x*.⁴

We have a hint of the rather uneasy dynamics of conditional happiness in *Émile*. For Sophie wanting to make her parents happy commits her in a certain direction, regardless of what she might or might not want. If she can only be happy if they are happy, then she must do what makes them happy. In one episode, the father speaks to the daughter about becoming a woman: "you are a big girl now, Sophie, you will soon be a woman. We want you to be happy, for our sakes as well as yours, for our happiness depends on yours. A good girl finds her own happiness in the happiness of a good man."⁵ For the daughter not to go along with the parents' desire for marriage would be not only to cause her parents unhappiness but would threaten the very reproduction of social form. The daughter has a duty to reproduce the form of the family, which means *taking up the cause of parental happiness as her own*.

We learn from reading books such as *Émile* how much happiness is used as a technology or instrument, which allows the re-orientation of individual desire towards a common good. We also learn from reading such books how happiness is not simply instrumental but works as an idea or aspiration within everyday life, shaping the very terms in which individuals share their world with others. We do things when we speak of happiness, when we put happiness into words.

Let's take the statement: *I am happy if you are*. Such a statement can be attributed, as a way of sharing an evaluation of an object. I could be saying I am happy about something if you are happy about something. The statement, though, does not require an object to mediate between the "I" and the "you"; the "you" can be the object, can be what my happiness is dependent upon. *I will only be happy if you are*. To say I will be happy only if you are happy means that I will be unhappy if you are unhappy. *Your unhappiness would make me unhappy*. Given this, you might be obliged to conceal your unhappiness to preserve my happiness: *You must be happy for me*.

I am not saying that such speech acts always translate in quite this way. But we can learn from how the desire for the happiness of others can be the point at which they are bound to be happy for us. If to love another is to want their happiness, then love might be experienced as the duty to be happy for another. It is interesting that when we speak of wanting the happiness of the loved other we often hesitate with the signifier "just." "I just want you to be happy." What does it mean to want

"just" happiness? What does it mean for a parent to say this to a child? We might assume that the desire just for the child's happiness would offer a certain kind of freedom, as if to say: "I don't want you to be this, or to do that; I just want you to be or to do 'whatever' makes you happy." You could say that the "whatever" seems to release us from the obligation of the "what." The desire just for the child's happiness seems to offer the freedom of a certain indifference to the content of a decision.

Let's take the psychic drama of the queer child. You might say that the queer child is an unhappy object for many parents. In some parental responses to the child coming out, this unhappiness is not so much expressed as being unhappy about the child being queer, but as *being unhappy about the child being unhappy*. Take the following exchange from the novel *Annie on My Mind** (1982) by Nancy Garden:

"Lisa," my father said, "I told you I'd support you and I will. . . . But honey . . . I have to say to you I've never thought gay people can be very happy—no children for one thing, no real family life. Honey, you are probably going to be a very good architect—but I want you to be happy in other ways, too, as your mother is, to have a husband and children. I know you can do both. . . ." I am happy, I tried to tell him with my eyes. I'm happy with Annie; she and my work are all I'll ever need; she's happy too—we both were until this happened.⁶

This speech act functions powerfully. The parent makes an act of identification with an imagined future of necessary and inevitable unhappiness. Such identification through grief about what the child will lose reminds us that the queer life is already constructed as an unhappy life, as a life without the "things" that make you happy: a husband and children. The desire for the child's happiness is far from indifferent. The speech act, "I just want you to be happy," is directive at the very point of its imagined indifference.

For the daughter, it is only the eyes that can speak; and they try to tell an alternative story about happiness and unhappiness. In her response, she claims happiness, for sure. She is happy "with Annie"; which is to say, she is happy with *this* relationship and *this* life that it will commit her to. The power of the unspoken response is lodged in the use of the word "until": we were happy "until" this happened. The father's speech act creates the very affective state of unhappiness that is imagined to be the inevitable consequence of the daughter's decision. When "this" happens, unhappiness does follow.

**Annie on My Mind* concerns two teenage girls who are friends first and then fall in love. Despite pressures from family and school, they attempt to stay true to each other. Banned in many places and publicly burned in Kansas, the book has nevertheless been a bestseller since its first printing. [Editors' note]

The social struggle within families is often a struggle over the causes of unhappiness. The father is unhappy as he thinks the daughter will be unhappy if she is queer. The daughter is unhappy as the father is unhappy with her being queer. The father witnesses the daughter's unhappiness as a sign of the truth of his position: she will be unhappy because she is queer. Even the happy queer becomes unhappy at this point. And clearly the family can only be maintained as a happy object, as being what is anticipated to cause happiness, by making the unhappiness of the queer child its point.

The speech act "I just want you to be happy" can be used as a form of tolerance or acceptance in coming out stories. A contrasting example to *Annie on My Mind* was presented in Dana's story of coming out to her parents in *The L Word*. After trying to persuade her daughter to give up desire for duty, her mother eventually says: "I can see that you've found love. It doesn't matter what form it takes as long as it makes you happy."

It is always paradoxical to say something does not matter: when you have to say something does not matter it usually implies that it does. Recognition can withdraw the approval it gives. What does it mean for recognition to be made conditional on happiness? I have suggested that some things more than others are attributed as happiness causes. In this occasion, the couple are asking for parental blessing of their marriage: a straight way of doing queer love, perhaps. If queers, in order to be recognized, have to approximate signs of happiness, then they might have to minimize signs of queerness. In other words, being turned by happiness can mean being turned toward the social forms in which hopes for happiness have already been deposited. One thinks of the final film in *If These Walls Could Talk 2* (2000, dir. Anne Heche): the happy image in the end is of a white middle-class lesbian couple who are pregnant: they dance around their immaculate house, and everything seems to shimmer with its nearness to ordinary scenes of happy domesticity. Their happiness amounts to achieving relative proximity to the good life.⁷ If this is a form of optimism, then it might be a "cruel optimism" as Lauren Berlant⁸ describes so well. You follow certain ways of life in the hope that you will catch happiness on the way, even if, or perhaps more cruelly, even because, they embody the scenes of past rejection.

Lauren Berlant (b. 1957): Professor of English at the University of Chicago whose work addresses the role of emotion and affect in politics and the public sphere.

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Notes

¹Cited in Bill Lucas, *Happy Families: How To Make One, How to Keep One* (Harlow, UK: Educational Publishers, 2006), 26. This principle that to love makes the other's happiness essential to your own is widely articulated. But does this principle always hold true? I would say there is a desire for this principle to be true, but that this desire does not make the principle true, as a psychoanalytic approach might suggest. If love is to desire the happiness of another, then the happiness of the subject who loves might depend upon the happiness of the other who is loved. As such, love can also be experienced as the possibility that the beloved can take your happiness away from you. This anxious happiness, you might say, forms the basis of an ambivalent sociality: in which we love those we love, but we might also hate those we love for making us love them, which is what makes us vulnerable to being affected by what happens to them. In other words, love extends our vulnerability beyond our own skin. Perhaps fellow-feeling is a form of social hope: we want to want happiness for those we love; we want our happy objects to amount to the same thing. Even if we feel guilty for wishing unhappiness upon our enemies, it is a less guilty wish than wishing unhappiness upon our friends. In other words, our presumed indifference toward the happiness of strangers might help us to sustain the fantasy that we always want the happiness of those we love, or that our love wants their happiness.

²Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile*, trans. Barbara Foxley (London: Everyman, 1993), 359.

³Max Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*, trans. Peter Heath (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2008), 12.

⁴You might be asked to disregard your views on *x* in order to make someone happy. I have found this especially true in the case of weddings. You are asked or even instructed to join the happy event of the wedding because it would make someone happy for you to share in their happy occasion even if they know that you are not happy with the very idea of marriage that is celebrated in weddings. You are often judged as selfish when you refuse the demand to participate in the happiness of others, especially in cases when such happiness is sanctioned by law, habit, or custom.

⁵Rousseau, 434.

⁶Nancy Garden, *Annie on My Mind* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1982), 191.

⁷In *The Promise of Happiness* I offer a detailed reading of this film, suggesting that the happiness of the ending can be related to queer struggles for a bearable life, and not simply or only to aspirations for the good life. So while I am suggesting here that promotions of happiness can involve an affective form of homonormativity (see Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics and the Attack on Democracy* [Boston: Beacon Press, 2003]; Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* [New York: New York University Press, 2005]), I would not and do not equate happiness with normativity. As I will suggest in due course, being happily queer can be to be happy with and about one's deviation. It is worth noting however that in books such as *How to Be a Happy Homosexual* the promotion of happy homosexuality does involve a commitment to "de-queer" gay life. The book includes criticisms of practices such as cottaging, as "for the isolated and insecure gay man it fosters the idea that contact with gay people is of necessity dirty, undignified, nerve-wracking and dangerous. It can do nothing for the self-image of those gay men, who already have a bad opinion of their sexuality" (Terry Sanderson, *How to Be a Happy Homosexual: A Guide for Gay Men* [London: The Other Way Press, 1991], 64). Cruising is also criticized, as it can "increase the sense of isolation in those who are already unhappy with their sexuality" (Sanderson, 67). Sanderson criticizes the hedonism of queer culture, suggesting that homosexual men need to develop an ethics premised on making other people happy (145). Although he does not describe such ethics in terms of conservative family values (or in terms of mimicking straight relationships or family forms), it is clearly linked to the promoting of a sociability premised on fellow feeling or what he calls "finer feelings," which is contrasted to the superficiality and hedonism of queer cultures (145). I am indebted here to Vincent Quinn for an excellent paper that reflected on *How to Be a Happy Homosexual* as a sexual conduct manual.

Understanding the Text

1. Ahmed uses a quotation from Nancy Garden's novel *Annie on My Mind* to illustrate how the desire of a parent for the happiness of a queer child "creates the very . . . state of unhappiness that is imagined" (par. 12). How and why, according to Ahmed, does this come about? Trace her argument with care. Write a brief paraphrase that explains her reasoning here.
2. What role does Rousseau's *Émile* play in the development of Ahmed's ideas about happiness? What is she trying to illustrate about the interplay of individual desire and ideas about what function happiness plays in the social and individual realms?

Reflection and Response

3. Ahmed uses extensive footnotes to clarify and develop her ideas in this essay. Write an analysis of what functions the notes provide. Do they perform a kind of argument of their own? Carefully discuss each note as you make your case.
4. Ahmed uses the words "speech act" and "recognition" several times as she analyzes the case of "the queer child." What do these words mean in this context? How can "speech acts" sometimes have unintended and unforeseen effects? What is Ahmed's argument about this child's development in relation to her parents?

Making Connections

5. Consider the idea that Ahmed's theories represent happiness as a process rather than a thing. What is the process she describes? How do "acts of identification" and their effects contribute to this process? Write an essay in which you first introduce Ahmed's concepts and then locate examples from contemporary culture that contribute to the notion that human happiness might be an act of continuous construction and reconstruction or identification and misidentification.
6. Toward the end of "Illusion," Sissela Bok notes that the philosopher Immanuel Kant stressed "truthfulness" rather than "some unachievable full truth." Bok continues: "The fact that we can strive for the former, no matter how far out of reach the latter may be highlights the human potential for choice in communication with others as well as inwardly." (par. 21) What role does "striving for truthfulness" play in Ahmed's exploration of queer happiness and the need to communicate with parents and others about queerness? Does "illusion" also play a role? Reading Ahmed's essay and Bok's essay together, can you develop a theory of how truth, illusion, and happiness can coexist?