Exploring the Intersection of 'Happy Life' and Existentialism in Contemporary Continental Thought

Explorando a Intersecção entre 'Vida Feliz' e Existencialismo no Pensamento Continental Contemporâneo

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ABSTRACT

This research explores how existentialism intersects with the pursuit of happiness in contemporary continental philosophy, analyzing the works of Sartre, Camus, and de Beauvoir. It delves into the complexities inherent in seeking happiness, including individual existence, freedom, and meaning. Specifically, it examines Simone de Beauvoir's concept of ambiguity and its role in human existence and freedom. Ethical considerations regarding the pursuit of happiness are raised, alongside an analysis of how existential ambiguity influences one's journey towards happiness and reveals moral implications. By examining these ethical ambiguities, the paper contributes to contemporary discourse on existentialism, highlighting the tension between freedom, meaning, and happiness in human existence marked by uncertainty.

KEYWORDS : Existentialism, Philosophy, *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* Authenticity ; Absurdity ; Ethical Dilemmas

RESUMO

Esta pesquisa explora como o existencialismo se intersecta com a busca da felicidade na filosofia continental contemporânea, analisando as obras de Sartre, Camus e de Beauvoir. Aprofunda-se nas complexidades inerentes à busca da felicidade, incluindo a existência individual, a liberdade e o significado. Especificamente, examina o conceito de ambiguidade de Simone de Beauvoir e seu papel na existência e liberdade humanas. Considerações éticas sobre a busca da felicidade são levantadas, juntamente com uma análise de como a ambiguidade existencial influencia a jornada rumo à felicidade e revela implicações morais. Ao examinar essas ambiguidades éticas, o artigo contribui para o discurso contemporâneo sobre o existencialismo, destacando a tensão entre liberdade, significado e felicidade na existência humana marcada pela incerteza.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Existencialismo, Filosofia, A Ética da Ambiguidade, Autenticidade; Absurdo; Dilemas Éticos

1. Introduction

One of the most significant philosophies or philosophical schools that has emerged in the 20th century is existentialism that delves deep into the core aspects of human existence, freedom as well as perennial quest for the meaning of life (Rickebach, 2006). This philosophical school emerged as an aftermath of the World War II and existentialism was a response to the existential uncertainties as well as moral dilemmas that were faced by individuals in the face of war, advancements within the technology as well as the disappearance of the traditional belief system (Sartre & Mairet, 1960). This philosophical paradigm has its roots in the works of philosophers such as Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche and it has evolved into a diverse as well as influential approach that has impacted the way we understand philosophies, theories and individual life within continental philosophy (Ong, 2009). Within the discussion of existentialism is the primacy of individual existence and the assertion that human beings are fundamentally free and responsible for shaping their own destinies (Cinelli, 1989; Ong, 2009). This argument regarding individual agency is coupled with a keen awareness of the inherent absurdity and meaninglessness of life, themes that are recurrent in the existentialist philosophy. As existentialism arose and expanded around the world, it also found diverse forms with figures such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Simone de Beauvoir.

In this background, this paper has a three-fold aim where primarily, it will discuss and analyze foundational existential principles by tracing its historical development and key tenets. Secondarily, the

paper will explore how existentialists, notably Sartre, Camus, de Beauvoir, Ardent, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and other philosophers discuss the concept of happiness in relation to individual existence, freedom and the search for meaning. Finally the paper will analyze the existential ambiguities that arise when happiness is explored in the context of contemporary continental philosophy. These aims will be achieved by conducting a comprehensive analysis of primary texts and by drawing on the philosophical work of above-mentioned philosophers. Additionally, the research will also discuss contemporary philosophers such as Levinas and Merleau-Ponty to encompass phenomenological and ethical perspectives within the discussion of human happiness and agency.

The structure of this paper will lead in a manner of logical progression. Beginning with the analysis of existential thought, the paper will move on to an in-depth examination of individual existence, which will be combined with the understanding of the authenticity of the context of happiness. Moreover, the paper will observe and analyze the notions of absurdity and ethics of ambiguity with the help of the works of Albert Camus and Simone de Beauvoir. Furthermore, the research will also talk about more contemporary continental philosophers and study the existential ambiguities that are crucial to the quest of a 'happy life'. There will also be contributions by the paper to the continuing debates that are part of the contemporary continental thought by paying attention to the nuances of human existence and the eternal search for individual happiness.

2. Foundations of Existential Thought

Existentialism is a philosophical movement that thrived in the 20th century, and it found its roots in the philosophical reflections of Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche. The existentialist emphasis on individual experience, freedom, and the intrinsic uncertainties of human existence and its comprehension entails that it is crucial to engage with intellectual territory from which this philosophical theory emerges (Stewart, 2011).

The credit of 'father of existentialism' is generally offered to Søren Kierkegaard because he had laid the groundwork for the movement in the 19th century (Kirillova & Ulitina, 2017). He tackled challenges that were masqueraded by the burgeoning industrial age and the rise of rationalism by questioning the acceptability of detached reason in circumnavigating the convolutions of human existence (Moyn, 2012). Kierkegaard's notion of individual subjectivity as the focal point of truth serves as a cornerstone for existentialism. In his work *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard commences the concept of the 'knight of faith'. This concept suggests an individual who transcends the ethical through a leap of faith and comprises a personal relationship with the divine (Kierkegaard & Marina, 2013; Noble, 2017). This emphasis on

subjective experience over objective reason remained one of the groundwork ideas within and throughout existentialist thought (Evans, 2006). This is to say that this notion or theory frames the existential condition by presenting personal responsibility and the constant tension between faith and doubt (Evans, 2006; Kierkegaard & Marina, 2013; Noble, 2017).

Furthermore, Friedrich Nietzsche contributed significantly to the development of existentialist ideas after Kierkegaard. Nietzsche's proclamation of the 'death of God' and his critique of traditional morality challenged the established and existing foundations of meaning and values. In Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Nietzsche discusses the concept of the 'Übermensch' (Bernd, 2018). This concept means the overman or superman who creates their own values in the absence of traditional moral ideas. This idea predicts existentialism's prominence in individual autonomy. This idea also suggests the necessity to construct one's own meaning (Thompson, 2008). Moreover, Nietzsche rejected universal truths and promoted perspectivism. This implies an existentialist thought by highlighting the subjective nature of reality and experience.

With the arrival of Jean-Paul Sartre within the realm of philosophy, existentialism escalated. Sartre is one of the most significant figures in the existentialist movement in which he incorporated Kierkegaard's stress on subjectivity and Nietzsche's critique of traditional values. Sartre argued that "Existence precedes essence" (Atwell, 1969). While saying this, Sartre implied that primary existence is attributed to individuals and their essence is defined through their choices and actions. This is also known as 'existentialist maxim' which underlines the centrality of individual existence and freedom in the philosophical dialogue.

3. Individual Existence and Authenticity

With the rise of existentialist movement, Sartre's philosophical discourse grasped attention and he arose as one of the most noteworthy philosophers who presented the notion of 'happy life'. This was done by Sartre by unfolding the existential account through examining the concept of individual existence and the reflective consequence of authenticity in the pursuit of a 'happy life" (Ang, 2019). Sartre's (2015) philosophical oeuvre can be identified in his work Being and Nothingness. In this work, Sartre (2015) has discussed for a vision of radical freedom and responsibility. This forms the core of existentialist analysis as per Sartre as well as provides the background information for 'happy life'. It is key to note at this stage that Sartre's discussions begin with the assertion that existence precedes essence. As Cox (2016) implies that this assertion is (please check if 'is' was missing or not) also the presence of an existentialist declaration that summarizes the existentialist rejection of predetermined purpose and inherent meaning.

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This radical freedom, while liberating, commences an existential tension regarding a responsibility to shape one's own existence without the comfort of predetermined paths (Marcuse, 1948; Cox, 2016). Furthermore, this also suggests that individuals are not born with a predefined essence or destiny; rather, they define themselves through their actions and choices.

In the Sartrean existentialism, the pursuit of a 'happy life' is directly connected with the notion of 'authenticity'. Sartre argues that individuals must challenge or face the 'anxiety-inducing' freedom so that they can make a choice and act in an authentic manner (Webber, 2009). This suggests that authenticity is the alignment of one's actions with one's true self, unencumbered by external influences or societal expectations. Golomb (2012) expands Sartre's argument by indicating that in the pursuit of a 'happy life,' individuals must oppose the inherent torture and agony of freedom and the responsibility to choose in an authentic manner. In order to explain this clearly, Sartre puts forth the example of a waiter. This particular waiter executes his duties inauthentically by only taking on a role, which is lacking in true personal engagement. The behavior of the waiter turns into a kind of self-deception or contradiction of his freedom to present himself in an authentic way. The freedom to influence one's fate is both a liberating and troublesome aspect of human existence. Sartre's famous dictum, "Man is condemned to be free", puts forth the contradictory nature of this existential difficulty (Craig, 2009). This suggests a dilemma that enhances particularly pronounced in the pursuit of happiness. This conflict implicates recognizing the weight of choice of an individual and its impact on both individual existence and the broader human condition.

Moreover, Sartre's investigation of 'bad faith' further clarifies the challenges that are encountered by individuals in the search for authenticity and happiness. The concept of 'bad faith' indicates self-deception in which individuals participate when they avoid the responsibility of their freedom by adopting roles that are given to them by their societies or by subscribing to external norms (Yue & Mills, 2008; Webber, 2010). This avoidance or as Sartre calls it 'evasion', is a betrayal of authentic existence and an obstruction to the comprehension of undisputable happiness. The pursuit of societal expectations, rather than authentic self-definition, becomes a barrier to the fulfilment of one's true potential. In simple words, the analysis of individual existence and authenticity uncovers an interdependent and interconnected relationship between radical freedom, responsibility, and the pursuit of a 'happy life' (Griffin, 2001; Webber, 2010). The existential strain ascends from the necessity of choosing authentically in a world where preconceived meaning is absent. This means that within the Sartrean framework, the quest for happiness requires a bold confrontation with the anxieties of freedom and a commitment to shaping one's existence in association with an authentic self.

3.1   Absurdity and the Myth of Sisyphus

Camus suggests a distinctive perspective on the pursuit of happiness by delving into the philosophy of absurdity. In his work The Myth of Sisyphus, Camus presents an exploration of views on the absurdity of existence and the existential quest for meaning and happiness in a universe that appears indifferent to human endeavors (Eddins, 2001; Camus, 2013). After the Sartrean discussion, one of the noteworthy discussions on 'happy life' or individual happiness has been provided by Albert Camus. At the heart of Camus' philosophy lies the recognition of the absurd, a condition wherein individuals wrestle with the incompatibility between their innate desire for meaning and the apparent meaninglessness of the universe. Camus famously affirms, "The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world" (Sagi, 1994; Camus, 2013). This existential conflict is exemplified in the myth of Sisyphus, a figure condemned by the gods to perpetually roll a boulder up a hill, only to have it roll back down each time he nears the summit. Sisyphus' ceaseless and seemingly futile task becomes a metaphor for the human condition, symbolizing the perpetual struggle for meaning in the face of a seemingly indifferent cosmos (Sefler, 2013).

The pursuit of a 'happy life,' within Camus' context, involves implementation of absurdity of existence rather than succumbing to nihilism or despair. Camus challenges the notion that life's **inherent** lack of objective meaning necessitates a descent into hopelessness. Instead, he proposes that acknowledging the absurdity of the human condition allows for the possibility of an authentic and liberated existence. The happiness Camus envisions arises not from the discovery of an overarching purpose but from the rebellion against the absurdity itself. Camus introduces the concept of the 'absurd hero', a figure who, like Sisyphus, confronts the absurdity of existence with defiant rebellion (Camus, 2013; Francev, 2022). The absurd hero does not seek external validation or metaphysical meaning but instead engages in a continuous act of defiance against the absurd. In this act of rebellion, individuals can find a sense of purpose and, paradoxically, a form of happiness. Camus notes, "The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart" (Camus, 2013; Allen, 2015). Happiness, in this context, emerges from the very act of confronting and rebelling against the absurd, not in the attainment of an ultimate meaning.

To illustrate his ideas, Camus draws on the myth of Sisyphus, presenting Sisyphus' eternal task as an allegory for the human condition. The repetitive nature of Sisyphus' endeavor mirrors the cyclic nature of life's challenges and the constant re-evaluation of meaning. Yet, despite the apparent futility of his task, Sisyphus' rebellion against the gods becomes an act of autonomy and personal defiance, representing

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an existential victory over the absurd. In conclusion, Camus' philosophy of absurdity offers a distinctive lens through which to examine the pursuit of happiness within an indifferent universe.

3.2 Hannah Arendt's Exploration of Happy Life

Unlike philosophical perspectives of Sartre and Camus, Hannah Arendt contributes to political theory and existential philosophy by offering a distinctive perspective on the pursuit of a 'happy life'. Arendt's reflections in her work The Human Condition examine human existence, freedom, and the search for meaning (Allen, 1982; Hinchman & Hinchman, 1991; Kateb, 2007). Arendt was influenced by existentialist thinkers such as Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers. Arendt asserts, "Birth is the beginning of action", highlighting the existential significance of our capacity to initiate and create (Kattago, 2013). This influenced her philosophical inquiries on the nature of human action and the conditions that foster a meaningful life. She contends that each human being is born into the world, bringing with them the potential for new beginnings and initiatives (Marder, 2013; Lysaker, 2014). Unlike some existentialists who emphasize individual subjectivity, Arendt places a distinct emphasis on the importance of human relationships and the public sphere in the pursuit of a 'happy life' (Allen, 1982; Hinchman & Hinchman, 1991; Kateb, 2007). One of Arendt's key contributions is her exploration of the concept of 'natality' as a fundamental aspect of human existence. From this perspective, the happy life, for Arendt, involves actively engaging with the world, contributing to the public realm, and participating in shared endeavors.

Arendt's existentialist perspective on the 'happy life' also comprises a critical examination of the role of freedom. Drawing on existential notions of individual agency, Arendt highlights the prominence of political freedom in promoting a meaningful existence. She contends that freedom is not a passive state, rather it is realized through active participation in the public sphere. In her words, "Freedom is actually the reason for action". This suggests the existential link between freedom, action, and the pursuit of a life imbued with significance (Winham, 2012). Furthermore, Arendt's reflections on the 'vita activa' (active life) contribute to the existential exploration of happiness. She distinguishes between three fundamental activities: labor, work, and action. Labor implicates the presence of necessary as well as cyclical activities required for survival. On the other hand, work pertains to the creation of durable objects (Wainwright, 1989). However, when we discuss "action", we identify that it is the human interaction and engagement in the public realm that Arendt discovers as the highest potential for happiness. In conclusion, as per Arendt, the notion of 'happy life' is interwoven with the opulence of human relationships and the shared world of political action.

Arendt's existentialist standpoint develops particularly prominent in her discussions on totalitarianism and the erosion of public space. In The Human Condition, Arendt advises against the dangers of a society that diminishes the public realm, where individuals are reduced to isolated beings consumed by private concerns (Arendt, 2013; Arendt, 2001). In this given context, the existential conditions for a 'happy life' are undermined, as the space for meaningful human interaction and shared accomplishments shrinks. This has been exemplified by Arendt's analysis of the trial of Adolf Eichmann who is a high-ranking Nazi official. This example serves as a poignant illustration of Arendt's existentialist concern for the conditions that enable or hinder the pursuit of a meaningful and happy life. In Eichmann in Jerusalem, Arendt ascertains the 'banality of evil', highlighting how individuals can become disconnected from their capacity for moral judgment when removed from the public sphere (Arendt & Kroh, 1964; Arendt, 2013; Arendt, 2001). For Arendt, the 'happy life' emerges not only from individual freedom and action but also from a collective commitment to the public realm. In conclusion, Hannah Arendt's existentialist stance on the happy life is an examination that amalgamates existential principles with a keen consciousness of the importance of human relationships and political engagement.

It is key to bring Foucault at this stage because both Arendt and Foucault share a concern for the impact of societal structures on individual agency and the quest for happiness. Arendt's focus on the public realm aligns with Foucault's analyses of power structures that shape individuals within society (Flynn, 2008). Foucault's emphasis on power relations and the ways in which they govern and discipline individuals complements Arendt's existential exploration of freedom within the political sphere. A key point of junction lies in their evaluations of forms of power that impede the realization of a meaningful and happy life. Foucault's investigation of disciplinary power in institutions stresses how certain societal structures can stifle individual autonomy and the pursuit of authentic happiness. On the other hand, Arendt warns against the vulnerabilities of totalitarianism and the erosion of public space, which diminish the conditions for genuine human interaction (Ucnk, 2017). In their own ways, both thinkers call attention to the societal conditions that can either enable or hinder the thriving of human life (Gambetti, 2011; Lysaker, 2014; Boven, 2016).

Furthermore, both Arendt and Foucault tackle the complexities of autonomy and freedom. While their approaches differ, they share a concern for understanding how individuals negotiate freedom in the face of societal constraints (Gordon, 2002). The existentialist strands in Arendt's work which are focusing upon natality, human action, and engagement with the world, also relate with Foucault's later focus on ethical self-fashioning. Foucault's exploration of 'care of the self' in his later works reflects a concern for personal autonomy and the cultivation of a meaningful life through intentional self-reflection and ethical

choices. Arendt's existential emphasis on political freedom through active participation in the public realm connects with Foucault's analysis of 'biopower', i.e., the ways in which institutions govern and regulate individuals on a societal scale (Dumm, 2002). In this sense, both Arendt and Foucault acknowledge the existential imperative for individuals to actively shape their lives in response to societal conditions (Maze, 2018). However, it is essential to note their differences. For instance, Arendt's emphasis on the political sphere and public engagement contrasts with Foucault's focus on the microphysics of power and the intricate ways in which power operates at various levels (Miller, 2022). While Arendt looks to political action for the realization of a happy life, Foucault's later works suggest a more individualized pursuit of self-fashioning and ethical existence.

3.3 The Ethical Dilemmas and the Ambiguity in the Pursuit of a Fulfilling Life

Moreover, at this stage, we can examine Simone de Beauvoir's philosophical discussions within The Ethics of Ambiguity. This work presents an exploration of existentialist ethics and their intricate connection to the quest for a fulfilling life. Beauvoir's conceptualization of ambiguity dissects its relevance to freedom, responsibility, and the ethical dimensions that shape the pursuit of happiness within contemporary thought (Moore, 2008). Beauvoir's The Ethics of Ambiguity orbits around the existential insight that human existence is inherently ambiguous. This ambiguity arises from the dual nature of human freedom: the freedom to transcend and create one's essence and the freedom to negate and oppress the freedom of others (Holveck, 1999). Beauvoir notes, "In itself, ambiguity is neither a good nor an evil… We must simply, in order to be philosophers, undertake to study it". Beauvoir's examination also incorporates the concept of 'bad faith,' which she inherited from the works of Jean-Paul Sartre. 'Bad faith' refers to the self-deception individuals engage in when they evade the full weight of their freedom and responsibility (Nicholas, 2021). The pursuit of a fulfilling life, according to Beauvoir, necessitates confronting the inherent ambiguity of existence without succumbing to the comforts of 'bad faith.' Individuals must recognize their freedom not only as a source of potential but also as a source of moral responsibility.

When we discuss Beauvoir's philosophy, we can identify the ethical dimensions that emerge in her discussion of existentialism. This ethical dimension emphasizes on recognizing the freedom of others. Beauvoir declares that true freedom requires acknowledging the freedom of others. This means that true freedom is the idea of dispelling the temptation to reduce others to mere instruments or objects or tools. This ethical imperative reiterates the existentialist notion that one's freedom is complexly tangled to the freedom of others which can also be understood in terms of interdependence that forms the ethical

composition of a meaningful life. Beauvoir's reflection of ambiguity encompasses existential response to the contingency of human life. In admitting the contingent nature of existence, individuals confront the unpredictability of their circumstances and the essential uncertainties of life. Beauvoir writes that "Man is condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does" (Heckman, 2015). This sentence to freedom suggests that there is a constant conciliation of human beings with ambiguity. As individuals navigate the ethical choices presented by the contingencies of life, they face this constant conflict or conciliation.

A key example from Beauvoir's own life and work that demonstrates individual autonomy and freedom is her relationship with Jean-Paul Sartre. Even though these two were involved in an intellectual and romantic relationship, Beauvoir's writings, including The Ethics of Ambiguity, reveal her obligation to sustaining her individual freedom and intellectual autonomy. Her life becomes a living proof to the challenges and possibilities innate in the ambiguous territory of private and intellectual relationships while upholding the ethical responsibility to oneself and others. This background directs individuals in their search for happiness by urging them to confront the complications of existence, exercise authentic freedom, and engage ethically with the contingent nature of life. Moreover, Beauvoir's ethics of ambiguity contribute to the ongoing dialogue about the nature of ethical responsibility and the pursuit of a fulfilling life. The recognition of ambiguity, the rejection of 'bad faith,' and the recognition of the interdependence of freedom offer one of the most significant ethical frameworks within both existential and continent philosophy. In conclusion, Simone de Beauvoir's The Ethics of Ambiguity provides an insightful existentialist perspective on the ethical dimensions of the pursuit of a fulfilling life.

4.   Navigating the Continental Philosophy on 'Happy Life'

At this stage, continent philosophy can be considered as one of the key philosophical eras where several philosophers have presented their views on existentialism and Emmanuel Levinas was one such philosopher. Levinas was one of the key figures in contemporary continental philosophy. He carries a unique ethical perspective to the existential consideration of happiness and meaning that goes above and beyond the approaches of his predecessors (Marcus, 2018). One of the concepts that is central to Levinas' philosophy is the concept of the 'face of the Other'. Levinas asserts that confronting or encountering another person commonly leads to an ethical responsibility that surpasses individual autonomy (Drazenovich, 2005). He states, "The face commands, calls, and requires the Other, without reducing him to sameness." In Levinas' framework, true happiness is intertwined with ethical responsibility, emerging from the recognition and response to the infinite Other. Levinas' philosophy challenges the

individualistic pursuit of happiness by emphasizing the ethical imperative to prioritize the well-being of others (Cepulis, 2012). In the encounter with the Other, individuals confront the ethical demand to go beyond self-interest, opening avenues for profound interpersonal connections and contributing to the larger project of creating a meaningful life (Anderson, 2019).

On the other hand, Maurice Merleau-Ponty who is known for his work on phenomenology, offers comprehensions into the existential quest for meaning through his exploration of embodiment and lived experience (Dufourcq, 2022). Merleau-Ponty contends that our perception and understanding of the world are intricately tied to our bodily existence. In Phenomenology of Perception, he posits, "My body is in the world as the heart is in the organism" (Slatman, 2005). According to Merleau-Ponty, meaning is not an abstract intellectual construct but is rooted in the embodied engagement with the world. For Merleau-Ponty, happiness is found in the richness of lived experience, where the body serves as the mediator between the self and the world (Merleau-Ponty & Smith, 1962). The meaningful life emerges from the dynamic interplay between the body and the environment, highlighting the importance of direct, unmediated engagement with one's surroundings. This suggests that happiness is not merely the mental state of an individual but also an embodied and relational phenomenon.

Moreover, another contemporary continental philosopher that can be discussed here is Alain Badiou who is known for his engagement with ontology and political philosophy. Just like Levinas and Merleau-Ponty, Badiou offers a unique perspective on happiness through his exploration of truth, events, and subjectivity. In Being and Event, Badiou speculates that genuine change and happiness are commonly the result of transformative events that disrupt the existing order (Brassier, 2006; Roffe, 2006). Badiou implies that, "An event is not a modification of the situation; it is the creation of a new world." This is because Badiou argues that happiness is directly and closely connected to the courage to embrace transformative events that challenge the existing status quo within the society or within the individuals. Badiou's emphasis on the subjective warrant to truth and fidelity to transformative events provides a new and unique way through which we can approach the search for meaning. Furthermore, Badious argues that happiness transpires from the ethical and subjective engagement with events that impel individuals beyond the constraints of the established order. In this manner, the pursuit of a meaningful life implicates an active involvement in the establishment of new possibilities and truths.

Navigation of Existential Ambiguities by Unravelling the Complexities of the Pursuit of Happiness

When we indulge deep into the existential discussion of happiness or 'happy life' for individuals, the background becomes increasingly complicated. This is because it is marked by concepts of tensions, anxieties, and ethical dilemmas. In this section, we critically analyze the existential ambiguities that arise

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when happiness is contemplated within the context of existentialist thought. The relationship amongst individual freedom, the quest for meaning, existential anxiety, and the ethical dimensions of happiness are scrutinized, drawing on real-life examples and existential insights.

4.1 Individual Freedom and the Paradox of Choice

Existentialist thought places a profound emphasis on individual freedom as the foundation for the pursuit of a meaningful and happy life. However, this freedom is not without its paradoxes. The very autonomy that allows individuals to shape their destinies also presents them with the burden of choice— a paradox encapsulated in the concept of 'existential angst' (Schwartz, 2015). The existential ambiguity arises as the freedom to choose, a cornerstone of existentialist thought, then becomes a source of distress and uncertainty (Madan et al., 2020). The existentialist tension emerges when individuals are confronted with the vast array of possibilities and the responsibility to navigate their own path (Schwartz & Ward, 2004). Consider the modern experience of choice overload in contemporary societies. It can be observed that when individuals are presented with an excess of opportunities in career paths, relationships, and lifestyle choices, they usually face the anxiety of making the 'right' decision. In conclusion, the pursuit of happiness becomes snared with the challenge of authentically exercising freedom within the vast array of choices.

4.2 Existential Anxiety and the Search for Certainty

One of the most significant yet pervasive themes within existentialist approach is the existential anxiety which obscures the pursuit of happiness. The acknowledgment of life's integral or innate uncertainties as well as the inevitability of death, and the absence of predetermined meaning permeate existence with anxiety (Routledge et al., 2009). However, it is also key to reflect here that this anxiety is not pathological, rather it is a necessary characteristic of the human condition or a recognition that individuals need to tackle the unknown and deal or cope with the limits of their own existence (Arrowood et al., 2022). Whenever there is the fear of the unknown, the impermanence of life, and the existential dread associated with the passage of time, then it can mitigate or hinder the search for a meaningful and happy life for individuals. Existential ambiguities surface as individuals traverse the tension between the desire for well-being and the irrevocability of uncertainty (Kossowska & Sekerdej, 2015). Therefore, the pursuit of happiness becomes a difficult mediation with existential anxiety, requiring individuals to cultivate resilience and find meaning amongst the innate uncertainties of life.

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4.3 Ethical Considerations and the Interconnectedness of Happiness

Existentialist philosophers, from Levinas to Arendt, emphasize the ethical dimensions of human existence. The pursuit of happiness is not isolated but intricately connected to the well-being of others and the ethical responsibilities that arise in the communal sphere. The existential ambiguity emerges as individuals navigate the tension between personal happiness and the ethical imperative to consider the happiness of others. Consider real-life examples where individuals wrestle with ethical choices in the pursuit of happiness. A person chasing a beneficial career prospect may face the ethical dilemma of compromising values for personal gain and this can potentially impact the well-being of others. Existential ambiguity happens as individuals face the ethical complexities inherent in their pursuit of happiness which balances personal aspirations with the connexion of human existence.

In the context of corporate management, guidance as well as leadership, existential ambiguities are visible blatantly. Executives and leaders usually face decisions that directly affect the happiness and livelihoods of their employees. The pursuit of financial success and personal achievement can strike with ethical contemplations. This is because leaders search the bridge between organizational goals and the well-being of the workforce. The existential anxiety develops as leaders cope with the obligation to nurture a positive and ethical work environment while struggling for personal and organizational success. The pursuit of happiness in existentialist thought shows how it relates to ethical existential ambiguities. The paradox of individual freedom, the existential anxiety inherent in the human condition, and the ethical considerations of interconnected happiness contribute to the complexity of this pursuit. When we acknowledge these ambiguities, it helps individuals to engage authentically with the challenges and uncertainties of life, and helps them in building resilience, ethical responsibility, and a more philosophical understanding of the complex relationship amongst freedom, meaning, and happiness.

5. Conclusion

In summary, this paper has indulged into the convergence of the pursuit of a 'happy life' and existentialist principles within the framework of contemporary continental thought. The quintessence of this conversation lies in recognizing and tackling existential ambiguities rather than seeking facile resolutions. The foundational principle of existentialism, the assertion of individual freedom, present both a source of empowerment and a profound challenge. While it presents individuals the agency to shape their destinies, the paradoxical burden of choice becomes clear in the face of distinct possibilities in life. The existentialist framework requires us to recognize that happiness is not a straightforward destination, rather it is a dynamic process which is shaped by the authentic exercise of freedom within

life's countless choices. The paper also identified the connection between existential anxiety and human happiness. The essay has presented a compelling case study of ethical dilemmas in corporate leadership which underscores the relevance of existential considerations in real-world scenarios. This concept emerged as a proof to the irrevocability of uncertainty. However, existentialist approach asks us to see this anxiety as an innate part of human condition rather than viewing anxiety as an impediment to happiness. In discussing existential anxiety, the essay has also discussed that individuals can cultivate resilience with the help of incorporating the ambiguities of life. The choices made by leaders impact not only their own happiness but also that of their employees. The existential tension is palpable as leaders navigate the intricacies of organizational success while safeguarding the ethical fabric of their decisions. Ethical contemplations entwine a key thread into the existential fabric of the pursuit of a 'happy life.' Happiness outspreads beyond individual satisfaction to incorporate the well-being of others. In simple words, this research and investigation suggested that the pursuit of a 'happy life' is not a linear path, rather it is a dynamic arrangement with the difficulties of existence. Existential ambiguities do not negate the possibility of happiness but infuse it with depth and substance. The pursuit becomes a continual process of self-discovery, ethical reflection, and the authentic exercise of freedom. As we stand at the intersection of existentialist principles and the quest for happiness, the call is not to unravel every ambiguity but to embrace the inherent uncertainties of life.

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