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ARTICLE

Existential Happiness

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Abstract

Existential happiness is happiness that one has a basic life at all. Having a basic life, as I understand it, involves being the subject of experiences and being an agent in some minimal sense. As I argue, existential happiness is a fitting response to having a basic life. To make this argument, I look at two possible accounts of the fittingness of existential happiness: the value of a basic life and attachment to the constitutive elements of one's life. I also consider a few possible sources of existential happiness, including encounters with death, counterfactual thinking, and hedonically positive feelings of awe directed toward one's own consciousness.

Keywords: existential happiness; the value of lives; the value of consciousness; existential terror; happiness; emotion; well-being

1. Introduction

Ben Bradley describes the experience of existential terror as the sense of horror or dread you might feel when you reflect on the fact that "at some point in the future you will cease to exist altogether… and you will never come back" (2015, 409). The phenomenon of existential terror has received a good amount of deserved attention (e.g., Behrendt 2019; Scheffler 2016). However, there is an overlooked and equally important emotion that is in some ways the opposite of existential terror: existential happiness.[1] This was first pointed out to me by Chris Nettles. It is the sort of feeling expressed by Shelly Kagan (2012, 302) when he writes about his life,

> Although it's a pity I do not get more, I'm extremely lucky to have gotten as much as I get. My own view is that the universe is just this swirling mass of atoms, forming clumps of various kinds of things, and then having those clumps dissolve or break apart. Most of those atoms do not get to be alive at all. Most of those atoms do not get to be a person, falling in love, seeing sunsets, eating ice cream. It's extraordinarily lucky of us to be in this select, fortunate few…

Here, Kagan does not just feel happy about having good things in his life. He is happy about getting "to be a person" (2012, 303).[2] Seemingly, he is happy to have a basic life at all. Let us call this feeling 'existential happiness.'

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[1] At risk of being pedantic, existential happiness is only the opposite of existential terror in some ways because, as we will see, their objects are not perfect opposites. Moreover, the attitudes taken toward these objects are not perfect opposites either, as the real opposite of happiness is, obviously, unhappiness.

[2] As Kagan (2012, 302–3) also noted, Kurt Vonnegut (2009, 220–2) expressed this sort of idea when imagining a certain deathbed prayer: "God made mud.…God said to some of the mud, 'Sit up !…See all I've made,' God said. 'The hills, the sea, the sky, the stars.' …And I was some of the mud that got to sit up and look around ….I got so much, and most mud got so little.… Now mud lies down again and goes to sleep … What memories for mud to have ….I loved everything I saw."

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What does it mean to have a basic life? I take some being to have a basic life if (1) the being is the subject of (conscious) experiences and (2) the being is an agent in some minimal sense (that is, it can have or perform intentional thoughts or actions). For a being to have a basic life, there must be something it is like to be that being. A p-zombie—something that looks and acts like a person but is not the subject of any experiences—does not have a basic life. However, it is not enough just to be the subject of experiences. Something might be the subject of experiences while having no agency. Imagine, for example, a human whose every thought and action is remotely controlled by an alien scientist. Even if this human has experiences, she has not had a basic life. Indeed, it seems that one way in which the alien scientist has potentially harmed or wronged this person is by robbing her of the opportunity to have a basic life. Having a basic life entails that one has some input into how that life goes or, at the very least, how one thinks about it. However, having a life need not entail that one is an agent in any robust sense (e.g., a rational, self-conscious deliberator); it might just entail that one has intentions (compare Kagan 2019, 17–8). Animals such as sparrows and mice have basic lives despite not being rational, self-conscious deliberators in some robust sense.

Being glad that one has a basic life full-stop is not the same as being glad that one has the particular life that one has (as opposed to possible alternatives). Let us call the latter kind of happiness "happiness about particulars," which is happiness about the particular features of one's life. If existential happiness is directed at features of one's life, they are universal features, those features that are constitutive of having a basic life. The existentially happy person, then, is just someone experiencing happiness about having a basic life *at all.*

It may be useful, however, to think of existential happiness and happiness about particulars as two extremes on a spectrum. We might call many cases of happiness 'existential happiness' if they fall close enough to that side of the spectrum and likewise with happiness about particulars. To illustrate, consider Jep. Jep is happy about being alive because he likes being a writer, has a beautiful house, and loves his many friends. Jep's happiness is largely happiness about particulars, although he still might be happy if he had some other beautiful house or creative job. Now consider Hirayama. Hirayama is happy about being alive because he likes sitting outside, feeling the changes in the weather, listening to music, and watching the lights play in the leaves on his lunch break.[3] I am prone to call Hirayama existentially happy. Of course, one can have sentience and agency without ever sitting outside or hearing music (say, people who live on a space station). But the features of Hirayama's life that he is happy about, compared to Jep, are much more universal, even if they are not all so universal as to be necessary features of a basic life. For simplicity, however, I will mostly focus on pure and clear cases of existential happiness.

I will argue that existential happiness is a fitting response to having a basic life. In section two, we will explore a couple of reasons why existential happiness is a rationally fitting response to having a basic life: the intrinsic value of a basic life and one's attachment to the elements of a basic life. In the third section, we will consider a few psychological explanations for the occurrence of existential happiness: encounters with death, contentment about having a basic life, and awe about one's own subjective experience. But while these accounts explore different reasons for the rational fittingness and occurrence of existential happiness, the phenomenon itself—happiness about having a basic life—will remain the same.[4]

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[3] I borrow the character of Hirayama from the film *Perfect Days* (Wenders 2023).

[4] While my use of the term "existential" here does not refer to existentialism as a philosophical tradition, it would still, as one reviewer has suggested, be a promising area of research to see how the notion of existential happiness would be received by various existentialist philosophers like Kierkegaard.

2. The Rationality of Existential Happiness

The most obvious reason why it makes sense to be happy about having a basic life is that having a basic life is a good thing. Thomas Nagel suggested something like this when he wrote, “There are elements which, if added to one’s experience, make life better; there are other elements which, if added to one’s experience, make life worse. But what remains when these are set aside is not merely neutral: it is emphatically positive” (1970).[5] David Chalmers similarly suggested that all sentient creatures, even those with no capacity for happiness or suffering (creatures he nicknames “Vulcans”), have lives with morally significant value (2022, 332). As Chalmers (2022, 333) wrote,

> suppose you are faced with a situation in which you can kill a Vulcan in order to save an hour on the way to work. It would obviously be morally wrong to kill the Vulcan. In fact, it would be monstrous. It does not matter that the Vulcan has no happiness or suffering in its future. It’s a conscious creature with a rich conscious life. It cannot be morally dismissed in the way that we might dismiss a zombie or a rock.

Chalmers’ intuition seems right even if Vulcans have no desires regarding their continued existence. This suggests that being the subject of experiences is important and valuable in itself. After all, the intrinsic value of being the subject of experiences seems like a natural explanation for the moral wrongness of killing Vulcans (compare Pho and Thompson 2023, 93). This value might be *sui generis*, as Chalmers seems to think. Or, as Takuya Niikawa (forthcoming) suggests, consciousness may have intrinsic aesthetic value due to its complexity and the other unique characteristics that make it awe-inspiring.[6] In either case, a world full of Vulcans seems more valuable than a world full of creatures with no experiences at all.

Andrew Y. Lee, however, thinks that Nagel’s assertion is mistaken. If Nagel were correct, Lee thinks, then an otherwise empty world with a single suffering creature (at least at some sufficiently low level of suffering) would be more valuable than one where the creature is, say, not the subject of any experiences. Lee takes this sort of conclusion to be implausible (2018, 664). Presumably, Lee would endorse the same sort of test for the value of having a basic life. Thus, the possibility that having a basic life is intrinsically valuable entails a similar conclusion. This might mean that it is implausible that having a basic life is good. It is quite plausible that the intrinsic value of consciousness is easily outweighed by suffering. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily imply that consciousness has no intrinsic value. Indeed, if we specify exactly how low the suffering of Lee’s creature needs to be in the thought experiment for the creature’s consciousness to remain a good thing, it might no longer seem intuitive that the world where the creature is not the subject of any experiences is indeed better. Imagine that this creature lives a psychologically rich life, but one of neutral hedonic valence, except for one moment when it stubs its toe. It is not obvious that this mere toe-stubbing suddenly makes it the case that the world where the creature is not the subject of any experiences is a better world. It is even less obvious that the world where the creature is not the subject of any experiences is better than a world where the creature has had both experiences of pleasure and suffering in equal amounts but then stubs its toe, tipping the scales slightly toward suffering.[7]

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[5] Let us assume here that Nagel had something in mind besides *hedonic* positivity.

[6] See section three. One might also consider the perspective of a cosmic explorer who, after centuries of travel, discovers an inhabited planet and sees other sentient creatures for the first time. Certainly the categorically different nature and highly-specific structure of such beings and their mental lives would warrant awe.

[7] At any rate, my own case against Lee is potentially stronger than Nagel’s case. Since a basic life involves more than just being a conscious subject, we also have to take into account the potential value of being an agent. Imagine, for example, an unpopulated planet filled with active (but not sentient) vacuuming robots and an otherwise identical planet filled with stationary (but equally expensive) vacuums. Other things being equal, it would seem worse to destroy the world filled with vacuuming robots. This suggests that minimal agency possesses some intrinsic value (see also Kagan 2019, 16–30).

Lee (2022) would respond here with another challenge. If life in itself were valuable, he would say, then an "empty life…devoid of any goods or bads (except for life itself)" that lasts forever would be better than an "excellent life…[i.e.] a life with an average quality very far above zero" of normal length. The idea that the eternal, 'empty' life is better than the normal, excellent one is not obviously unintuitive, but let us suppose that it is. Lee relies here on the same kinds of intuitions that may lead us astray when making judgments about cases like Parfit's "repugnant conclusion".[8]

First, as Michael Huemer points out, "we should be wary of intuitions whose reliability turns on our appreciating large numbers. This is because, beyond a certain magnitude, all large quantities strike our imagination much the same" (2008, 908). And, as Huemer notes, we have a "tendency to underestimate the effect of compounding a small quantity. Of particular interest is our failure to appreciate how a very small value, when compounded many times, can become a great value" (2008, 910). This would seem to show the epistemic weakness of Lee's appeal to the intuitive plausibility that a normal, excellent life is superior to an 'empty' and infinitely long life. After all, it would seem to conflict with other common intuitions (e.g., that Vulcans' lives have some value) and we have just seen two plausible explanations for why Lee's intuition might be unreliable. As far as having a basic life is an intrinsically good thing, then, absent defeaters, existential happiness is a fitting response to having a basic life.[9]

So far, I have discussed how existential happiness is a rationally fitting response to having a basic life due to the intrinsic value of a basic life. However, this is not the only reason to be existentially happy. Another good reason one might be existentially happy is out of attachment to the elements of a basic life. In the introduction, we contrasted existential happiness with happiness about particulars, which is happiness about one's life because of its particular features. Many of our attachments, such as loving relationships, will ground happiness about particulars rather than existential happiness because of the particularity of the objects of one's attachment. Nevertheless, it is plausible that the elements of a basic life—having experiences or being an agent—could be fitting objects of our attachment.

The attachment model might independently overcome the aforementioned issues brought up by Lee (2018) against the model of existential happiness' reasonableness that was based on the goodness of having a basic life. This is because attachment can ground the fittingness of certain attitudes that value alone cannot. Kai Draper (1999, 410–3), for example, wrote of the loss of objects of our attachment, "The problem with such a loss is not simply that you are deprived of any benefits that may result from the presence of the object of your attachment.… Should I learn that soon I will see a dear friend for the last time, I would dread my loss even… if this loss would be neither unpleasant for me nor even something of which I am aware."[10] As Draper (1999) realized, the fittingness of our attachments do not covary as cleanly with the value of their objects as does, say, the fittingness of our desires. Indeed, it is typical of love and attachment that these attitudes do not depend only on the value instantiated by their objects. We may even regard someone incapable of this sort of attitude as deficient in character. And as far as it is rationally fitting to feel attached to the elements of a basic life, it is also rational to experience existential happiness when reflecting on one's possession of a basic life.

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[8] Parfit's "repugnant conclusion" is that some world "z," featuring a large population with lives just barely worth living, would at some sufficiently large population level be better than some world "a" that featured a much smaller population living excellent lives. As Lee (2022) argued, "In response to the Repugnant Conclusion, one cannot reject the stipulation that each person in z has a life barely worth living (since that is simply how the scenario is defined)," but one can reject the supposition that an infinitely long, "empty" life has any value. As we will see, this response does not pacify any worries about the ways in which our intuitions in both cases might be flawed and misleading. But even setting concerns about these intuitions aside, we might still worry that Lee's method of casting doubt on the intrinsic value of consciousness could be used to analogously argue against the value of things like virtue or innocent pleasure.

[9] The intrinsic value of a basic life also gives each person at least one reason to live. This reason is just so that one can have a basic life. After all, insofar as a basic life is intrinsically valuable, it would be rational to want to have a basic life. This sort of desire would be what Bernard Williams (1993) calls a "categorical desire," the sort of desire that is not contingent on one's continued existence and which indeed gives one reason to live. I take it that the reasonableness of desiring a basic life implies that we have a reason to have a basic life. And this is just a reason to live.

[10] See also Scheffler (2016). Similar accounts are often given of loving relationships. See, for example, Kreft (2022).

3. Sources of Existential Happiness

In the last section, I have discussed two reasons why existential happiness is a rationally fitting response to having a basic life. In this section, I will describe three potential sources for the occurrence of existential happiness in human experience. These sources include reflections upon and encounters with death, regarding our own conscious experience as sublime or awe-inspiring, and counterfactual thinking. These accounts can help us make sense of why experiences of existential happiness, for most of us, only occur sometimes and why they occur when they do.

Sometimes, certain experiences and reflections make salient our attachment to the elements of a basic life. One such experience involves closely encountering death. This sort of experience is captured by David Foster Wallace in a passage from a short story where a character is anticipating his death, which will occur later that day. The character reports that his thoughts are full of the

> generic things that almost anyone who's confronting imminent death will end up thinking. As in, 'This is the last time I will ever tie my shoe', 'This is the last time I will look at this rubber tree on top of the stereo cabinet', 'How delicious this lungful of air right here tastes', 'This is the last glass of milk I'll ever drink', 'What a totally priceless gift this totally ordinary sight of the wind picking trees' branches up and moving them around is'. Or, 'I will never again hear the plaintive sound of the fridge going on in the kitchen'.…Or, 'I won't see the sun come up tomorrow or watch the bedroom gradually undim and resolve, etc.' (Wallace 2005, 173).

Plausibly, impending death can render 'totally ordinary' experiences into 'priceless gifts' because it makes our attachment to *experience itself* or *agency itself* particularly salient.[11] We could even imagine Wallace's narrator sadly reflecting on the last time he will stub his toe, taste a stale cookie, answer annoying emails, or take out the trash. The very ability to have experiences and do things, the very grounding of our lives, seems to warrant our attachment.[12]

Similarly, in situations where one narrowly avoids death or has some similar experience, the increased salience of one's attachment to these elements of one's life can make one's attachment to them an occurrent mental state. This occurrent mental state, coupled with the belief that one securely has these objects of one's attachment, seems like a fitting situation for the experience of existential happiness. It seems fitting, for example, when waking up from a dream where one was dying from lung cancer and suddenly finding oneself safe in one's bed, to feel happy just to have a basic life.[13]

Another source of existential happiness has to do with the sublime and awe-inspiring qualities of conscious experience itself. To see how, it will help to turn toward some of the literature on existential terror. As mentioned in the introduction, existential happiness has some important overlap with existential terror. Both emotions involve an abstract and in some sense positive reflection on one's existence. So it is not surprising that the literature on existential terror should be useful for understanding existential happiness. In particular, we will look at how some philosophers have cashed out existential terror as a response to a perceived threat to one's frame of reference. The same disorientation that has been cited as an explanation for existential terror may also be able to explain the occurrence of existential happiness.

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[11] Compare Pratte (2021, 166–71).

[12] One reviewer has noted a potential tension here with the Buddhist emphasis on freedom from attachment (see, e.g., Garfield 2015). It is true that a Buddhist might not recommend being attached even to one's own life, which is, after all, transient, since such attachment will ultimately produce suffering (*dukkha*). On the one hand, this is not a special problem for my account, but for any philosophical position that asserts the rational desirability or attachment-worthiness of some transient good. On the other hand, my account might be even less vulnerable to such criticisms than those regarding other such goods due to the fact that—in a certain sense—the elements of a basic life are the least transient things in one's life to which one might be attached.

[13] See also Frias et al. (2011). A similar phenomenon can occur with emotions close to existential happiness. To use an autobiographical example, after recovering from panic disorder and agoraphobia, I was suddenly extremely happy to do all of the simple, ordinary things that the disorder had previously made difficult for me, such as shopping for groceries.

Kathy Behrendt thinks that the prospect of annihilation disrupts our usual sense of our own subjective viewpoint. This causes fear, she thinks, since this disruption unmoors us from the "basis for (amongst other things) valuation itself," causing a "meaning disruption…where 'meaning' here is…denoting 'sense' rather than 'significance'"(2019, 22–3). This is seemingly because the prospect of annihilation highlights the contingency of our subjective viewpoints. This, in turn, might reveal the contingency of our own particular ways of making sense of the world, something that usually does not seem contingent in everyday life (compare Jacobson 2009). Thomas Nagel (1986), similarly, thinks that the expectation of annihilation achieves a disorienting effect because it involves the (temporary) cessation of a cognitive illusion that one's subjective existence is "a universe of possibilities that stands by itself," and so concerns the "disappearance of an inner world that had not been thought of as a contingent manifestation at all" (Nagel 1986, 227–8).

Consider that one can think of one's inner life in terms of experiential possibilities that are, to an extent, explainable in terms of more basic experiential possibilities. But there is a point at which such explanations bottom out. The possibility of one's having visual or spatial experiences generally, for example, does not seem explainable in terms of any other subjective possibility. By analogy, imagine a painting of a pomegranate. The pomegranate has parts, such as seeds and flesh. But the flesh of the pomegranate is not in turn composed of paintings of the pomegranate's chemical compounds; instead, it is made of the chemical compounds of paint. The painting has 'bottomed out' since what makes up the pomegranate flesh is no longer something inside the painting's represented ontology. In the same way that the flesh of the pomegranate seems basic in the ontology of the painting, so do the elements of our possible subjective experiences seem ontologically basic to us from inside. What Nagel suggests is disturbing about annihilation is that our inner world—in ordinary, unreflective circumstances—does not seem like the sort of thing that could not exist.

Disorientation from one's usual frame of reference, however, need not be a negative experience. Existential happiness plausibly involves a similar step back from one's usual point of view and marveling at the fact that one has a point of view at all. Just as the future annihilation of one's point of view might force one to confront the contingency of the background of one's experiences, so might the appreciation of the very fact of one's having a point of view. Feeling happy about having a life, in this sense, involves a positive sense of wonder at one's existence. This may necessitate a certain disengagement with one's usual egoic frame of reference, since the appreciation of having a point of view involves having one's point of view as the object of one's thought. This disengagement may also be involved in the disruption of sense-making that Behrendt discusses. To see the world without our usual way of evaluating or making sense of it may similarly amount to feeling disengaged from one's egoic frame of reference. This may be a source of existential happiness as much as existential terror and is a common feature of experiences of the sublime.

As Tom Cochrane (2012) suggested, feelings of "self-negation" are central to experiences of the sublime. A sense of the sublime can be evoked by colossal objects like stars and mountains and even by profound insights. As Cochrane wrote, when "we are suddenly confronted by a scene of tremendous complexity, intensity or magnitude, we are often momentarily overwhelmed by the task of perceiving the object and gasp as if struck. A comparable experience can occur when we appreciate concepts or theories of great profundity for the first time" (2012, 129). These experiences are moments of self-negation insofar as the task of "perceiving the object makes us feel reduced or overwhelmed" (2012, 129).[14] This all seems like a very plausible description of Nagel contemplating his annihilation, a thought that “the mind tends to veer away from…always startling, often frightening,” and similar to “thinking you were safely on the ground and suddenly you look down and notice that you’re standing on a narrow girder a thousand feet above the pavement” (1986, 226–8). Importantly, however, experiences of awe often involve a sense of both fear and attraction. This is why reflecting on the contingency of one’s point of view can evoke both a sense of terror and a sense of appreciation. Both effects can even emerge in the context of reflecting on one’s annihilation. As Kevin Aho wrote, many terminally ill patients “who were initially horrified at their diagnosis” eventually came to find their “remaining days often lit up with a sense of urgency and deep meaning; the gravity of their condition pulled them away from frivolous quarrels and ego-driven concerns toward a feeling of happiness for the short time that was left” (2022, 22).

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[14] See also Keltner (2023).

This sort of experience can occur independently from reflections on death. Plausibly, it is an aspect of the sorts of experiences that some people seek out through practices such as meditation or taking psychedelic drugs. Encountering the sublimity of consciousness, however, might normally require no more elaborate means than mere introspection. As Takuya Niikawa (forthcoming) writes,

> I sometimes have a strong emotional feeling when I introspect on my own consciousness… [it] appears as something extremely enigmatic concerning its relation to the physical world and at the same time incomparably significant for me, in that it gives meaning to my existence and life; I also marvel at the well-organized complexity of consciousness….While I strongly desire to understand and uncover the nature of consciousness….I also feel the limits of my own intellect….This emotional experience has at its core a strong aesthetic pleasure, but is also accompanied by the discomfort of facing…the essential limit of my intellect….This emotional experience also seems to have the general properties that characterize aesthetic experiences….[T]he awe experience gained through such introspection involves absorbed attention distancing from everyday concerns….Therefore, it is plausible to regard the emotional experience as aesthetic awe.

So existential happiness can emerge through reflection on one’s own subjective experience because one’s subjectivity per se warrants a positive experience of awe. This is because awe-inspiring experiences often warrant and give rise to happiness. An astronaut looking at the earth from space or spelunker discovering a massive cave will likely feel not just awe but happy about their views.

All of these reflections are, admittedly, rough and preliminary. Still, at least as far as Nagel (1986) and Behrendt’s (2019) accounts of existential terror are plausible, they seem to ground an equally plausible account of a source of existential happiness. One might object here that even though consciousness is awesome, it is unclear why this feature would create a reaction of existential happiness. Consider, by analogy, Jupiter’s Great Red Spot. There is something awe-inspiring about this storm. However, the mere existence of the spot does not make us happy. While it is true that the mere existence of awe-inspiring things need not always make us happy, it is fitting to be happy about getting to experience awe-inspiring things. Gazing at Jupiter’s Great Red Spot in a telescope would fittingly evoke positive feelings of awe. The case of experiencing awe over one’s own consciousness is, of course, different insofar as it involves marveling at experience itself. But this difference, it seems, only makes one’s own consciousness an even more understandable object for a positive feeling of awe. After all, what seems to make Jupiter’s Great Red Spot the fitting object of a positive feeling of awe, rather than a neutral one, is precisely its becoming a part of one’s experience.

Let us, finally, consider one other way in which existential happiness might emerge in one’s experience: through counterfactual thinking. To see how, let us consider the phenomenon of contentedness. Cheshire Calhoun (2017, 331–2) understands contentedness as involving counterfactual thinking and an assessment of one’s present condition as “good enough” in relation to the evaluative facts and one’s framework of expectations. Contentment, finally, involves acceptance of the "imperfections of our condition and…is a form of propositional gratitude," which is "gratitude that something occurred" (2017, 332–45).[15] Many times, existential happiness seems to emerge through a similar process. Indeed, it is just this line of thinking that Shelly Kagan expressed when he remarked, "Although it's a pity I don't get more, I'm extremely lucky to have gotten as much as I get" (2012, 302). Kagan is responding to the fact of his death by entertaining the possibility that he might not have existed at all. He adjusts his expectation framework to account for his luck over getting to have a life at all and expresses contentment about the fact.

As Calhoun suggested, contentment relies on an expectation framework that determines the stance one takes toward the evaluative facts of one's situation (2017, 336). In particular, contentment results from an expectation framework under which one is happy about how things turned out. As we have seen above, Kagan hinted toward a luck-based framework of expectation about one's own existence. In this framework, one could not have really expected to have been born at all. One's existence in the universe, after all, is the result of an uncountable number of contingent events, the probability of which, when taken all together, is infinitesimally small.[16] Reflecting on this fact, we might feel extremely lucky about getting to have a basic life.

4. Conclusion

To feel existential happiness is to feel happy about the fact that one has a basic life. Having a basic life is here understood as being the subject of experiences and being an agent in at least a minimal sense. As I have suggested, existential happiness is a fitting response to having a basic life. This is because a basic life is valuable and because it is rationally fitting to feel attached to the elements of a basic life. Experiences of existential happiness, I have suggested, can emerge from close encounters with death, counterfactual thinking, or through experiences of awe over one's own subjective experience. Although I have not discussed such reasons, it is likely that there are also practical reasons for cultivating a disposition to experience existential happiness. The abstract and deep appreciation for life in experiences of existential happiness will certainly enrich one's life, and the tendency to experience existential happiness likely qualifies as a virtue of appreciation.[17] Such issues make for promising areas for future research on this important emotion.[18]

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[15] We might, taking Kagan's (2012, 303) advice, speak of a sense of fortunateness instead of happiness in certain cases.

[16] This is true, at least, if we do not live in a multiverse (especially an infinite multiverse). Even in such a case, however, one might feel fortunate for having gotten to live at all insofar as fortune, as opposed to luck, simply involves whether an event is significant and outside of one's control (see Porter 2022). One also might attune one's framework not to what is likely but to what exceeds what one is entitled to (compare Calhoun 2017, 340–4).

[17] Compare Calhoun (2017).

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