THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF WELL-BEING UNDER CONDITIONS OF WAR: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE TRANSFORMATION OF EXPERIENCING HAPPINESS AND WELL-BEING IN THE PRE-WAR PERIOD AND DURING FULL-SCALE WAR (THE UKRAINIAN EXPERIENCE)

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.30525/978-9934-26-715-4-45

Abstract. This chapter provides a comprehensive phenomenological analysis of the transformation in the existential perception and internal experience of well-being, happiness, and prosperity in Ukrainian society under the conditions of full-scale war in comparison with the pre-war period. *The purpose of the study* is to conceptualize the phenomenon of well-being through the prism of phenomenological description, to reveal the specifics of the transformation of Ukrainians' lived experience, and to identify the key existential concepts of experiencing happiness amidst the war-trauma challenge. *Research methodology* relies on phenomenological and comparative analyses, as well as the hermeneutic method of existential analysis of texts and testimonies. The comparative-historical paradigm was employed to contrast pre-war criteria of well-being (oriented toward individual self-realization, material stability, and hedonistic dimensions) with wartime realities, which triggered shifts in the foundational structures of human being-in-the-world (where survival, community solidarity, and mutual aid emerged as priority values). *Results.* It is demonstrated that the full-scale war led to a profound disruption of the phenomenon of well-being and shattered the horizon of the future, transforming it from a space of

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possibilities into a space of uncertainty and threat. A distinct shift occurred from external-material and objectified forms toward an intensive internal-existential experience. It was established that under existential threat, happiness transforms from a «category of accumulation» into a «category of presence» and a «category of solidarity», accompanied by the experience of the phenomenon of so-called «micro-happiness» (the joy of a moment of silence during the absence of shelling, access to heat, light, and water, which become conscious blessings). Well-being is no longer perceived as a linear movement toward success, but rather as an experience of the fullness of being within a fragile perception of the «here and now», as the ability to find meaning, calm, and psychological resilience within collective resistance and mutual support. *Practical significance.* The findings can be applied to the development of existentially grounded methods of social and psychological therapy, state and public rehabilitation programs, as well as in teaching courses on phenomenology, philosophical anthropology, and the sociology of extreme conditions. *Value/originality.* The originality of this research lies in its pioneering systematization of the unique Ukrainian experience of living through war via a philosophical-phenomenological inquiry into how the structure of the subjective experience of happiness changes and how the internal resilience of Ukrainians is formed through transformed modalities of well-being in a boundary situation. *Conclusion.* The full-scale war fundamentally altered the existential dimension of the phenomenon of well-being. Happiness and prosperity cease to be categories of surplus or the accumulation of material and emotional resources; instead, they have transformed into essential dimensions of existential fortitude. The criteria of well-being have shifted from individual comfort to collective support and mutual trust, defined by the capacity to preserve human dignity, find meaning in resistance, and live and create despite destructive circumstances.

INTRODUCTION

Extreme social upheavals, such as high-intensity warfare, radically transform not only a society's socio-economic institutions, but also the deep structures of human experience and life. Prior to 2022, the understanding of well-being in Ukrainian society was primarily based on material and economic criteria, with happiness and prosperity perceived through the

prism of individual success, material wealth, self-realization, and consumer comfort. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation on February 24, 2022, completely altered the lives of Ukrainians; it was not only a major military-political and humanitarian catastrophe of the 21st century, but also a profound ontological shock that radically reconfigured the structure of social and individual existence. The Russo-Ukrainian war endangered the fundamental conditions of the subject's existence-their safety, physical integrity, as well as spatial and temporal stability. Extreme events of such scale became a kind of «existential fault line», wherein everyday life, institutional foundations, and the value-meaning orientations of human existence lost their taken-for-granted self-evidence. Under such conditions, fundamental categories such as «well-being», «prosperity», «happiness», and «quality of life» can no longer be viewed exclusively through the lens of sociological, economic, or psychological indicators of self-sufficiency. Thus, there arises an urgent need for a philosophical-phenomenological inquiry into precisely how the structure of the subjective experience of happiness changes, what new reference points govern its perception by Ukrainians during an existential trial and the direct experience of a boundary situation, as well as the capacity to foster internal resilience through transformed modalities of well-being.

In the pre-war period, the conceptualization of well-being within both domestic and global discourses was long examined through the neoliberal paradigm of individual success. Prosperity was interpreted primarily as the result of accumulating material resources, attaining high social status, enjoying a broad spectrum of consumer choices, and executing personal life projects. This model of life can be characterized as «ontological security» (sensu E. Giddens) [1] and a sign of the fundamental predictability of the world, implying that the future is a linear continuation of the present, while the subject's bodily and spatial safety serves as a default, «unnoticed background» for self-realization. As contemporary researcher Timo von Wirth notes, ontological security is defined as a basic human need and emotional state whose disruption through uncertainty and destabilization threatens identity, routines, and people's capacity to act. Neglecting this factor in transition policies provoked resistance, as individuals felt their customary way of life threatened. Applying the concept of ontological security helps explain the deep psychological reasons behind resistance to

change and informs the design of conditions under which society can more readily accept necessary transformations [2, p. 2].

However, high-intensity war rapidly dismantles this «safe background», turning it into the primary condition and object of existential choice. In accordance with the classical phenomenological tradition established by E. Husserl, M. Heidegger, and M. Merleau-Ponty, systemic challenges of this magnitude cause the breakdown of consciousness's intentional horizontal bonds: the future «shrinks» to a horizon of a few hours or days, the past becomes alienated as a pre-crisis idyll, and the body transforms from an instrument of achieving goals into the immediate epicenter of vulnerability and pain [3; 4; 5].

At the same time, the Ukrainian experience of resistance and adaptation under full-scale war reveals a paradoxical phenomenon: despite the destruction of external material and security conditions, society does not sink into total apathy or destruction; instead, a profound restructuring of the very framework of experiencing well-being takes place. A fundamental shift can be observed from material-hedonistic foundations toward categories of fundamental ontological security, community solidarity, moral agency, and new forms of temporal adaptation. Therefore, the main objective of this chapter is to execute a comparative phenomenological analysis of structural shifts in the perception of well-being and to elucidate new modes of existential resilience among Ukrainians-specifically the phenomena of «micro-happiness» and solidary well-being, which emerged as responses to the challenges of wartime reality. To achieve this objective, the following tasks are set: to deconstruct the pre-war paradigm of well-being and identify its key intentional and value foundations; to analyze the phenomenology of trauma and the destruction of the subject's life under the impact of sudden existential threats; to conceptualize the transformation of temporal experience (the perception of time) and its impact on the capacity to feel joy and calm in a situation of extreme uncertainty; to reveal the essence of the «micro-happiness» phenomenon as a means of local harmonization of being amid temporal rupture; and to substantiate the role of horizontal solidarity, volunteering, and community agency as new phenomenological sources for restoring personal integrity and experiencing meaningful well-being.

1. Pre-War Paradigm of Well-Being: Transformations in the Experience of Happiness and Prosperity

In the pre-war period, prosperity in Ukrainian society largely aligned with the classic forward-looking model, which presumed long-term planning, investment in the future, and resource accumulation. However, during the phase of relative economic recovery and stabilization following the systemic shocks of 2014-2015 up until February 2022, this model gradually mutated, as globalized, essentially neoliberal models of subjective well-being took root in the mass consciousness. The primary components of this model included: the linearity of the future, where the planning horizon relied on the predictability of temporal flow, allowing the subject to construct long-term strategies for self-realization; individualized hedonism, where happiness was concentrated in the realm of personal comfort, consumption, travel, career advancement, and capital accumulation; and bodily safety as a given, where the body was perceived as a resource for achieving goals or a source of aesthetic pleasure rather than an object of direct physical vulnerability. In Edmund Husserl's framework, this lifeworld of the pre-war subject is designated as a «horizon of habitual expectations», wherein well-being was determined by the degree of alignment between the actual state of affairs and the individual's goals [3]. In Husserl's «Lectures on the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time», it is emphasized that human perception is always structured by a triad: retention (the retention of the past), primal impression (primal perception of the present), and protention (the primary expectation of the future). In the pre-war lifeworld, it was precisely the vector of protention – the orientation toward the future – that functioned as the system-forming vector for the concept of «well-being». As contemporary domestic researcher I. Ivaniuk notes, according to Husserl's phenomenological concept, the past does not disappear, but is merely pushed back in time, which is why the actual «now» point constantly contains the retention of the past. The temporal duration of consciousness is a consistent unfolding where separate time intervals form an unbroken, holistic «stream», and their separation is merely an artificial abstraction. Concurrently, temporality functions within a spectrum of intentions: the past overlays the actual perception, while the future posits itself in expectation, which, upon the occurrence of an event, becomes the present and shifts into the past. The goal of the phenomenological approach is to

capture this sequential temporal unity within a single holistic act through the contemplative mode of the «now» [6, pp. 139-140].

When subjects perceive their temporal flow as stable, predictable, and manageable, it enables them to construct long-term life strategies – taking out mortgages, planning career advancement, investing in their children's education, and scheduling vacations far in advance – all of which served as criteria for normativity and psychological comfort. Within this coordinate grid, happiness was interpreted not as the actualized experience of a fleeting moment, but as the cumulative result of long-term projection. As contemporary British sociologist Anthony Giddens notes, institutions of late modernity are characterized by high dynamism, global impact, and reflexivity, along with the capacity to continuously re-examine social life in light of incoming knowledge. This dynamism is sustained by the separation of space and time and the development of abstract systems that sever interaction from local contexts. As a consequence of the decline of tradition and the transience of knowledge, the individual finds themselves in conditions of uncertainty and is forced to independently choose a lifestyle, realizing the «reflexive project of the self» through the formation of a coherent yet flexible biographical narrative within a stable and predictable spatio-temporal framework [1].

It should be noted that the value orientations of Ukrainians regarding the experience of well-being in the pre-war period came under the palpable influence of Western consumer culture and neoliberal individualism. Well-being was increasingly equated with material wealth, financial independence, and high levels of individual consumption. Western researchers Daniel Kahneman and Angus Deaton, in their classic psychological and economic studies, delineated two measurable components of well-being: emotional well-being (the daily experience of joy or stress) and life evaluation. Does money buy happiness? This question frequently arises when subjective well-being is discussed in the academic community. Kahneman and Deaton contend that emotional well-being (daily experiences) and overall life evaluation (thoughts on one's life trajectory) are governed by entirely different drivers. While high income and education are the primary determinants of life evaluation, daily emotions are more strongly influenced by health, social contact, loneliness, and negative habits. As a result of logarithmically increasing income, overall life satisfaction increases;

however, this satisfaction improves daily emotional happiness only up to a certain threshold. The joy derived from income growth fades faster than intuitively expected, whereas low income merely exacerbates the distress of life's adversities [7, pp. 16489-16490]. In pre-war Ukraine, the key driver of life satisfaction was precisely this instrumental component – social status, material success, domestic comfort, vehicle ownership, travel abroad, and access to quality services. In this context, phenomenologically, this can be termed a movement along the circle of «hedonic adaptation», where the subject continuously raises the bar of personal standards for quality of life, and the sense of well-being requires a constant expansion of consumer choices. Gradually, happiness came to be understood through both self-organization (eudaimonia) and pleasure (hedonism); however, both approaches remained individualistic and detached from society. This meant that individual well-being was progressively isolated from the broader social context, giving rise to a dominant trend toward the «privatization of well-being», wherein individuals concentrated on building a local «comfort zone» (within private or familial space) while distancing themselves from wider social and security challenges.

This self-isolation within one's own «microcosm» relied on the illusion of complete physical and infrastructural safety, where basic security was taken for granted. The foundation for such detachment from society was the illusory reliability of everyday existence, in which the body and safety remained the unremarked backdrop of life. In Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, the body appears not merely as a physical object, but as the primary «anchor» through which the subject is rooted in the world and comes to know it. In pre-war daily life, bodily integrity, the absence of immediate threats to life, and the availability of basic infrastructural goods (electricity, water supply, cellular service) existed in a state of phenomenological «unobtrusiveness» (in Martin Heidegger's terminology) [4; 5].

Thus, whatever functions seamlessly remains outside the focus of consciousness. The external world is perceived as a silent and reliable backdrop against which the individual's «true» life projects unfold – career advancement, creativity, capital accumulation, or self-development. Consequently, basic security was not perceived as an active element of «happiness» or «well-being»; rather, it was a self-evident prerequisite and

a fundamental given that was rarely the subject of reflection or existential gratitude.

Since 2001, researchers at the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) have conducted continuous monitoring of the sense of happiness among the Ukrainian population, allowing them not only to track changes over time but also to identify the underlying drivers of happiness. The dynamics of happiness levels (the percentage of respondents who reported feeling «happy» or «rather happy») were traced from 2001 to 2017. During this period, two categories of factors influencing happiness were examined. First and foremost, these studies focused on «reality, primarily socio-demographic characteristics and levels of material well-being. The impact of situational perceptions – specifically respondents' satisfaction with various aspects of life, such as family, work, and personal safety – on happiness levels was also investigated... The level of happiness (the proportion of happy individuals) rose from 38 % in 2001 to 65 % in 2010. A potential driver of this significant increase was the economic growth experienced in Ukraine between 2002 and the global financial crisis of 2008... Subsequently, it declined slightly, settling at 58 % in the final pre-war period» [8, pp. 84-85]. Summarizing these findings, scholars emphasize that throughout the twenty-first century, the happiness level among the Ukrainian population generally exhibited an upward trajectory before stabilizing at 53 % (as of May 2017). The primary drivers positively shaping Ukrainians' sense of happiness included younger age, strong family and intimate relationships, good health, high material prosperity, higher education, and a high degree of personal freedom and agency over one's life [8].

Accordingly, a concluding profile of the pre-war model of well-being in Ukraine can be formulated, outlining its key distinguishing features:

– Anthropocentric individualism: The localization of sources of happiness within the boundaries of the self and the immediate micro-social sphere («my success», «my achievements», the family circle).

– Teleological orientation and linearity: The interpretation of well-being as a deferred outcome achievable only through sequential effort and long-term planning.

– Material-aesthetic verification: The evaluation of quality of life through measurable indicators of comfort, consumer experiences, environmental aesthetics, and leisure practices.

– Passive ontological trust: The default perception of the surrounding physical and social environment as safe, predictable, and stable.

It was precisely this conceptual model – hitherto taken as a natural and immutable given – that suffered catastrophic disruption on February 24, 2022, when the full-scale invasion imperiled the very physical existence of the subject and laid bare the existential fragility of all classical dimensions of well-being.

2. Transformation of the Phenomenon of Well-Being During the Full-Scale Invasion

During the war, Ukrainian society underwent a phenomenological shift and an existential transformation in its experience of happiness. The full-scale invasion on February 24, 2022, brought about the destruction of Ukrainians' customary life. Plunged into conditions of extreme military violence, established structures of experience that had previously functioned automatically and self-evidently instantly lost their validity. The events of this existential fault line acted as a form of phenomenological shock therapy, leading to a radical shift in the very mode of being-in-the-world.

Let us analyze how models of subjective well-being transformed during the full-scale war. Fundamental changes occurred across three key dimensions: the sudden collapse of the horizon of temporality, along with the exposure of the vulnerable bodily and material-hedonistic foundations of well-being.

While in the pre-war period notions of happiness and well-being relied largely on hedonistic and eudaimonic dimensions – oriented toward long-term planning, self-realization, resource accumulation, and quality-of-life improvements – the extreme experience of war radically dismantled this structure. According to the phenomenological approach, a breakdown of the «horizon of expectations» occurs, forcing the individual to confront fundamental existentials: mortality, uncertainty, loss of control, and loneliness.

As contemporary researcher Uliana Lushch-Purii notes, the onset of the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine initially sparked a societal condemnation of any positive emotions; however, an attitude of «immersing oneself in absolute grief» proves destructive to the psyche and

contradicts its natural adaptive mechanisms. Although the topic of happiness during wartime is primarily addressed through an econometric lens, there is a distinct need for its philosophical analysis. Is happiness possible during war? This question forms the title of Lushch-Purii's work, which posits that both eudaimonic and hedonistic happiness remain possible even in times of war. Indeed, «it is precisely the experience of eudaimonic happiness at the individual level that fosters mental health, adaptability, and emotional resilience during war, while at the collective level, it enhances social cohesion, combat readiness, and the overall efficacy of Ukrainian society on its path to victory» [9, p. 40]. Happiness remains attainable during war because it is not merely a fleeting emotion, but a complex worldview-and-value phenomenon that, under altered realities, manifests primarily in its eudaimonic form. The first major driver of such happiness is the growth of solidarity, unity, and mutual assistance – at the interpersonal and volunteer levels, as well as across the entire nation and the international community. The second fundamental factor is the presence of a overarching shared goal: building a free and prosperous Ukraine, wherein victory over Russia stands as an indispensable milestone. Here, eudaimonic happiness arises directly from the very process of moving toward this goal, as it imparts meaning to human existence and restores a sense of personal agency and purpose [9, pp. 36–37].

Studies on the adaptation of Ukrainian society under wartime conditions reveal that confronting an existential threat triggers a so-called «paradox of adaptation». Basic components of well-being become localized around fundamental lower-level needs: safety, preservation of life, connection with loved ones, and access to shelter. Phenomenologically, happiness ceases to be perceived as an achievement or an extraordinary emotional high; instead, it is reconceptualized as a «quality of being» – the capacity to carry on, to see loved ones unharmed, and to maintain societal functionality. «War or armed conflict represents one of the most severe calamities resulting from human activity. It is frequently accompanied by collateral damage, physical and psychological trauma, destruction of housing and property, substantial economic and social costs, as well as additional long-term negative consequences. Research into the impact of war on psychological resilience demonstrates the adverse effects of distress, anxiety, and uncertainty on both individual and social fortitude» [10].

If in a normally functioning consciousness the continuity of temporal flow is sustained by the Husserlian triad of retention (holding the past), primal impression (perceiving the present), and protention (primary expectation of the future), wartime delivers a direct blow to consciousness's vector orientation toward the future [3]. Amid relentless missile strikes, air raid alerts, forced displacement, and the constant threat of sudden death, the vector of protention – primary projection and expectation – becomes blocked. The future ceases to be a predictable arena for executing long-term life plans, transforming instead into a source of undefined threat and existential anxiety (Angst, in Martin Heidegger's sense) [4]. Under these circumstances, the subject's entire linear life trajectory is jeopardized: years of resource accumulation or career growth lose their meaning, as the horizon of existence itself can rupture at any given moment. Phenomenologically, the mind responds to this temporal fragmentation through a collapsing or shrinking of the temporal horizon. Consciousness is forced to recalibrate to the mode of the actual present, and the planning horizon contracts from years and decades to the scale of «here and now» – sometimes shrinking to a matter of a few hours or the interval «until the next air raid siren».

However, this temporal shift is not merely destructive; it also serves an adaptive-protective function. By freeing themselves from the weight of a threatening future, the individual gains the ability to intensely heighten their experience of the present moment. This «compression» of time shapes a uniquely wartime experience of happiness, wherein the defining factors become the joy of having survived another day, the preservation of life, and immediate presence with loved ones. Well-being ceases to be a strategic accomplishment and is instead experienced as the phenomenon of so-called «micro-happiness»: the joy of a moment of silence during the absence of shelling; access to everyday necessities (heat, light, water) that were once taken for granted but now become consciously cherished blessings; and the localization of prosperity in the form of «one more day lived». Thus, well-being is temporalized not as a linear progression toward success, but as a punctuated, intermittent experience of the fullness of being within a fragile «here and now».

Against the backdrop of the systematic destruction of pre-war life and the severance of temporal bonds, Ukrainian society has developed distinct phenomenological and existential mechanisms of adaptation. The response

of Ukrainians to total wartime threats was not passive immersion into apathy or depression, but rather a reactivization of existential resources through the deconstruction of happiness into micro- and macro-acts of living the present («the phenomenology of micro-happiness») and a shift beyond the individual self toward a space of shared well-being grounded in solidarity and ethical support. A unique adaptation of life architecture under wartime conditions takes place – a phenomenology of collective well-being, marking a transition from the individual self to a «we-subjectivity». Having witnessed the breakdown of the pre-war individualized model of prosperity, Ukrainians discover a new world in which personal well-being in times of war becomes impossible and unthinkable in isolation from the well-being of the community. A transition occurs from an individual self-perception to community (solidary) well-being [11]. Well-being is no longer localized exclusively within private space (one's own apartment, family, or financial standing); its boundaries expand to encompass the building, the street, the city, and the country. An individual's sense of safety and calm proves directly dependent on whether other members of the community are protected and provided for. The individual feels significantly happier and calmer even in a cold or blacked-out home, provided they are alongside a community demonstrating mutual aid.

Examining the existential function of micro-happiness reveals that it consists in restoring a sense of internal integrity and ontological calm. As Austrian psychiatrist, psychologist, philosopher, and former Nazi concentration camp prisoner Viktor Frankl wrote, a person is capable of enduring the most brutal existential trials if they retain the ability to find meaning in the immediate moment of reality – what he called the «logotherapy of boundary situations». «As soon as a person finds the meaning of their life, they not only become happy, but also gain the ability to cope with suffering» [11, p. 118]. Micro-happiness functions not as an escape from objective wartime reality, but as an active existential reclamation of the right to joy. Despite all the aggressor's efforts to depersonalize and destroy, Ukrainians continue to feel, value, and live their lives «here and now».

The war has contracted Ukrainians' temporal horizons of perceiving happiness to a scale ranging from a few hours to several days. The ongoing experience of air raid alerts and missile threats has forged a new temporal mode. Ukrainians have learned to localize happiness in situational details –

such as a cup of hot coffee during blackouts, the availability of electricity, a conversation with relatives, or the successful operation of air defense systems. Gratitude to the Armed Forces of Ukraine and to fate for another day lived has become a central element of experiencing well-being. Living «here and now» has transformed from a popular psychological slogan into a vital coping strategy for overcoming chronic exhaustion and anxiety.

Bodily existence and the preservation of life become paramount to the subject's being-in-the-world during war. The lived bodily experience of warmth, absence of pain, and physical survival becomes a direct phenomenon of the sense of well-being. In his work Phenomenology of Perception, French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty noted that the body is not merely a physical object, but our primary mode of perception and presence in the world. In pre-war life, it operated in a transparent mode of «unobtrusiveness», remaining a backdrop for realizing social and status aspirations. War restores the body to its primary, immediate vulnerability and exposure. Constant air raid sirens, explosions, the chill of bomb shelters, and bodily exhaustion from prolonged exposure to extreme conditions all reshape abstract intellectual perception. Pure sensation, M. Merleau-Ponty noted, is a «shock» experience, instantaneous and indivisible, whereas normal functioning «must be understood as an integrated process where the text of the external world is not copied, but constituted. If we try to grasp 'sensation' starting from the constellation of bodily phenomena that condition it, we encounter not a psychological individual as a function of known variables, but a formation already tied to a certain totality and endowed with a specific meaning... There is no physiological definition of sensation, and no autonomous physiological psychology in general, since the physiological event itself is regulated by psychological and biological laws» [5].

In the Ukrainian context, the body becomes the primary mediator for experiencing threat and, simultaneously, the key metric of well-being. In peacetime, it functions automatically and unremarkably, serving merely as an instrument for achieving social, professional, and cultural goals. However, war shatters this transparency: through constant danger – shelling, injuries, and exhaustion – bodily vulnerability moves to the forefront. The body sheds abstract social attributes and reverts to its basic existential essence, manifested in material fragility, physical limitation, and the primal

need for safety. Under such conditions, the very perception of happiness undergoes a fundamental change, acquiring a distinct bodily dimension. Physical integrity and the absence of pain or injury are no longer taken for granted, but are recognized as fundamental blessings. Basic bodily sensations – such as warmth, access to hot water, the opportunity to sleep in a safe place, or the embrace of loved ones – transform from mundane details into phenomena of joy and ontological calm. The feeling of safety ceases to be an unremarked background and steps into the foreground of consciousness as a foundational indicator of subjective well-being.

In this connection, regular monitoring and research are conducted within the Ukrainian academic community to assess society's level of resilience under wartime conditions. Notable among these initiatives is the project titled «Ukrainians' Well-Being: A Pilot Study of Ukrainians' Personal Well-Being Conducted Using the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS4) Methodology», which addresses issues such as the sense of meaning in life as a vital resilience resource for Ukrainians. As Olena Litvinova, partner at Ruban Litvinova Social Impact Advisory and co-author of the study, notes: «despite stress, anxiety, and loss, Ukrainians maintain a high sense of meaning in life – this indicator remains consistently high and even demonstrates growth potential under a protracted crisis. Conversely, other well-being indicators – life satisfaction, happiness, anxiety – remain at a moderate level, which corresponds to the extraordinary conditions in which the country lives. A sense of meaning is not only a psychological anchor, but also a powerful resource for action and adaptation that supports people's emotional resilience and strengthens social cohesion» [12].

It is also worth noting that the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology conducts the study «Dynamics of Self-Reported Happiness of the Population of Ukraine from 2001 to 2026» based on nationwide public opinion polls that incorporate questions on self-reported happiness. This survey notes that «despite the war and the challenges facing society, the majority of Ukrainians (71 %) are happy, though one in six Ukrainians (16 %) feels unhappy; chief among the factors associated with the level of happiness are age, health, well-being (the better one's health and the higher one's level of well-being, the happier one is), and understanding the meaning of life; the percentage of happy individuals in Ukraine has remained virtually unchanged compared to December 2025 (71 % vs. 69 %), but has increased

compared to December 2024 (58 %)... These figures demonstrate that despite the war and the challenges facing society, the majority of Ukrainians are happy, with only one in six feeling unhappy – happy individuals outnumber the unhappy by more than three to one. The survey demonstrates a high level of subjective happiness among Ukrainians even under difficult conditions» [21].

It should be emphasized that during wartime, a clear trend toward the transformation of happiness is observed within Ukrainian society, manifesting as a kind of semantic restructuring – in other words, a transition from individual to collective (social) well-being. This semantic restructuring can be categorized into three dimensions: the de-individualization of well-being, wherein personal life proves impossible when severed from the vitality of the entire community and nation; agency through helping, in which volunteering, financial donations to the armed forces, and mutual support become essential instruments for restoring a lost sense of agency (where meaningful action for the benefit of others counteracts feelings of helplessness and imparts a profound emotion of satisfaction and happiness despite external stress); and emotional popularization and survivor's guilt, which indicate that the experience of happiness during war becomes dualistic, frequently accompanied by feelings of guilt over one's relative comfort or safety, thereby shaping the complex phenomenon of «fragile happiness» or «happiness through tears».

As contemporary researcher V. Halega notes, the full-scale war triggered a profound socio-economic shock in Ukraine, devastating infrastructure, demographic structures, and household life cycles. Mass migration, job losses, and rising inequality have created long-term threats that demand an immediate and effective state response. Under such conditions, social policy must serve as a crucial economic stabilizer and a core element of national security, aimed at minimizing the impact of wartime shocks and laying the foundation for post-war recovery. Encompassing a broad array of instruments – from income support to the digitalization of public services – it must operate as a multi-tiered economic shock absorber. A dedicated economic imperative must also be the systematic preservation of the population's mental health, given that psychological resilience directly governs labor productivity and societal adaptability [13, pp. 644, 657-658].

To thoroughly investigate the transformational processes currently unfolding within our society, Ukraine provides a complex landscape for studying social security, where the concept of resilience serves as a key theoretical framework aligning with contemporary international trends in peacebuilding and crisis management. As contemporary researcher S. Lyndiuk rightly observes, ensuring social security entails restoring a human-centered system, nurturing its values, accounting for global trends, and implementing practical instruments for sustainable development. However, implementing such state measures requires taking into account the geopolitical situation, globalization processes, and security risks, as well as conducting further research to avoid practical pitfalls [14, pp. 338-340].

Questions of social resilience – the capacity of a society to withstand threats, adapt, and transform for further development – are increasingly raised in contemporary academic discourse. Domestic scholars B. Reiman, K. Reiman, O. Sukhyi and Yu. Pachkovskyi note in their research that under wartime conditions, public trust, high morale, solidarity, and social support become key factors of resilience at the macro level [15, p. 126]. Another Ukrainian researcher, O. Vasylchenko, having conducted a comprehensive study of Ukrainian consumer behavior during wartime, revealed their adaptability to crisis conditions, uncovering a tight link between personal psychological traits and economic priorities. She further emphasized that due to uncertainty and declining incomes, Ukrainian consumers reoriented toward essential goods, exhibiting marked rationality, frugality, and a rejection of impulse purchases. On this basis, O. Vasylchenko identified four behavioral types: «creators of personal potential» (investing in self-development and personal growth); «socially-oriented innovators» (focusing on charity and helping others); «practical realists» (pragmatically managing budgets and prioritizing health); and «creative hedonists» (seeking emotional gratification through hobbies and gastronomy). The researcher posits that this typology enables the optimization of business strategies, advertising campaigns, and state social support programs during times of instability [16, p. 441].

Nevertheless, even though feelings of unhappiness and pessimism about the future occasionally prevail in our society, Ukrainian agency is developing qualitatively through volunteering and collective solidarity. The growth of civic capital, high public trust, the functioning of democratic

institutions, and sustainable development (the harmonization of economic, social, environmental, and spiritual factors) create the necessary conditions for raising happiness levels and safeguarding the freedom of life choices for every individual [17, p. 116].

During wartime in Ukrainian society, volunteering, civil resistance, and horizontal solidarity become the primary phenomenological engines shaping collective well-being, serving as fundamental sources of internal resilience. In conditions of war, the most destructive factor for the human psyche is the sense of helplessness – a state in which the subject feels like a passive victim of external circumstances or military-political forces. Helplessness breeds deep existential anxiety and destroys any possibility of experiencing well-being. «Existential anxiety is an anxiety linked not so much to a specific external danger as to the fundamental conditions of human existence: freedom and the necessity to choose, responsibility for one's life, finiteness, uncertainty, the potential loss of meaning, and the limits of control. It can emerge during life transitions, losses, difficult decisions, confrontations with mortality, or in moments when habitual answers to the question 'how to live?' cease to function» [18].

Volunteering and ethical agency have proven highly effective in the Ukrainian context. Engaging in volunteer activities – ranging from financial donations and weaving camouflage nets to logistics, medical aid, or clearing debris – fundamentally alters an individual's phenomenological stance. In Ukraine, volunteering has become a true «language of the heart», representing far more than assistance: it is a tangible contribution to societal development and support for those in need. Volunteers help transform lives and make the world a better place [19]. As contemporary researchers I. Berezhnyi and T. Bielavina rightly observe, volunteering under martial law emerges as a vital socio-psychological mechanism for consolidating Ukrainian society and interiorizing collective values. Since 2014, this movement has evolved from spontaneous self-organization into a permanent civil society institution that plays a decisive role in sustaining defense capabilities and humanitarian aid. Volunteer activity significantly enhances the country's social resilience and social capital, strengthening horizontal bonds of trust and a culture of mutual aid. The volunteer movement in Ukraine has transformed into a core element of national self-identity and a genuine symbol of moral fortitude, bolstering Ukrainian statehood during profound

crises [20, p. 155]. Volunteer work helps restore individual agency: through action, the subject reclaims their status as an active author of their own life. The individual ceases to merely «endure the impact» of war and begins to actively influence the course of events. Furthermore, anxiety undergoes a transformation, dissipating into targeted practical activity directed toward protecting others. A person finds the ethical justification of their existence in assisting defenders or civilians affected by hostilities, creating a profound sense of duty fulfilled. In this context, the phenomenological outcome of ethical agency is the emergence of a specific mode of happiness – happiness as fulfilled solidary responsibility. When an individual devotes their own resources, time, and strength to collective victory and the support of others, they receive in return a sense of meaningful saturation in life, which proves far more durable and resilient than pre-war consumer hedonism.

Thus, the wartime experience of Ukrainian society demonstrates the emergence of a new phenomenology of well-being. It relies on two complementary strategies: internal-temporal localization (the ability to live and value «micro-happiness» in the present) and external-ethical expansion (finding meaning and resilience in solidarity, volunteering, and shared existence). Concurrently, a radical re-evaluation – or rather, a radical purging – of the concept of happiness itself takes place, liberating it from accumulated social constructs. The individual returns to the essentials of well-being: gratitude for existence itself, for preserved life, for the physical presence of others, and for fortitude when facing the trials of fate.

3. The Experience of Transforming Well-Being in Contemporary Ukrainian Culture

Contemporary Ukrainian culture has emerged as one of the most sensitive tools for investigating and analyzing Ukraine's new socio-cultural realities. Literature, essays, fiction, and art between 2022 and 2026 not only document the reality of war, but also construct a new language to describe the psychological state of society.

Investigating the phenomenology of well-being during a full-scale war requires turning to specific literary texts that serve as «primary material» for philosophical hermeneutics. The creative output of Serhiy Zhadan, Kateryna Kalytko, Volodymyr Yermolenko, Tetyana Ogarkova, Yaryna Chornohuz, and others offers the most representative capture of the triad transforming

the Ukrainian lifeworld: action/service, the linguistic restructuring of being, and the ethics of solidarity.

While in the pre-war period the concept of well-being correlated primarily with individual dimensions in public consciousness and artistic-philosophical thought (material stability, hedonistic comfort, orientation toward personal strategies of success and self-realization), the full-scale invasion caused a radical shift away from material-hedonistic foundations toward ethical-coexistential and existential sources of well-being. Since 2022, a profound re-examination of domestic comfort and safety has taken place. The very concept of «home» underwent deconstruction: it ceased to be merely a physical space and transformed into a metaphysical sanctuary, the loss of which is experienced as a loss of identity's integrity.

Since the beginning of the full-scale war, a significant body of literature – both artistic and scholarly – reinterpreting the value of routine has appeared in Ukraine. These works highlight how, amid catastrophe, restoring small daily rituals serves not as an escape from reality, but as a means of reclaiming agency and control over one's own life. A vivid example of Ukrainians' resistance to Russian aggression is the collection of 44 essays, Life on the Edge (Zhyttia na mezhi), by Volodymyr Yermolenko and Tetyana Ogarkova. The book addresses key concepts (Time, Space, Home, Death, Culture, Love) and their reinterpretation through the experience of full-scale war. The overarching ideas and distinctive features of the book are as follows: The «Edge» as a Point of Origin: The primary focus centers on revealing the «edge» not merely as a division between war and non-war, but as the point where new calm, safety, and fundamental values are born through human resilience in the midst of danger. Return to Primordial Meanings: War causes a devaluation of words, demanding documentary clarity. To foster a clearer understanding of this process, the authors revise basic concepts such as «trust», «home», and «care», purging them of extraneous abstractions. Home, for instance, emerges not simply as physical space, but as a metaphysical shelter and a core component of identity. Integration of Theory and Experience: V. Yermolenko and T. Ogarkova skillfully alternate philosophical systems and literary allusions with journalistic sketches and eyewitness accounts from destroyed towns and villages [22].

Beyond analyzing the ongoing war, the authors examine the nature of Russian evil. They note that «this war cannot be understood as the creation

of human beings. There is much in it that is beastly – not animalistic, but precisely beastly, beastly-industrial, predatory, and metallic-like... Russian geopolitics is zoopolitics. It is an interpretation of human interaction in terms of interaction between beasts. Even not between animals with their struggle for survival... but precisely between mythological beasts that crave aggression for the sake of aggression; that see murder and destruction as their modus vivendi» [23, p. 166].

The book also outlines the origins of European values and the historical development of ideas – from the confrontation between capitalism and communism to the transformation of how ruins and one's own roots are perceived [22]. As V. Yermolenko and T. Ogarkova rightly observe, «history accomplishes what you previously considered impossible. History is movement through the territory of the impossible. A simple thing: it never ends. It can take a pause; it can take a time-out. And then it seems to you that the whirlwind has subsided and things have fallen from the sky back to their customary places, and now no one will displace them. But usually, you simply do not realize that over the mountain, a new storm has begun. Therefore, what is the end of history for you is somewhere out there its beginning» [23, p. 38].

Despite all the grief that the war has brought upon the Ukrainian people, it is impossible to suppress their longing for freedom. Imperialism is an evil that always opposes the desire for freedom, V. Yermolenko and T. Ogarkova emphasize: «In the Ukrainian context, this desire for freedom also carries a special word – 'volya'. Volya encompasses several meanings: volya as freedom, volya as desire, and volya as effort... Volya is freedom that collides with rigid limitations, yet fights against those limitations. Volya is freedom in spite of everything» [23, p. 218].

A poignant example of the transformed perception of happiness during war is the Diary of Kateryna Savenko, a resident of Mariupol who kept a record during the Russian siege of the city. K. Savenko wrote her diary so that the entire world would learn what transpired in Ukrainian Mariupol in 2022: «My beloved, blooming city! Beautiful, modern, adorned with a wondrous sea, plants and animals, strong infrastructure, and beautiful, friendly people. How could anyone raise a hand to destroy all this out of the stupid, inhumane ambitions of an insane antichrist!» (Day 20) [24].

This diary became a harrowing chronicle of the final days of a beautiful young woman who wanted to live. It became the voice of a person who witnessed her city losing connectivity, electricity, safety, and loved ones – and yet kept striving to hold on to life, memory, and love for her home. The realization of everything taking place passes through pain and suffering. After enduring such hellish trials, a profound re-evaluation of values occurs, prompting an individual to abandon falsehood and hypocrisy and recognize that living in truth is easier, and prevailing through it is simpler. Regarding this re-evaluation of values, Kateryna wrote that she «found joy in the simplest things that no one could ever have imagined. Everything material faded into the background» (Day 12 of the war). She believed that peaceful days would return, writing: «we will surely see each other when the war ends, and we will rejoice in the simplest things: silence, the sun, the singing of birds, the smiles of loved ones» [24].

Ukrainian war poetry is characterized by the poetization of gratitude and «micro-happiness», illuminating a profound transformation within the emotional sphere. Happiness in wartime poetry appears not as a grand event, but as a tiny space of light. In the collection People with Verbs, Kateryna Kalytko highlights fundamental shifts at the level of speech and temporal perception, demonstrating how language adapts to existential threats and how the meaning of the word «well-being» is cleansed of material noise, leaving only the pure value of human connection and solidarity. She speaks of poetry as «a territory of truth and courage – especially poignant when a great war comes» [25].

«*...we are now people with verbs,*
with torn mouths,
but with intact hearts.
We are learning anew to say 'to live',
and this verb weighs more
than all pre-war nouns...» [25].

The word «alive» in K. Kalytko's poetry emerges as the highest possible form of happiness. Here, one observes a radical simplification of the value scale, wherein basic biological and existential preservation of being becomes the absolute source of gratitude.

The wartime poetry collection [dasein: defense of presence] by poet, combat medic, and scout Yaryna Chornohuz – written during frontline

rotations – records not merely the physical realities of war, but its metaphysical and ontological dimensions. The author addresses eternal themes: love, the threshold, the pain of losing brothers-in-arms, and a direct, bodily connection to the sacralized, blood-soaked land. The defining features of Chornohuz's poetry and worldview can be divided into three facets, the first of which is timelessness and candor. Her verse grows out of service in the Armed Forces of Ukraine (near Mariupol and in the Severodonetsk forests), yet through a universal philosophical language, it transcends specific time and circumstances:

«*We will never know the exact answer*
how to live with the touches of the fallen on our body» [26].

The phenomenon of «afterlife» (pisliazhyttia) is one of the central concepts of the collection, denoting a state after losing the entire source of one's vital energy – a moment when a person hits rock bottom and begins to see the world and its objects in their primordial form. Multidimensional defense manifests in the very title of the collection, referencing not only the defense of specific Ukrainian territories, but also the defense of humanity, life, and the right to remain human in the face of total destruction:

«*The world has narrowed to the defense of this land.*
And even if there is something after this, even then –
we will probably never truly need anything else» [26].

In recent years, over a thousand books have been written about the Russo-Ukrainian War, hundreds of which are poetry collections. A special place among them is occupied by the poetry of military personnel, given their direct participation in the war. This poetry does not romanticize war, but rather documents it in the most aesthetic manner, preserving it for posterity. Tetiana Hrynova, editor-in-chief of TyKyiv, provides a summary of ten poetry collections by military personnel published over the past two years – some of them, regrettably, posthumously. Among the published books are the following poetry collections: Just Don't Write to Me About the War (Tilky ne pyshy meni pro viinu) by Pavlo Vyshebaba, a Ukrainian writer, musician, public figure, and eco-activist; I Am a Bird in the Nets (Ya ptakh mizh tenet) by Illia Chernilevskyi, who volunteered for the war at the beginning of the full-scale invasion (a film and television director by profession, he wrote his own poetry, played guitar and piano, and was killed in action in May 2022 in Donetsk Oblast); and Poems from the Loophole

(Virshi z biinytsi) by Maksym «Dali» Kryvtsov. «War sharpens feelings and awareness. Poems about war are like bullets – they strike fatally deep and remain in the heart forever. They serve as intersection points between those on the front lines and those in the rear, acting as bridges for mutual understanding. The publication features the author's photographs and recorded readings of the poems» [27].

The new poetry collection by Anatolii Dnistrovyi, Days of Anxiety: Poems (Dni tryvoh. Poezii), includes poems written after February 24, 2022, as well as earlier verses that resonate with the anxieties of the current wartime era. We Were Here (Tut buly my) by Artur Dron: «The poems in this poetry collection were written at the front, but they are not about war. They are about people who love more than they fear, who were here and did not leave. In this language, soldiers remember their own, and children write letters on notebook pages. In it, people speak of pain and hope, say goodbye, and love» [27].

The poetry collection Road of Life (Doroha zhyttia) by AFU servicewoman Oksana Rubaniak (call sign «Ksena») was «written at the front in Donetsk Oblast while defending the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. Road of Life instills faith in the heart in the victory of light over darkness, truth over lies, and life over death» [27]. Another book, To Live Not Allowed to Die (Zhyty ne mozhna pomerty), is a collection of short stories and novellas by Oleksandr Osadko, published posthumously by his wife. The few stories the author managed to create demonstrate his extraordinary talent, a refined sense of humor, an ability to notice and masterfully depict details, as well as to choose charismatic rural residents as characters portrayed with a skillful and precise word. The future in Oleksandr's dialogues becomes prophetic, transforming into a warning to new generations. Three Medals in a Drawer (Try me-dali v shukhliadi) by Valerii Puzik is a «collection of selected poems from the past nine years about war, love, and death. About time that froze, stopped, yet did not end; about PTSD, fear, returning home, and returning to war. It is a conversation with God, with the earth, with the sky – a record of emotions and states that one would not wear to a victory parade. It is what one wants to hide, and perhaps forget» [27].

The poetry of the legendary Ukrainian poet Lina Kostenko resonates across generations. Her verse is not merely words, but a national code

pulsing through every line. She writes about Ukraine in a way that catches the breath with pain, pride, and love. Her poems were relevant yesterday, remain so today, and will sound into the future, for within her words lies Ukraine itself – unbroken, proud, and free:

«*And horror, and blood, and death, and despair,*
And the roar of a predatory horde,
A little gray man
Has caused black ruin.
He is a beast of a hideous breed,
The Loch Ness of the cold Neva.
Where are you looking, O nations?!
Today it is us, tomorrow it is you».
* * *
«*For history is written*
at a desk.
But we write with blood on
our own land». *Lina Kostenko* [28].

In wartime Ukrainian literature, books characterized by the concept of a «new eudaimonism» are increasingly coming to the fore. The works of soldier-writers demonstrate that the highest expression of well-being during war becomes action beyond the boundaries of the self. Happiness is discovered through active love, supporting the army, rescuing civilians, and preserving cultural heritage. The writer and serviceman Serhiy Zhadan recently published the book Hymns of Baroque Wars (Hymny barokovykh viin), in which the author combines poetry, prose, and drawings that reflect polyphonic chronicles of defense and love in times of war. Through images of teachers, military personnel, orchestra players, and urban landscapes, the author captures the most harrowing element: the testimonies of people who refuse to lose their voice amid destruction. S. Zhadan seamlessly pairs graphics with drawings, and poetic rhythm with the dimensions of prose [29].

Overall, within Serhiy Zhadan's wartime reflections and literary works, happiness and well-being shed their purely individual or material dimensions, transforming into a category of «collective breath» and an existential duty toward others. In his diaries and public addresses, he explains war through simple yet powerful words, speaking of a happiness that ceases to be about

comfort when one's home becomes the front line. Such happiness evolves into the opportunity to be needed – the chance to pull someone out of the dark, to offer food and warmth. It is the strange, bitter happiness of knowing you are where you belong, even when surrounded by ruins. This «bitter happiness» serves as a classic example of wartime eudaimonia, in which the sense of personal usefulness and ethical rectitude becomes the supreme good. A reinterpretation of «home» and agency likewise unfolds: home is no longer merely a closed, private space. In S. Zhadan's works, home becomes an ethical border demanding defense; consequently, well-being shifts from the consumption of material goods to the expansion of the individual self across the entire community.

Throughout the war, S. Zhadan has presented a significant number of books, maintaining that after victory, Ukrainians will return to the cultural reality that existed prior to the conflict. «The cultural component restores a sense of normality to life, whereas war is fundamentally the ultimate abnormality of reality and existence. Even if culture cannot compete with cannons and missiles, it remains capable of ensuring that we remain ourselves», S. Zhadan asserts (from a video interview with the writer, Ukrainskyi Tyzhden, April 26, 2022).

Thus, the transformation of the experience of well-being in contemporary Ukrainian culture attests to a profound reconfiguration of fundamental human needs. The experience of happiness and well-being ceases to be a private hedonistic project, transforming instead into a collective existential resource for resilience. The retrieval of ethical agency, the restoration of routine through care for others, and the discovery of meaning within boundary situations emerge as primary mechanisms for overcoming collective trauma, shaping a unique model of ontological security amidst wartime calamity.

CONCLUSIONS

The conducted comparative phenomenological and existential-ontological analysis of the transformation of perception, conceptualization, and inner lived experience of well-being and happiness in Ukrainian society allows for the formulation of the following synthesizing conclusions.

The comparative analysis demonstrates that Ukrainian society has undergone a radical transformation of the concept of well-being: shifting

from a pre-war individualistic-hedonistic model to a wartime solidary-existential one. The pre-war lifeworld rested on atomized individualism, material and status indicators of success, consumer hedonism, and taken-for-granted ontological security. The full-scale war triggered an existential shock, exposing the fragility of this model as prestigious consumption and capital accumulation gave way to categories of fundamental ontological security, the physical preservation of life, spatial shelter, and the availability of basic living conditions (electricity, heat, connectivity).

The war has altered the temporal structure of experiencing happiness. The impossibility of long-term planning gave rise to the phenomenon of «micro-happiness» and the lived experience of well-being within the present «here and now». The blockage of the protention vector (the primary projection of the future) and the threat of sudden death caused a collapse of the long-term planning horizon. Consciousness responded to this temporal rupture by shifting toward a mode of maximally saturating the present moment with meaning. Thus, the phenomenon of «micro-happiness» transforms into an adaptive-defensive phenomenological tactic consisting of the conscious intentional fixation on localized moments of joy, calm, safety, and connection with others. This has enabled the subject to maintain psycho-emotional integrity and build inner resilience amid chronic uncertainty.

Physical safety, the preservation of human life, mutual support, and a sense of personal involvement in a common cause have become the new fundamental determinants of subjective well-being. The destruction of individualized strategies of success has brought the intersubjective dimension of well-being to the fore. Personal well-being under wartime conditions has proven impossible when severed from the well-being of the community. In these circumstances, a collective solidary subjectivity has taken shape, in which the boundaries of personal safe space have expanded to encompass the entire country, and the «Other» has become a co-participant in a shared existential resistance. Practices of civil resistance, volunteering, and horizontal mutual assistance have emerged not merely as socio-economic phenomena, but as acts of restoring ethical agency.

The Ukrainian experience of enduring a boundary situation demonstrates the unique adaptability of the human lifeworld – one capable of reconfiguring the sources of happiness even within an environment of total destructive

threat, drawing resources for resilience from solidarity, existential agency, and the profound value of everyday existence.

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