

Volume 11 Issue 1  
**03 / 2013**  
tamarajournal.com



---

## Happy Death of Gilles Deleuze

Finn Janning

independent researcher

finnjanning@gmail.com

---

### Keywords

*Deleuze*

*Death*

*Suicide*

### Abstract

In this essay, I will look closer at the death of the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, who committed suicide in 1995. I will scrutinize his death in concordance with his philosophical thoughts, but frame my gaze within Albert Camus' well-known opening-question from *The Myth of Sisyphus*: "Judging whether life is worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy" (Camus, 2005:1).

---

Either ethics makes no sense at all, or this is what it means and has nothing else to say: not to be unworthy of what happens to us.  
Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*

### Introduction

My theses is that living a life worth living, as a consequence, leads to a happy death.<sup>1</sup> If I can justify this belief, then the concept *a happy death* can serve as an ethical guide or evaluation similar to the concept of living a life worth living. Instead of solely focusing on how to live a life worth living, we might bring into focus the concept a happy death. Such shift outlines some ethical issues between dying and death, for instance, by emphasizing that a life doesn't just stop, but rather closes or ends as a consequence of how it was lived. The end transforms everything in a life.

### The Question

In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus claims that there is only one truly philosophical problem: Suicide. A suicide is, simply speaking, a matter of life and death. Or put differently: As long as we don't kill ourselves we must assume, following Camus, that life is worth living. However, refraining from committing suicide doesn't tell us much about, what makes a life flourish. After all, the alternative to being alive is nothing. Still – at least it seems so – the degree of how a life flourish, what it achieves, its successes, etc. vary. Never the less, the view that Camus presents is not surprising, given the original notion in philosophy as a preparation for death (Plato). But, unlike Plato for whom the goal of philosophy was wisdom, Camus seems much more focused on the process itself: Life as an existential struggle. Hereby, Camus underlines that no one can teach you to become wise; it is something that you must achieve yourself. See the world with your own

eyes; practice what will become your own experiences. Get dirt on your hands. In other words: To become wise is hard work.

I believe that Camus addressed one of the most significant and difficult problems in philosophy. His question instantly leads to more questions such as: How to judge? How to evaluate a life? What is a life? What is a worthy life? Which life? Which form of life is worth more (and measured how?)? To what degree and grandeur does different form of lives matter? The questions are philosophical qua that they raise awareness of key factors that we often don't question, but simply assume that universal criteria's exist, that is, that some lives are worth more without knowing the criteria's for such tacit knowledge. Furthermore, these questions leave this inquiry with one crucial question: Is it possible for a philosopher to judge a life, his own life, as worthless and still remain a philosopher? This question is interesting due to the supposition that wisdom leads to a better form of life. But then, it might also be too much of a cliché to assume that a philosopher per definition is wiser, at least in a practical sense, than say a football coach. For the purpose of creating a plot, it might work in making the obstacle of coming to a resolution regarding suicides, more challenging. Nevertheless, it's not the profession as such that is of importance, but rather *the way a life is lived* that is of importance.

In addition, to the different approaches between Plato and Camus, it might be useful to use the distinction made by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* – between theoretical and practical wisdom. Plato's philosopher king is more likely to incorporate theoretical or mathematical wisdom, whereas Camus focuses much more on the practical wisdom, i.e. the excellence in practical matter like how to act depending on the context. The key issue of practical wisdom is the capacity to plan one's life well (Aristotle, 1140a 24-28). And, then it follows that the clever human, is the one who also has the courage to take the decision in accordance with his or her planning (1144a -27).

To a certain degree, Camus is updating Aristotle's thought about "The Good Life". In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle tell us that "eudemonia" means "living and faring well", i.e. living a life worth living (1905a 19-20). Those who manage to become wiser – in both ways – will most likely find life worth living – at least more flourishing, engaged and interesting. Unlike, those who find life meaningless and absurd are likely to find life more sad than joyous. Seen in this light, Aristotle was right: There is nothing noble in suicide, only an escape from something evil (book III, chapter 7). Or, to put it even more clearly: Only the ignorant commit suicide, in the world of Aristotle, since what he calls evil is intimately related to our inability of coping what is happening, and afterwards act based on this acquired knowledge. A life is per definition good qua being alive, because in life one can become wiser. Thus, everything bad in life, such as prejudices or even a suicide, seems to be the offspring of a lack of knowledge.

The question of interest is whether a suicide can be seen as a clever decision, i.e. leading to a happy death. If that is the case, then the question of interest is, by which criteria's. In other words, perhaps a suicide is not always an act of ignorance, but also – potentially – an act of cleverness.

Continuing this line of thought, then it is obvious that no one – not on purpose at least – strives to become an ignorant. Also, this underlines that we have to accept that different forms of wisdom are possible. However, such an acceptance contradicts with a lot of philosophical thinking, especially, the kind of philosophical thinking that operates within the arena of epistemology, i.e., agitating for an unchangeable faculty of knowledge (most notably Plato and Kant). For instance, Kant's doctrine that the moral self is a non-empirical self, unlike, for instance, a thinker like the hero of this story Deleuze, but also a philosopher like Richard Rorty that sees the self as something constantly becoming, i.e. being created in a way that also includes multiple inconsistent selves (Rorty, 1999: 77). For a non-empirical self it might be possible to evaluate all suicides as the same, but all forms of lives are not the same. For Rorty the self is changeable. Morally, this is a distinction between Kant's universal "Good Will", and Rorty's more complex idea of an ongoing strive to become more sensitive by including more and more knowledge about other living beings.

The ancient definition of philosophy as a love of wisdom doesn't reflect the mere Deleuzian and pragmatic approach favoring notions such as multiplicity, emergence, pluralism and cultural differences, etc. The truth is not the same for all since it depends on both the context and the utility, i.e., what purpose does the truth aim at, what lines of flight are created, etc.<sup>ii</sup> Similar there is no absolute knowledge, but a changing knowledge that, of course, affects the truth in each moment. Truth is matter of, as Rorty says, what is better in a specific context. Absolute knowledge is replaced with hope or belief, i.e. the hope that the human being will develop sufficiently so that tomorrow will be better than today. However, as Deleuze points out:

It is not succession that defines time, but time that defines the parts of movement as successive inasmuch as they are determined within it (...). The Self is in time and is constantly changing: it is passive, or rather receptive, 'self' that experiences changes in time. The *I* is an act (I think) that actively determines my existence (I am), but can only determine it in time, as the existence of a passive, receptive, and changing *self*, which only represents to itself the activity of *its own* thought. The I and the Self are thus separated by the line of time, which relates them to each other only under the condition of a fundamental difference (1998: 28-29).

Pointing this out, I would like to stress that Deleuze is closer to a pragmatic idea of truth defined as a continuing justification that tries to test our beliefs convincingly, than say Kant or Plato's idea of a faculty of knowledge. But, Deleuze doesn't fall for the idea that a linear time is the same as claiming that the past can't teach us anything, or that, e.g. a philosopher today is wiser than the Ancient, of course not – nor does Rorty believe that, I might add. On the contrary, Deleuze relates the question of truth to the question of location, because each human being is placed in time. The different perspectives open up for a truth of relativity or relations that should not be confused with the naïve idea that the truth is being relative. It is not the thing in itself that Deleuze (and no one else) can say anything about, but the relations, or the different worlds that each perspective makes possible. Instead of the Ancient Greek dictum: Know Yourself, Deleuze would probably say something like: Know your location. Everything is seen from a specific perspective, and such a perspective, of course, can vary. Everything, including death, takes place at a specific location limiting our gaze to that exact position.

So far, I have hastily portrayed Deleuze as a kind of anti-Platonist philosopher, who believes that truth is something created due to the changing location of the eyes that see. The point, with this very brief outline, is to underline how Deleuze sees the production of truth as intimately linked with the way one lives his or her life. To clarify this point even further: The way one thinks, feels and acts are expressed by the form of life that the person lives, and this, of course, becomes interesting when someone believing this commits suicide.

## The death

Gilles Deleuze died the 4<sup>th</sup> of November 1995. To paraphrase another opening from one of Camus's novels, *The Outsider*, we might state: That doesn't mean anything. It may have been another day. Deleuze died at the age of 70, but that is not important. What matters, though, is *how* he died.

Deleuze committed suicide by jumping out of the window of his Parisian apartment. He killed himself. He chose at one point of his life to end it. He gave death a place. The general assumption is that he killed himself due to severe illness – he suffered from a weakening pulmonary ailment, he had respiratory problems, had one lung removed, lost power of speech and writing – but still, not neglecting his sufferings, the question remains: Is it possible to judge life as worthless and still remain a convincing philosopher?<sup>iii</sup> Isn't killing yourself the exact form of *resentment* that he speaks about in *The Logic of Sense*?

Is it to accept war, wounds, and death when they occur? It is highly probable that resignation is only one more figure of *resentment*, since *resentment* has many figures. If willing the event is, primarily, to release its eternal truth, like the fire on which it is fed, this will reach the point at which war is waged against war, the wound would be the living trace and the scar of all wounds, and death turned on itself would be willed against all deaths (2004: 170).

Regardless, of the possible answer, whether his suicide was a resignation or death turned on itself, a suicide can only be seen as the ultimate judgment regarding a life, the ultimate response to an unbearable condition (Williams, 2011). No more, he concludes. Enough.

Through his final act, he emphasizes that this particular life, his life, was not worth living. It's obvious. The problem with such a claim is, nonetheless, where to distinguish between worthy and unworthy. The balance is similar to when a man grows bald. Is it when he loses his first hair, or when he is completely hairless? It is difficult to analyze such an ongoing process, but that doesn't mean that we can't learn anything from doing an inquiry. Regardless of when Deleuze began questioning the worth of living his life, i.e. questioning the form of life he was able to live, the result remains the same: At one point it was not worth it.

Death arrives from the outside as a problem that it's not possible to overcome. Not in the sense that no solutions are available, but rather that the human being no longer is capable of overcoming the problem by changing the situation in novel ways, i.e. "go beyond the human condition". Deleuze writes:

We are wrong to believe that the true and the false can only be brought to bear on solutions, that they only begin with solutions. (...) This prejudice goes back to the childhood, to the classroom: It is the schoolteacher who 'poses' the problems; the pupil's task is to discover the solutions. In this way we are kept in a kind of slavery. True freedom lies in the power to decide, to constitute problems themselves. (...) But stating the problem is not simply uncovering, it is inventing ... Invention, gives being to what did not exist; it might never had happened (Deleuze, 1991: 15).

This understanding of a problem as something that one has to overcome through invention leads towards a sensitive ethics where the challenge of each human being is to become in relation to a specific event. It is this scrutinizing or explorative process itself that is ethical since the invention is an actualization of a life's potential. This is what it means not to be unworthy of what happens to us, as Deleuze (2004: 169) points out in *The Logic of Sense*.

I will try to get close to an understanding of what it means to become worthy by focusing on the process of actualization.

## The Will to Create

In *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Deleuze writes: "The thought of the eternal return eliminates from willing everything which falls outside the eternal return, it makes of willing a creation, it carries out the equation 'willing = creating'" (2002a: 69). To will is to create. Seen in this perspective, it is obvious that Deleuze no longer persisted the will to create yet another line of flight. Also, the quote underlines that what made his life rich and flourishing was the ability to will = to create. In other words, the will to live, for instance, only exists when this will activates another will, i.e. the will to create. Or to put it even more clearly: Deleuze's only will, when he wills something is to create, i.e. to be inventive and construct concepts as he defines philosophy (1994). Philosophy for him was, therefore, an ethical practice. Thus, what he will is good in so far as he wants it again and again: The eternal return. In *Difference and repetition*, he writes: "Whatever you will, will it in such a manner that you also will its eternal return (Deleuze, 1994: 7). The repetition becomes the only way to move beyond morality, move beyond good and bad, move beyond the faculty of knowledge. A movement that is necessary for a life to grown by mingling with life in general. The self is not a constant (Kant), but something that is created through a life's encounter with the different forces in life. Deleuze, emphasizes that the repetition is the *thought of the future*, because it is not repeating certain habits, but creating a temporary plane on which a life can re-invent itself. If we recapitulate here, then his will to create aims at the people to come, but since he can't actualize his own will the future doesn't exist. The function of this ethical philosophy is to create a plane for future creations, the more possible relations, the better. This happens by inventing a local approach to the local obstacles in life. Furthermore, he points out that the will to power means: "Whatever you will, carry it to the n'th power" (ibid: 8).

What did he carry to the n'th power by committing suicide? Perhaps, he simply wanted to act, i.e., wanted to execute the only plan left for him to 'create' – suicide as act against death. In other words: He wanted to act, rather than judge; wanted to produce, rather than reproduce; wanted to create, rather than end in resentment. And the only possible activity was suicide, at least, to avoid judging and criticizing. What we can justify so far in saying is that by committing suicide Deleuze is repeating the immanent metaphysical movement or shakiness caused by the common premise for all living being: To live is to be in a state of dying. Such banal truth shows that it is impossible to create a firm metaphysical foundation for more than one, for more than one specific life, but yet an indeterminate life. Only the extreme forms of life return, e.g. forms of life balancing on the every limit of their power to stay alive. "In the eternal return, univocal being is not only thought and even affirmed, but effectively realized" (Deleuze, 1994: 41). What is returned through the eternal return of being alive qua dying is just the fact of a life being alive. Deleuze agrees with Camus in saying that being alive itself is joyful. Actually, he goes as far as saying that is all there is to it. There is no need for further graduation, either life is worth living or you're only death. Why are small kids always so happy? They are happy just to be alive. -A simple fact

that many forget while growing older and our focus tends to occupy itself with issues such as status, recognition, and money, i.e. external factors.

Let us return to the chilly day in November back in 1995, the day where Deleuze no longer could neglect this unfulfilled will to act, to live, to do. This will to will. He could only manage to do one last act, i.e. commit suicide, because such an act would repeat the difference that made it possible: A life still being alive. In a paradoxical way, the suicide confirms or witness' a life, and a certain kind of death, of course, witness an even more specific aspect of that life. A life where you are able to master your strengths, e.g. in his situation to write books and articles is a life worth living for that person. If this practice is not possible, then life is not worth living. Viewed in this perspective the distinguishing parameter between worth and unworthy is the ability to "being equal to the event", to become a revolutionary free from resentment, to mingle with life. His last act takes place in life at ...

... the point at which death turns against death; where dying is the negation of death, and the impersonality of dying no longer indicates only the moment when I disappear outside of myself, but rather the moment when death loses itself in itself, and also the figure which the most singular life takes on in order to substitute itself for me (2004: 173)

A happy death then, is when the person committing suicide doesn't do it as a response to life, but on the contrary as an acceptance of how a life mingles with life. Again, it is becoming worthy of what happens as an ethical practice.

It might be useful to recall the etymology of the word ethic that esteems from the Greek word Ethos. In Greek thinking ethos originates in two forms, i.e. nature and nurture. The genetic basis is for both Aristotle and Deleuze a potential – something real, but not yet actualized. The process of actualization leads us to the second form of ethos, i.e. how this potential is formed, shaped, educated – that as a result will manifest itself in the excellence of our character, i.e. one's character makes the actualization right, because it is related to the potential. In short: Ethic is risky business since nothing is 100 percent certain, we can anticipate all potential effects of our decisions, but then again, certainty is not the goal. Rather, justification based on our experiences and knowledge here and now. As already Aristotle's pointed out: Living a life worth living is a difficult task, because one needs to take care of oneself without ever knowing oneself completely. Hopefully, through the use of both practical and intelligent reasoning a person becomes capable of making the right decisions. As mentioned, Deleuze's suicide can be seen as an inability to actualize what seems to make life worth living for him, e.g. a specific form of life (i.e. writing books and article, which of course could be a different depending on the life at stake). No longer could he execute what was right for him. Only he could live in resentment, which, of course, is not possible or even acceptable, if he wanted to live and die coherently in alignment with his own ethic.

## The process of difference

So far I have been suggesting that Deleuze's suicide can be viewed, as one last powerful will to act with the purpose of turning death against death. In death he can't act, which means that any kind of action is a negation of death. A suicide can be seen as such an act that emphasizes dying, i.e. the statement: "I am still alive" – as a negation of death. Of course, any kind of actions is an act in life; however, his act seems to affirm his own thoughts. Also, and more importantly, I believe we are able to say something more general about a life worth living, i.e. the inability to fulfill the formula: to will = to create *can* be seen as a crucial criterion of what makes a life worthless. Otherwise, a life as such qua being alive is worth living. However, note that the will to do something doesn't claim any moral superiority or direction. The will to create doesn't claim that a certain form of creation is more admirable, or even more right, than any other. A successful life is always singular. The formula: to will = to create emphasizes the fact that being able to outlive your will is what really makes a difference. One might want to, but can't. Instead of resigning and thereby ending in "learned helplessness" (Seligman, 2006) or impotence, Deleuze decided to accomplish the only possible act. For him, I assume, being able to do his work as a philosopher was such a crucial part of his mode of existence, it was the main way he could be active in strengthening his core strength. And saying this, then it's obvious (or should be!) that other people, who also see life and work as synonymous has been able to find alternatives, e.g. the physics Stephen Hawking, who are able to communicate through a highly advanced computer. However, such examples do not contradict with what I have pointed out here: The importance of *the will to will*. In short: Deleuze only had a will to nothingness, i.e. death. The will to create, in his thinking, is without any specific purpose other than to create, overcome problems, being innovative, etc. And it is exactly that, the will to create that is absent due to the incapability to execute what is the best to do for him in order to actualize

his potential. At one point, the only possible potential is death. Death reflects the event that he needs to match, the one he is placed within. Once again, the ethic is related to a specific form of life, an existential modus that might inspire other forms of life, but nevertheless remains singular. Each one of us can only become equal to the event. “The event is not what occurs (an accident); it is rather inside what occurs, the purely expressed. It signals and awaits us” (Deleuze, 2004: 170). Nothing happens in the event, but everything becomes (i.e. expressed). To become equal to the event, he expressed that he was ‘only’ dying, although he might have felt death.

Was his act a last homage to life? One can only die, because one has lived. Or because one is living, one can also claim to have lived. The suicide is an act. The criteria for an act would be: “Deleuze is dying” is compatible with “Deleuze is death”. However, if we turn his suicide around and see it, not as an act, but as a process – underlining his idea about becoming imperceptible in order to become – then the criteria is: “Deleuze is dying” is incompatible with “Deleuze is death”. The logic tells us that since he could no longer be in time, then he needed to do one thing that would take time. An activity such as to will = to create an activity that is complete in itself at any time. An activity, for instance, to see can go on forever, but a process is per definition incomplete all the time, qua becoming, that is going on until completed, i.e. a life as a process will terminate. The point is, I believe, not to overcome death, but matching it by in some way keeping the process or the becoming at focus. He forces us to move from the final conclusion: Deleuze is death to Deleuze was dying. I think all suicides share this: The severe difficulties of seeing the suicide as an act, as something complete like the end of a life. On the contrary, this difficulty keeps family and friends in a very unease condition, because we are forced to go on trying to understand. I am aware it might sound too smooth, but in a way this was the only possible way for him to underline the need for being inventive by underlining the formula of life: to will = to create. Create what, we might ask. The answer would be a convincing, believable justification – as putting the suicide into a web of potential relations in order to bring live to what doesn’t yet exist. Sooner or later, everyone will have to face the fact that Deleuze no longer is dying, he is death, but facing this is an inventive process. Each one has the possibility to decide, what kind of problem he was positing to us.

In the article *Bergson’s Conception of Difference*, he writes: “Life is the process of difference” (Deleuze, 1999: 50). If we put this quote next to an assumption that philosophy operate as a superior faculty of knowledge and truth, then Deleuze might have reached the truth. However, I believe such an interpretation might be too simplistic, even false. At least, it needs to be framed differently, if it needs to respect his philosophy. For Deleuze life was a creative act dealing with difference, i.e. a life is no longer conceived as a closed entity, but in and by itself it organizes a multiplicity that unfolds an ongoing actualization. It’s a life that repeats itself by its repetitive differentiation of its own difference. Seen in this perspective, life as such, would still consist of the same amount of differences as when Deleuze did find his life worth living. The only difference is that now, due to his illness; he can’t do anything about it. He can’t no longer organize the productive force, because he can’t actualize himself with these forces, he can’t no longer become a mixed body. To will = to create = a life as a process of difference. Differences only return, if someone repeats them, i.e. if someone acts and has the power to act. What Deleuze lacked was this ability to affirm the difference constituting a life. Death is the end of differences; death is the same for all human beings.

## A Different Approach to Suicide

Another way to approach the suicide might be through Emile Durkheim, who saw suicide as something related to social life. According to Durkheim a suicide doesn’t depend upon elements intrinsic to the act itself, but other features of a social context. It’s a social fact and should be explained by other social facts to locate any patterns or trends, for instance, a correlation between economic depression and suicide – or we might add, severe sickness to death and suicide (Giddens, 1986: 118). Also, Durkheim made a distinction between two kinds of suicide: ‘Egoistic suicide’ and ‘altruistic suicide’. Altruistic suicide emphasizes the integration of the individual into a social community, and respect for its values is the main source of the suicidal act (Giddens, 1986: 48). On the other hand, what can be defined as an egoistic suicide derives precisely from the absence of such integrative ties to a social life. This distinction can also be related to how advanced the society is. “If in modern society people kill themselves because life is meaningless, in traditional society they do so because death is meaningful” (Giddens, 1986: 47). Placed within this dichotomy, I would say that Deleuze committed an altruistic suicide. He was married, had two children and was very well established within society. He achieved to become a highly respected philosopher in his own lifetime. Factors that Durkheim mentions will make a difference. However, the sickness of Deleuze can in this perspective also be viewed as a burden for the family and the

society (it might not have been). He can no longer produce any positive relations; his state of non-being affects his mood, etc. Still, I don't believe that committing suicide in an intellectual Parisian society anno 1995, per definition, was seen as something honorable, even heroic or obligatory. An egoistic suicide, on the other hand, would require that Deleuze was having a low degree of integration with other social groups. That might be, however, my errand here is not to evaluate the family life of the philosopher, merely to situate the suicide in order to show, how relevant Camus' question is. The problem with the categories of Durkheim is that the suicide too easily can be viewed both ways. As well, his suicide most likely fits perfectly in the statistics (severe sickness leads to suicide), but that still doesn't bring us closer to the potential ethic relating to a suicide.

So once again, we return to Deleuze. The ethic of Deleuze opens up for a creative and innovative approach to become a human being, or more human. To create an ethical life is to confront one's own power and limits. To become equal with the event, i.e. the will = to create. – The will to match the event. This means the will to make a life worthy of what happens and to accept what takes place.

“Everything is vision, becoming” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 169); there is no single vision. Such understanding emphasize that being ethical is a form of life, a form of being that comes to life through the human being's style of life. It is through the style, i.e. how one forms his or her life, that people around can feel the presence of an ethic. In, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, Deleuze points out:

The *Ethics* judges feelings, conduct and intentions by relating them, not to transcendent values, but to modes of existence they presuppose or imply: there are things one cannot do or even say, believe, feel, think, unless one is weak, enslaved, impotent; and other things cannot do, feel or so on, unless one is free and strong. *A method of explanation by immanent modes of existence* thus replaces the recourse to transcendent values. The question is in each case: Does, say, this feeling, increase our power of action or not? Does it help us to come into full possession of that power? (1997: 269).

Deleuze's reading of Spinoza is close to some of the key ideas within Positive Psychology. Seligmann (2006), for instance, talks about the difference between optimistic and pessimistic explanatory styles. The difference is not just a matter of convincing oneself that something sad actually is joyous. It should not be mistaking with the fad of positive thinking. Rather, it is a matter of seeing different relations that might produce a more fruitful understanding of what actually happens. In other words: using one's power to the limit. Learning how to think is related with paying attention to the extent where other possibilities emerge, where lines of flights are produced. The difference between the optimistic and pessimistic explanatory style is that one has the courage to turn reactive forces into active by deciding what has meaning, and what doesn't. How to organize a life in a functional way that are in alignment with ones desires? Taking such decision, of course, always happens within the limits of actualizing our imagination. Deleuze might imagine himself being healthy, but that is not within his power. Time is not reversible, but he might – within his limit of action – use his power to manifest the difference between dying and death.

The relation between Positive Psychology and Deleuze is present in how to overcome the problem that we might address as: How to transform a life that is formed by pure reaction (i.e. impotence) into a life formed by positive actions (i.e. power)? Again, I believe, we come back to the will to will which again is related to his strength that he no longer could manifest.

## Conclusion: The Will to Will

A life worth living is a life that has the power to actualize its will to will. In relation to this definition, a happy death might be seen as the equivalent hereof, i.e. when a life no longer has this will, or simply accept that it no longer can act as becoming worthy of what happens. Such acknowledgement is the closest one can get to the Greek dictum: Know yourself by knowing your position, because such acknowledgement is fully knowing your place in time, knowing what is possible and what is not possible. – Acknowledging your limits in order to justify certain beliefs as being true, for instance, committing suicide as the only positive activity. Thus, let me stress: Know your location or position in life is not knowing your position in relation to pre-defined external categories or systems, like career-pattern, but a life's position. The unique position of a life within the different forces of life, such a position emerges when encounters are dealt with: either in an active and positive way, or in a reactive and pessimistic way.

In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari write:

There is a dignity of the event that has always been inseparable from philosophy as *amor fati*: being equal to the event, or becoming the offspring of one's own event – 'my wound existed before me; I was born to embody it.' I was born to embody it as event because I was able to disembody it as state of affairs or lived situation. There is no other ethic that *amor fati* of philosophy. Philosophy is always meanwhile ... Philosophy's sole aim is to become worthy of the event ... (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994: 159-160)

I believe that Deleuze succeeded with 'being equal to the event', to 'become worthy of the event' several times in his professional career as a philosopher. But, I also believe the exact same thing happened when he committed suicide. The death existed before him qua being a human that per definition is dying, but the only way to match the event was become it. To become worthy is to live with dignity and coherence towards your own thinking. A life worth living is a life without resentment; a life without negative actions or impotence, because such a life leads to a happy death. Yet, another quote might justify my belief that Deleuze died a happy death:

Every event is like death, double and impersonal in its double. It is the abyss of the present, the time without present with which I have no relation, towards which I am unable to project myself. For in it I do not die. I forfeit the power of dying. In this abyss they die – they never cease to die, and they never succeed in dying (152).

Yes, he was already death. His death existed before him; he was born to embody it. Seen with the textual tissue of his own thinking, his suicide was his last ethical act showing that freedom consist of both the will, and the will to= to create. The first will activates the much more basic existential will, i.e. the will to be against, to say no, for instance, it's enough with all this pessimism, negative actions and resentment. "I will not accept that!" he might have said. "I will not accept living like this!" he might have said. However, such will never becomes a pure opposition due to the fact that the other will, i.e. to will = to create, create an alternative. The human freedom is placed within this imperceptible relation of the courage to say no, and the creative or innovative ability to say yes: Courage and invention = freedom. When Deleuze could no longer say yes, the event he was living within was turning negative or pessimistic, he became equal with that event by doing the most negative act in live, i.e. to end a life. Hereby, he actually said his last yes in life to life. The difficult conclusion must therefore be: A suicide as the only possible decision within what is possible to fulfill the immanent purpose of a life leads to a happy death. But also, it leads to questioning in which situation a suicide really is the last yes, and not just a depressed no? Answering this questioning can only be done locally. Or in other words: The ethic of death is singular qua being part of, how a life is lived.

Committing suicide can, like Durkheim pointed out, be seen as a social fact outlining certain patterns that we need to be aware of. Looking through a sociological lens it might be easier to judge morally whether a suicide is a part of a sad tendency, for instance, the relationship between financial or economic crises and human crises. However, ethically, we have to investigate each suicide in its singularity. A life carries within it owns form of existence its own foundation, and even within this foundation it is possible for a life not to live up to its own desires and needs. A life constitutes itself by the various relations it is able to draw referring to both the courage to say no, and the inventive ability to say yes by creating new paths in life. This web of relations is what a life is made up by.

Deleuze took a clever decision (Aristotle), because it made him successful in achieving the life he lived: An affirmative life, not pessimistic or negative. And regarding Camus' question, it emphasizes that there always are several reasons for committing suicide, but the interesting question is a matter of coherence. Does the suicide affirm being alive qua dying, or does it claim – more moralistic – that some forms of life are unbearable?

Deleuze didn't kill himself because life was absurd or meaningless – as it obviously is for many who commit suicide. He didn't kill himself due to a sudden emotional shock, e.g. loss of a child, divorce, et cetera – as it also happens to many. No, he committed suicide because his life had already ended. If life is an offspring of our will to do something, to create and such will can't actualize itself, then you are not just dying, but already dead. In that sense he became equal of the event. He died with the event.



What then does it mean to die a happy death? To have used all of your resources, all your creative energy and life forces. Done what was in your power. To die peacefully and relaxed – like Socrates drinking his poison – might be the only criteria that distinguishes a happy death from other forms of deaths; being at peace and relaxed, even though only nothingness is waiting. I believe Deleuze accomplished that. I believe he is an example of a happy death.

## References

- Camus, A. (2005): *The Myth of Sisyphus*, translated by Justien O'Brien. Penguin.
- Deleuze, G. (1994): *Difference and Repetition*, translated by Paul Patton. Columbia University Press.
- Deleuze, G. (1997): *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, translated by Martin Joughin. Zone Books.
- Deleuze, G. (1999): *Bergson's Conception of Difference*, translated by M. McMahon, from *The New Bergson*, edited by J. Mullarkey. Manchester University press.
- Deleuze, G. (2004): *The Logic of Sense*, translated by Mark Lester. Continuum.
- Deleuze, G. (2002a): *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, translated by H. Tomlinson. Continuum.
- Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. (1994): *What is Philosophy?*, translated by H. Tomlinson and G- Burchell. Columbia University Press.
- Giddens, A. (1986): *Durkheim*. Fontana Press.
- Rorty, R. (1999): *Philosophy and Social Hope*. Penguin Books.
- Seligman, M. (2006): *Learned Optimism. How to Change Your Mind and Your Life*. Vintage Books.
- Williams, J. (2011): *Never Too Late? On the Implications of Deleuze's Work on Death for a Deleuzian Moral Philosophy*, in *Deleuze and Ethics* ed. by N. Jun and D.W. Smith. Edinburgh University Press.
- Urmson, J.O. (1988). *Aristotle's Ethics*. Basil Blackwell.

---

<sup>i</sup> *The Happy Death* is also the title of Camus first unpublished novel. The title of this article can be seen as homage to the writer, who addressed the problem of suicide most significantly.

<sup>ii</sup> In the philosophy of Deleuze there is no end-goal. On the contrary, a constant becoming in-between what takes place is the goal or aim, i.e. to increase our sensitivity and create productive relations to different people, different thoughts, and different emotions without reducing any of these to the same. Similarly, Deleuze doesn't believe in one vision, but the co-existence of multiple.

<sup>iii</sup> The term 'philosopher' refers to his own philosophy, so: Was his suicide an unfaithful act viewed within his own philosophical work? I do not wish to assume that philosophers have a greater responsibility as such, than any other profession. However, I believe the question is interesting, because Deleuze was a philosopher that through his work gave access to his philosophy, which is something unique due to the fact that most people committing suicide do not leave more than a suicide note, least not a well-developed philosophy.