Research Article

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# Mortality Reimagined: Going through Deleuze's Encounter with Death

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**Abstract:** Deleuze's philosophy, celebrated for its affirmation of life, also offers a profound and nuanced exploration of death, challenging conventional understandings of individuality and existence. Through key concepts such as the "death drive," the "virtual," and "assemblage," Deleuze frames death not as a terminus, but as an integral process within life itself. This article critically examines Deleuze's conception of death in three main stages. First, I explore how Deleuze characterizes the ego as a metastable entity – inherently fragile and prone to disintegration. This implies that we are always already embedded in processes that draw us into larger becomings, dissolving fixed identities. Next, I differentiate this perspective from spiritual traditions that emphasize ego dissolution. I argue that Deleuze's framework, while grounded in a secular, intellectual engagement with worldly involvement, offers insights that could enrich spiritual discourse. Finally, I also identify limitations in his approach. Deleuze's intense focus on the creation of the new often overlooks what he terms the "first death," which aligns with traditional conceptions of mortality as an absolute end. He appears to neglect the possibility of a final cessation of all processes, such as the heat death of the cosmos. After presenting the practical implications of these considerations for religious life, I conclude by addressing various points of contact between these reflections and other intellectual currents. While Deleuze's philosophy may not serve as a definitive framework for understanding death, engaging with his ideas provides insightful and novel perspectives on existence. It encourages a reexamination of the boundaries between life and death from an immanent standpoint, enriching traditional perspectives.

**Keywords:** Deleuze, death drive, ego fragmentation, ego dissolution, first death, second death, immanence, spirituality

## 1 Introduction

A philosophy as profoundly attuned to the affirmation of life as that of Deleuze may seem, at first glance, an unlikely framework for contemplating death.[1] Even the tragic circumstances of his suicide should not be construed as justification for such an inquiry, for an author's work should be evaluated primarily on the substance of their ideas.[2] Yet, upon closer examination, Deleuze's thought extends far beyond a mere materialist philosophy. It offers a deep engagement with the concept of death, weaving it into the fabric of life.[3] In his brief treatise on "Pure Immanence," Deleuze articulates a transcendental field distinct from empirical

1 Ansell-Pearson, "Affirmative Naturalism."
2 Osaki, "Killing Oneself, Killing the Father."
3 Smith, "Deleuze and Derrida, Immanence and Transcendence."

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experience – one that neither refers to an object nor belongs to a subject.[4] The transcendental field represents a life not of individuation but of singularization. Such a life harbors virtualities. For instance, a wound, as a possibility, is always already there in the field of virtualities, waiting to be actualized and existing before me as an individual. For Deleuze, the critical philosophical task lies in exploring these non-representable intensities and singularities, which are responsible for what we perceive and for the act of perception itself.[5]

In the philosophy of Deleuze, it is crucial to reject any form of transcendence and to focus on real-world genesis instead of conditions of possibilities. Actual entities are manifestation points of a process that originates from pre-individual intensities, unactualized potentials or gradients, or an embryonic quantity in its own internal resonance. These intensities enter into external relations – relations that are not intrinsic to the intensities themselves – and give rise to individualized phenomena.[6] Deleuze refers to the return to the pre-individual realm as "counter-actualization," a concept closely aligned with the notion of de-individualization found in spiritual systems. The key distinction between Deleuze's philosophy and these spiritual systems lies in his provision of an explanation for what he terms the non-representable. Deleuze resolves this apparent contradiction by positing a continuity between our actual existence and the pre-individual field of immanence, a field in which we are always already immersed, though unable to fully articulate it. This is revealed most vividly in limit experiences where identity fractures, allowing the hidden field of immanence to become perceptible. These moments expose the fluid connection between the intangible and the tangible, challenging fixed boundaries of understanding.[7] To invoke Hegel, one might argue that our cognition is part of a process capable of self-comprehension.

What value does it hold for someone who has already engaged with the concept of death from a spiritual perspective to also delve into the Deleuzian notion of death, especially when the ultimate aim is to transcend it? A straightforward response is that, as beings who function within society, we are inevitably bound to a worldly dimension. Even if we attempt to recalibrate our lives through certain principles and ritualistic practices toward a higher spiritual goal, we remain influenced by the external world. This explains the frequent disappointments in monastic settings, where far more worldliness and ego are encountered than one might expect from the outside. Indeed, it is true that these are lapses for which we feel remorse, leading us to reflect deeply on our shortcomings. However, these lapses reveal a fracture within the self – a self that is more than just the conscious ego. This fracture is often exacerbated by the projection of an idealized future self, free from flaws, onto our current existence. A central thesis of this article is that we can address this fracture from an immanent perspective, one that does not pit the spiritual side against the worldly, but rather unites them in the shared endeavor of diminishing the ego.

Deleuze's concept of "caesura" illuminates the fractured self, suspended between temporal representations.[8] It is a term originally derived from poetry, where it signifies a deliberate pause or break within a line of verse, often creating a moment of reflection or emphasis. In a broader philosophical context, it symbolizes a fundamental interruption or hiatus within a continuous flow, leading to a moment of potential reconfiguration. The fractured self resonates with the idea that consciousness cannot exist without a unifying synthesis, yet this synthesis transcends fixed notions of individuality or personhood. Singularities, operating on an unconscious and immanent plane, serve as the true agents of unification – nomadic and impersonal principles that generate individuality and selfhood without being reducible to them.[9] Hence, the underlying fragmentation is not a passive state but rather an active and dynamic condition that opens up the potential for transformation and agency. It is within the interstitial space, the caesura, that the self is empowered to engage in meaningful action.

Here, we set ourselves apart from approaches that either inherently locate spirituality within Deleuzian philosophy[10] or see in postmodernism an ally in the sacralization of the world following the acceptance of the

**4** Deleuze and Boyman, *Pure Immanence*, 25.
**5** Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 230.
**6** Mader, "Philosophical and Scientific Intensity in the Thought of Gilles Deleuze."
**7** Williams, *Gilles Deleuze's Logic of Sense*, 107.
**8** Voss, "Deleuze's Third Synthesis of Time."
**9** Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 102.
**10** Bryden, *Deleuze and Religion*, 4.

death of God.[11] Such perspectives attempt to reconcile the divide by subsuming it into a single dimension. This tendency explains the frequent dismissal of Cartesian dualism. While such rejections may appear convincing, they often sidestep the persistent challenge of the mind-body problem, which reemerges in contemporary discussions on qualia.[12] This persistence suggests that the rejection of dualism is frequently driven by ideological predispositions rather than rational discourse. Our challenge is to endure this internal divide, which forces freedom upon us. Unlike Hegel, Deleuze places less emphasis on such freedom.[13] In his framework, the pre-individual plane of immanence is so foundational that the debate over whether we are determined by these forces or can consciously intervene seems almost secondary. Yet, Deleuze's concept of counter-actualization acknowledges human freedom while emphasizing the limitations of conscious decisions.[14]

In the end, the task is not to defend freedom at all costs but to acknowledge that we are compelled to act freely by the very internal divide that defines us. This divide is something we often seek to overcome too hastily, driven by the allure of something beyond us that seems to promise more than a freedom that often feels like a burden. The aim here, through an immanent philosophy, is to minimize illusions regarding ourselves. I argue that Deleuze provides a unique conceptual framework that allows for comprehension of complex phenomena like death, surpassing the explanatory power of other philosophical traditions such as phenomenology, hermeneutics, or analytical philosophy. Deleuze represents the pinnacle of a philosophy of immanence – one that, due to its acute sensitivity to the ineffable, can sometimes seem to exude a mystical aura. Especially, for those who do not seek transcendence, Deleuze's thought offers a form of hope that starkly contrasts with the existentialist acceptance of meaninglessness,[15] making his philosophy deeply compelling. Immersing oneself in Deleuze's school of thought is to encounter the joys of life, coupled with the most rigorous critique of anything that seeks to transcend it. Once one has traversed this philosophical landscape, few things can divert the course from a path that ventures beyond mere immanence, transcending all its hopes and complexities.

In the following section, I will explore key concepts from Deleuze in relation to death, weaving them together into a cohesive perspective. From there, I seek to distill a distinctively Deleuzian view of death, which will serve as the basis for assessing its resonance with spiritual perspectives. This will allow for a critical evaluation of which elements may be affirmed within such paradigms and which aspects might necessitate rejection. Given that Deleuze's ideas may not always be readily accessible within theological domains, I have chosen to deliberately reiterate the central aspects and nuances of his key concepts. This approach aims to make Deleuze's profound insights more comprehensible to a broader audience.

## 2 Core Concepts of Deleuzian Philosophy Related to Death

In this section, I explore key concepts in Deleuzian philosophy related to death, incorporating significant insights from Brent Adkins[16] and Shaun Stevenson.[17] Before proceeding with an in-depth analysis, it is necessary to clarify the terms "ego" and "individual self" – concepts corresponding to the German *Ich* and the French *moi*. Unlike Freudian psychoanalysis, which distinguishes different components of the psyche, I use these terms interchangeably. Here, the "ego" refers to the entire scope of the subject's conscious experience, not merely a constructed self-image. This aligns with the phenomenological understanding of the ego as a pars pro toto, where the ego becomes synonymous with the individual self. Furthermore, drawing on Deleuze, I conceptualize the unconscious not as a repository of repressed content but as a dynamic, collective process

**11** Taylor, *Erring*, 103.
**12** Adams and Browning, "How Colour Qualia Became a Problem."
**13** Zizek, *Less Than Nothing*, 158.
**14** Lawlor, "The Ultimate Meaning of Counter-Actualisation."
**15** Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe: Essai Sur l'absurde*, 53.
**16** Adkins, *Death and Desire in Hegel, Heidegger and Deleuze*.
**17** Stevenson, "Positively Dead."

of production, representing the universal dimension of the subject.[18] This allows for a simplified terminology, setting aside specific psychological distinctions that, while critical in psychoanalytic contexts, are less essential here. In addition to that, I use "we" as a shorthand for a general religious perspective.

Adkins explores the concept of death as intimately connected to desire and intensity. He argues with Deleuze that the intensity of a body is defined by how it can be affected and affect other bodies. This idea is captured by Deleuze's metaphor of the tick, which, after exhausting its affective potential, reaches its peak intensity and dies. The body's organization establishes boundaries that delineate its minimal and maximal potentials. Desire, seen as a primordial force for self-preservation (akin to Spinoza's conatus), emerges before the formation of the self. It is connected to partial objects, such as the breast, and is embedded within both social and psychological dimensions, encoded within specific structures like the Oedipal complex in capitalist society. Within this framework, the death drive plays a crucial role in decoding desire, facilitating its transition by disrupting the structures that confine it. Adkins equates death with the death drive, viewing both as manifestations of anti-production – forces that focus on dissolution rather than self-preservation. This dissolution creates a continuum of internal and external intensities. Consequently, death and death drive cannot be reduced to mere null points of intensity; rather, they represent transitional states within the continuum of life's intensities. This perspective shifts the understanding of death from being a mere cessation of life's intensity to a profound transformation – a transition where death does not signify the end of life itself but rather the end of the directedness of desire.

Stevenson highlights Deleuze's critical distinction between personal death and impersonal death in Difference and Repetition. Personal death pertains to the end of a specific life narrative, while impersonal death involves processes of change and transformation beyond individual existence. Here, death does not negate life but rather affirms a more fundamental, immanent life. This affirmation is not about individual life but about a singular, impersonal life that is intertwined with the death drive. The death drive, or Thanatos, represents a form of repetition that underpins the structure of consciousness's time, which is structured through two syntheses: habit and memory.[19] At a fundamental level, this means that consciousness operating in the present and grounded in the past can be detached from the involved series of events, which constitutes the fractioned I and an empty order of time, called the third synthesis of time.[20] It is related to the death instinct because desire is now detached from the ego, desexualized, allowing intensities to unfold in whatever direction. This synthesis represents an empty order of time because the whole series of events is in view, where order plays no role. The concepts of the human game and the divine game further elaborate this perspective. In contrast to the human game, the divine game has no pre-existing rule and affirms all chance and regards of time (not just the present). Death, as a boundary between these games, allows for transcendence beyond the human, fostering novel forms of existence through what Deleuze terms the Body without Organs (BwO[21]). This process liberates us from human-defined strata and encourages creative lines of flight.[22] Hence, death's significance lies in its capacity to generate novelty outside the conscious experiences.

These insights on death, potentially linked to the notion of palingenesis,[23] underscore the importance of continuity, resonating with Bergson's concept of "duration."[24] Duration, as Bergson envisions it, represents a continuous, qualitative flow of time that resists fragmentation into discrete units. It transcends the mere ticking of clocks and calendar days, embodying the lived, subjective experience of time – a seamless unfolding that captures the essence of existence. Deleuze extends Bergson's ideas, proposing that virtual duration underpins and interconnects all phenomena, offering an interconnected ontology where the virtual and the actual are in constant interplay.[25] Within this framework, death is not seen as a terminal event but as a

**18** Kleinherenbrink, "Metaphysical Primitives."
**19** Leites, "Deleuze and the Work of Death."
**20** Faulkner, *Deleuze and the Three Syntheses of Time*.
**21** Smith, "What Is the Body without Organs?"
**22** Miranda, "Is A New Life Possible?"
**23** Eloff, "Enacting the Anti-Fascist Body."
**24** Grosz, "Bergson, Deleuze and the Becoming of Unbecoming."
**25** Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 204.

manifestation within the impersonal virtual plane – a movement of differences that perpetually eludes definitive resolution. The virtual, which we grasp only via question-problem complexes, cannot be fully represented but can be conceptually approached due to our immersion within it. Similarly, the ego's death is not a factual occurrence, but a problem situated within the virtual – existentially significant yet devoid of individual particularity. The fear of death arises from attachment to the ego's manifestation, resisting the deeper flow of becoming that transcends the self's boundaries. Continuity invites us to embrace the flow of existence, recognizing that the end of the individual ego is not annihilation but a return to the impersonal virtual plane.

## 2.1 Death and Death Drive

Simplifying the discussion above, for Deleuze, life is envisioned as a series of perpetual transformations, with death being one of these shifts. Death does not annihilate life but transmutes it.[26] The self is a temporary consolidation of forces that, upon death, dissolves and reorganizes. The forces that constituted this assemblage do not disappear but are redistributed into new forms within the vast field of life's potential.[27] Freud's death drive undergoes a profound reinterpretation here. Freud initially framed it as a compulsion toward self-destruction or a return to inanimate matter, contrasting Eros (life instincts) with Thanatos (death instincts).[28] Deleuze, however, reimagines the death drive not as an internal drive but as a force of assemblages.[29] This is where the BwO becomes significant, representing a state of pure potentiality unbound by traditional organizing principles.

Both death and the death drive seek transcendence from the ego's constraints, characterized not by finality but by reversibility and its intimate connection to personal consciousness. It is through this process of constraint-dissolution that the self may momentarily step beyond its limitations, engaging in the creation of new concepts and meanings and reflecting upon its own transformation. A potential blind spot might be present here: Deleuze's blending of death and the death drive could be seen as an evasion of the reality that death obliterates the possibility of personal experience. From a system-theoretical standpoint, Deleuze blurs the line between consciousness and life systems and the allopoietic environment into which we disintegrate upon death.[30] Although pre-individual singularities contribute to the emergence of the self, this transcendence holds little meaning for the individual human being. Believing otherwise may project an illusory continuity of the self beyond death.

In summary, unlike existentialist or metaphysical perspectives that regard death as the ultimate concern, Deleuze approaches death as merely another phase in the ceaseless process of becoming. Death, in this sense, lacks the existential gravitas found in other philosophical traditions. There is no mourning for the loss of being, nor is there anxiety about the void of non-existence. Deleuze's distinction between the virtual and the actual is key to understanding this (next sub-section). Upon death, the actual body disintegrates, but the virtual forces that composed it persist. These virtual intensities do not perish but continue to exist, recombining into new forms. The BwO can be understood as the virtual form that, even during personal existence, allows one to feel the virtual realm. Ultimately, the death drive is nothing other than a longing for this dissolution into the virtual, a return to the infinite potentiality that underlies existence itself.

## 2.2 Virtual and Actual

Deleuze's distinction between the virtual and the actual provides a critical perspective on the nature of death. The actual refers to the tangible manifestations of underlying forces, while the virtual represents the reservoir

**26** Lorraine, "Unfolding Life with Death."
**27** Beaulieu and Ord, "The Death of Gilles Deleuze as Composition of a Concept."
**28** Somers-Hall, "Deleuze, Freud and the Three Syntheses."
**29** Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 312.
**30** Sariyar, "Death from the Perspective of Luhmann's System Theory."

of potentiality that underlies and informs the actual. Death can be understood as a process where the actual dissolves, releasing the virtual forces that once shaped it.[31] The virtual is not merely a blueprint waiting to be actualized; it is an excess – a differential that surrounds and permeates the actual, rendering it always incomplete and open to transformation. After death, the virtual intensities that constituted a living being are not extinguished but persist, reshaping and manifesting in new forms within the world. The more attuned we are to these forces during life, the more conceivable it becomes to envision our continued existence through them, albeit in a transformed capacity.

The distinction between the virtual and the actual can be elegantly understood through the metaphor of a differential equation.[32] In mathematics, a differential equation defines the relationship between a function and its derivatives, mapping the trajectory of a system. Here, the virtual represents the space of latent possibilities and potentials inherent within the equation's structure – an abstract domain where potential states and developments exist but remain unactualized. The actual, by contrast, emerges as the specific solution to the differential equation: the concrete expression of the system's behavior under given initial and boundary conditions. In this sense, solving the equation is the act of actualizing the virtual, transforming latent potential into tangible reality. Boundary conditions, as condensations of intensities, mark the thresholds where these potentials crystallize into specific outcomes, such as the emergence of a specific desire. The differential equation itself embodies all potential solutions, encapsulating the virtual – the infinite array of paths the system might traverse. The virtual is not static; it persists as a dynamic and ever-present source of potential outcomes. Under varying conditions, it holds the capacity to generate different, new actualizations.[33]

To make these concepts even more vivid, the interplay between the virtual and the actual can be illustrated through children's play. Children allow themselves to be carried by joyful energies in their play, which are driven by singular points and their connections in the virtual realm. In this process, the energy rises at certain phases, for example when they interact with a piece of playground equipment, only to diminish again as the ordinary sequence of actual events takes over, until they reach a new singular point. Sometimes, children try to actively recreate these moments, only to be surprised that the effect is not the same as when they simply let themselves be carried by them. It is only when they fully surrender to the potentials of the moment that the fascinating experience unfolds – a complete absorption in the present, filled with joy, that captivates the observer. In this state, the boundary between the virtual and actual blurs, as the children's engagement creates a flow where new possibilities constantly emerge, unplanned yet deeply fulfilling.

## 2.3 Syntheses of Time

Deleuze's exploration of the syntheses of time offers a complex understanding of how presence, the past, and the future interrelate.[34] Drawing on Kantian philosophy and extending beyond mere introspection, Deleuze offers a dynamic and intricate examination of temporality. He identifies three syntheses of time. The first synthesis pertains to the present moment and is characterized by the repetition of events, habits, and actions. It is through these recurring patterns that we derive a sense of continuity. This continuity, established in the present, enables us to anticipate future occurrences based on past experiences. This synthesis is described as passive as it involves automatic and habitual repetitions.

The second synthesis is active and concerns the past and memory. Unlike the first synthesis, which is focused on present experiences and habitual patterns, this synthesis involves the preservation and active reworking of the past within memory. Time in this context is recursive, integrating the past into the present as

**31** Gaffney, *The Force of the Virtual*, 4.
**32** Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 177.
**33** Somers-Hall, "Hegel and Deleuze on the Metaphysical Interpretation of the Calculus."
**34** Faulkner, *Deleuze and the Three Syntheses of Time*, 56.

a virtual dimension that continually influences current experiences.[35] This synthesis operates with the notion of a "pure past," which is not merely recalled but serves as a foundational backdrop for all present moments. Memory, in this framework, is the active process that enacts past experiences, transforming them into a dynamic force that enriches the present. This act of retrieval and reactivation extends past influences beyond their original temporal context.

The third synthesis represents a radical departure from the previous two. It embodies a static, eternal dimension that Deleuze terms the "empty form of time" or "Aion."[36] This notion represents an all-encompassing, timeless whole. In this synthesis, time is not segmented into past, present, and future but integrates all aspects simultaneously. Aion underlies our conscious temporal experience (Chronos) and represents a non-linear, eternal time where all moments coexist as potentials. This external, unexperienced time introduces a repetition, occurring within an absolute temporal order – Deleuze's "ordinal time." It is the eternal return, which reflects a temporal series interrupted by a singular, monumental event (the death of God), which manifests through the active extinction of the self.[37] What eternally recurs through this repetition is the moment of irretrievability, the very essence of what one desires to eternalize: the actualization of the novel as a novel. In the realm of Aion, death is a singular occurrence within the continuous stream of existence. It disrupts the continuity of Chronos but does not sever the underlying essence of being. Instead, it reconfigures existence, aligning with Deleuze's concept of the "dividual."[38] Rather than a unified entity, the dividual is seen as a mutable assemblage of flows, fragments, and data. Death catalyzes a deterritorialization, dissolving the structured body into a BwO subsisting within the Aion.

Again, children at play offer a powerful illustration of Deleuze's three syntheses of time. Imagine children on a playground, running around and engaging with different play structures. Their activities are driven by the first synthesis of time: the repetition of familiar actions like swinging, climbing, and sliding. This is the passive synthesis at work, where actions repeat automatically, forming the stable, ongoing flow of the present. During play, something new can emerge: a sudden spark of creativity or imagination that draws from the second synthesis. A child might suddenly turn the slide into a pirate ship, drawing from past experiences of stories or other games. This transformation of the slide into something imaginative reflects the active reworking of the past – memories and imaginative experiences are brought into the present, not just as direct recollections, but as virtual potentials that reshape the immediate experience. This pure past is always available in the background, a well of possibility that the child actively taps into during play.

Then, there is the moment when something unexpected happens – a child pauses at the top of the slide, gazing into the distance, seemingly frozen in time. Here, we see the influence of the third synthesis of time, Aion. In this moment, time no longer feels sequential. The child is not simply moving from one action to the next. Instead, the present expands, becoming timeless, as the child is absorbed in the infinite potential of that moment. All times seem to converge here – past experiences, future possibilities, and the present – forming a single, boundless field. This timeless immersion reflects Aion, where moments coexist in an eternal present, unbound by linear progression. It is not without reason that it appears as though we are perceiving a pure, divine energy that has not yet been tainted.

## 2.4 Common Sense and Assemblages

Common sense represents the collective wisdom and shared knowledge of society, shaping our perceptions and judgments.[39] It is deeply intertwined with doxa, the prevailing opinion or belief that is so ingrained in our

**35** Voss, "Deleuze's Third Synthesis of Time."
**36** Somers-Hall, "Deleuze, Freud and the Three Syntheses."
**37** Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 150.
**38** Bruno and Rodríguez, "The Dividual."
**39** Snir, "Making Sense in Education."

consciousness that it becomes dogmatic – what we might call ortho-doxa. Common sense is the foundation upon which our cognitive faculties operate, enabling us to recognize, classify, and make sense of the world around us. It guides our thought processes, ensuring that we can identify and categorize objects and experiences in a way that aligns with the established norms of society. Even when common sense fails, leading to errors in judgment or understanding, it is often assumed that the failure is not of thought itself but of a temporary malfunction in our cognitive apparatus. Philosophers have long recognized that thought cannot be reduced merely to true or false recognition; there are deeper, more complex modes of thinking that challenge the rigidity of common sense.[40]

Assemblages, or "agencements," are dynamic systems composed of diverse elements that come together to form functional or expressive wholes.[41] These elements can be human or non-human, and their interactions create complex networks of relations that define the assemblage's identity and behavior. Unlike static structures, assemblages are characterized by their fluidity and capacity for change. They are constantly undergoing processes of de-territorialization, where established connections are broken, and re-territorialization, where new connections are formed.[42] This dynamic nature means that assemblages are always in a state of becoming, rather than being. The properties of an assemblage are not simply the sum of its parts but emerge from the interactions between its components. These interactions are governed by relations of exteriority, meaning that while the parts of an assemblage are interconnected, they retain a degree of independence, allowing the assemblage to be reconfigured or dismantled without losing its coherence.

Common sense, rooted in shared knowledge and fixed categories, often struggles to grasp the fluid and ever-changing nature of assemblages. It itself is a product of such assemblages, a realization accessible only through intensive, differential thinking. This tension between static understanding and dynamic reality is where the true complexity of thought emerges.

Death, within this framework, can be understood as a moment of radical deterritorialization – a dismantling of the assemblage that constitutes a living being. While common sense might perceive death as a final, absolute end, assemblage theory reveals it as a transformation rather than a termination. In this light, death defies the dogmatic image of thought as something comprehensible by common sense.

# 3 Assessing the Deleuzian Death Concept

In this section, I will evaluate Deleuze's concept of death in three steps. First, I will elucidate its defining feature, which I will term the fragmentation of the ego. Next, I will assess its potential spiritual utility and finally its limits. This analysis will reveal that, even in rejecting Deleuze's objectives, his thought provides profound insight into our limitations, highlighting problems for which he may not have intended to contribute.

## 3.1 Fragmentation of the Ego

What emerges from the preceding discussion as the essence of the concept of death is the realization that the ego represents a metastable surface phenomenon. It is the outcome of an assembly of heterogeneous, interrelated elements and is perpetually at risk of dissolution due to its virtual continuity. This insight is nothing new in relation to Freudian theory, yet it extends beyond the mere interplay of psyche and body to encompass relationships with other manifest entities as well as the virtual realm (the capacities of the involved entities). This process of returning to a less organized state is termed "second death," which recurs throughout life until

**40** Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze*, 14.

**41** Buchanan, "Assemblage Theory, or the Future of an Illusion."

**42** MacKenzie and Porter, "Deleuze and Guattari and Political Theory."

the "first death" signifies a point of irreversible transformation, leading to different forms of repetition.[43] According to Spinoza, the first death occurs when a body's proportion of motion and rest is altered to such an extent that it is minimally affected by external forces.[44] The second death is a concept imbued with positivity: it is positive both in the sense of affirming existence and in its creative potential.

This second death as the death drive (Thanatos), by compelling a return to a less organized state, disrupts the coherence and continuity of our present experience. It introduces a form of temporal disruption that challenges the stability of the here and now, subjecting our immediate experience to the forces of dissolution and reformation. This drive toward dissolution and reorganization affects not only the present but also the way past experiences are accessed and understood. It disrupts the straightforward continuity of past experiences, which leads to a re-evaluation and transformation, altering how these experiences are perceived and how they impact the present moment. The apparent continuity of the ego that we often experience is a result of the way gaps and reshaping of the past are incorporated into representational patterns of understanding. Deleuze does not oppose representations; rather, he emphasizes that these are surface phenomena of cognitive faculties.[45]

The fragmentation of the ego does not always guarantee its survival. The degree to which the ego can be disrupted is reminiscent of the constraints faced by the tick feeding on its host: though a multitude of virtual potentials lies dormant beneath the surface, the manifestation of these potentials is limited by the body's intrinsic boundaries. The resilience of the ego is tested by the intensity and magnitude of its fragmentation. Just as the tick's sustenance is limited by the host's physiological confines, the endurance of the ego is governed by the threshold of physical and psychological coherence.[46] We intuitively recognize that we cannot expose ourselves to every risk, yet the image of thought often obscures this danger. Some deliberately venture into peril, such as mountaineers seeking to unlock latent potentials and transcend boundaries. This dissolution of limits, attainable only through embracing significant risk, reflects a shift from a human endeavor to a divine game.

This line of thought suggests that to transcend our limitations, we must open ourselves to the subterranean forces within us, the uncharted territories of the self. This is what Deleuze and Guattari articulate in their concepts of *becoming-animal* or *becoming-child*.[47] In the process of becoming, one entity does not simply transform into another; rather, each entity interacts with the other, resulting in a state of becoming that exists in the interstice between them, beyond their individual identities. This intermediary state is what Deleuze refers to as a "pure affect" or "pure percept," which remains irreducible to the subjective experiences of affections or perceptions. Individuals discover their authentic identities only through a rigorous process of depersonalization, wherein they become receptive to the myriad multiplicities within themselves and the intensities that permeate their existence. This self-experimentation serves as the foundation of identity, facilitating a transition from the eternal to the novel and from the universal to the singular.[48]

Becoming calls for a rejection of identification with the overarching whole – this includes the ego – and an openness to the possibilities of life that lie beyond individual singularization and the constructed image of the self. Such an approach leads to an affirmation of life, echoing Bergson's *élan vital*, a vital force that drives creativity and evolution.[49] Although it might appear as a form of regression, Deleuze argues that the opposite is true: our backwardness stems from the fact that we quickly confine our inherent potentials into narrow, limited pathways. It is our representational thinking, our reliance on common sense, that hinders us from fully realizing our potential. An idea, in its fullest sense, can only emerge when we encounter an intensity mediated by the signs of a problem – when we have no clear direction of where the journey will lead. New thoughts are encountered and not produced.

**43** Crowley, "Possible Suicide."
**44** Land, "Making It with Death."
**45** Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy*, 11.
**46** Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 348.
**47** Ibid., 368.
**48** Smith and Smith, *Essays on Deleuze*, 124.
**49** DiFrisco, "Élan Vital Revisited."

The absence of direction in such a perspective on life can evoke a sense of dread, which justifies the notion "second death." When one allows oneself to be influenced by the thought of transcending common sense and societal necessities within a mundane consciousness, one is left without a stable foundation to anchor them. One begins to dissolve, with no clear understanding of where they are headed or why. In such a state, might it not seem preferable to live as a wanderer, aimlessly drifting through existence? Here, we encounter the first cracks in the joyful creation of novelty. Experience teaches us that not every relinquishment of order-enhancing structures leads to greater novelty or joy. The Spinozist maxim, which urges us to aim for that which maximizes the intensity of being affected and affecting others, offers no clear guidance on how to achieve this. Certain structures appear necessary to reach this maximum intensity. Simply embracing the BwO does not guarantee an elevated level of affective intensity. We seem to require a fundamental degree of common sense, even though the ultimate objective is to transcend it. This echoes the distinction between the philosophy of being and the philosophy of essence in Hegel's work. Although immediacy is the ultimate goal, it can only be achieved through mediation; pure immediacy is unattainable, for it would immediately dissolve upon attainment. Bergson recognized this as well, which is why he introduced the duality of memory.[50]

Deleuze recognizes the necessity of a certain structure for the stability of the self.[51] However, he intentionally refrains from deriving this structure from everyday consciousness, as doing so would fail to honor the profound intensity of a death that shatters the ego. Stability is rather anchored in the experiences surrounding my effects. I engage in a series of experiments with both my body and mind, exploring boundaries that I then test, thereby encountering the limits of my being. This approach closely mirrors the phenomenological reduction, albeit inverted. The inversion lies in our focus: rather than seeking the essential structures of thought, we delve into the mental and physical possibilities that lie beyond the realm of common sense. Ultimately, the true guarantor of stability is habit. The highest achievement I can aspire to is the habituation to encountering novelty – a perpetual return of difference in the Nietzschean sense. Just as Nietzsche posits that the "last man" must exist to pave the way for the Übermensch, certain structures from everyday consciousness are necessary to enable the "divine game" of existence. Stability, therefore, is not a constraint but a precondition for the exploration of new possibilities.

## 3.2 Dissolution of the Ego

To assess the value of Deleuze's notion of the "second death" from a spiritual standpoint, one should juxtapose the ego fragmentation inherent in this concept with the ego dissolution, which is regarded as a pivotal element in perennial philosophy for reestablishing a connection with the Divine. René Guénon, a prominent figure in traditional thought, argues that the contingent ego is an illusory construct that obscures true understanding of existence.[52] The transcendence of this illusory ego is therefore pivotal for spiritual realization. The destruction of the ego paves the way for a return to a universal essence that transcends all individual and relative forms. By dismantling personal limitations, one is afforded the opportunity to directly experience the Divine and recognize their true identity as an integral part of the universal being. In this context, the "second death" appears to encapsulate only a limited perspective that moves from persistence to subsistence and not beyond all manifestation.

When examined closely, the process of achieving the impersonal according to Deleuze signifies a transformation wherein the individual evolves into a constellation of liberated singularities – a condition where the boundaries between the personal and the collective, the private and the universal, become fluid. This form of depersonalization emerges from a place of love, allowing the impersonal to be understood as an active and creative state. After fragmentation, the components of the ego are interwoven in a new and intensified

**50** Elsasser, "A Reformulation of Bergson's Theory of Memory."
**51** Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 305.
**52** Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, 37.

manner. Here, the ego is not condemned as an illusion but is seen as a limiting condensation that Deleuze seeks to loosen, enabling the energies associated with it to become potent on a different level.

Despite the differences between fragmentation and dissolution, Deleuze's concept of depersonalization is, in fact, much closer to the spiritual than most worldviews that nourish and strengthen the ego. In fact, Deleuze's perspective appears to converge with traditional spiritual teachings that aim to transcend the ego and attain unity with the divine or the absolute.[53] However, he introduces a crucial new dimension: the integration of novel experiences into this process. This is particularly evident in the context of thinking. Much like Heidegger, Deleuze suggests that true thinking only emerges when we are surprised by it – when thinking becomes an encounter with a sign (something forcing us to think) rather than the active construction or continuation of pre-existing thoughts. Heidegger argues that true thinking requires continually re-extracting thoughts and expressions.[54] Similarly, for Deleuze, authentic thought emerges not from common sense or conventional reasoning, but through the creation of new concepts that enhance our understanding and engagement with fundamental issues. In this perspective, thinking is not merely the application of reason, but a rupture with habitual patterns, making space for novel ideas and insights.

As long as we remain within a capitalist society dominated by the limiting constraints of common sense, we can indeed recognize Deleuze as a significant ally in challenging the notion of a fixed ego. Common sense compels us to think within predefined categories and norms, reinforcing the illusion of a stable and immutable self. Such societal frameworks foster a rigid and static view of identity, constraining the flow of life and the richness of human experience. Deleuze's philosophical approach offers a means to interrogate these rigid constructs of identity. Regardless of the direction in which this inquiry leads – be it spiritual, artistic, philosophical, or even political – Deleuze's work allows us to transcend the tyranny of the ego. This liberation from conventional categories and norms opens the door to a deeper and more nuanced engagement with reality, free from the constraints of common sense.

Hence, Deleuze's philosophy allows us to engage with one's spiritual path from a wordly perspective.[55] Empirical evidence suggests that many religious individuals often grapple with a pronounced ego and a sense of self-righteousness, particularly due to their self-identification as religious. This tendency can be significantly challenged when they encounter not only idealized examples of saints but also secular philosophies that emphasize the importance of ego relativization. There need not be a conflict between spiritual and purely secular perspectives, especially when focusing on socially observable outcomes. While fundamental differences remain, they tend to play a secondary role in interpersonal interactions.

## 3.3 Limits of Deleuze

Let us now turn to the limitations of Deleuze's philosophy in the context of death. While it can certainly guide us toward a form of spiritual realization, it also presents a risk of appropriation precisely because it encounters less resistance in society compared to transcendent systems. Deleuze himself advocates for experimentation and refrains from moral judgments, even though his atheistic stance is relatively clear. This very humility makes Deleuze both appealing and potentially appropriable. Deleuzian philosophy does not constitute a counter-initiation proposing enlightenment; rather, it offers assistance in leading a more intense life, free from the usual constraints we experience. This does not immediately appear as a source of danger, nor is it, provided we understand its limitations and remain aware that Deleuze's philosophy can unwittingly confine us to immanence if we fail to make a conscious effort to transcend it.

At first glance, it may seem inconsequential how the ego is disintegrated if the ultimate goal is to transcend individual identity. Whether the ego disintegrates through rigorous religious practices or through other

**53** Sariyar, "Becoming Child of the Moment through Deleuzian Philosophy and Sufism."
**54** Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, 19.
**55** Justaert, *Theology After Deleuze*, 39.

spiritual or philosophical methods might appear irrelevant. However, this perspective overlooks the profound significance and purpose behind different paths to ego disintegration. Understanding that the corresponding journey encompasses both the outcome, and the process is crucial. Various methods – whether through religious rituals, meditation, philosophical inquiry, or other spiritual disciplines – yield distinct experiences and forms of transformation. The manner in which the ego is dissolved influences the consciousness and understanding of the individual embarking on this journey. In many spiritual traditions, including the perennial philosophy, the process of dissolution itself is considered an integral aspect of spiritual maturation and re-connection with the divine.[56] The focus is not solely on eliminating the ego but also on the manner and state of consciousness in which this transformation occurs. It is no coincidence that Deleuze emphasizes art as a primary medium for ego dissolution. In this context, the artistic experience serves as a profound means of navigating and transcending the ego, illustrating the deep interplay between process and outcome in the quest for self-transcendence.

Furthermore, we mentioned that ego fragmentation and ego dissolution are two distinct outcomes. In the case of ego fragmentation, the primary goal is to open oneself up to pre-individual intensities. This can lead to an intensified identification with various aspects of the ego, which in turn contributes to a further solidification of the boundaries between self and other. Intensity and novelty can indeed be highly idiosyncratic, as exemplified by some artists' characters. If everything remains open-ended, there is no guarantee that something will unfold in a direction that aligns with Deleuze's positive sense. In fact, depersonalization can lead to stagnation where nothing occurs. On the other hand, ego dissolution enables the individual to transcend their identity without regressing. This can result in a profound spiritual awakening, where the individual gains a new perspective on the world and develops a deeper understanding of life's complexity.

The "narrow corset" of religion often provides specific dogmas and rituals that shape and transform the ego in particular ways. While these structures can be necessary and beneficial for many, offering clear direction and discipline, they may also be perceived as constraints by others. However, these structures are not inherently negative; rather, they are tools that can either be utilized or transcended, depending on one's individual spiritual journey. From a Deleuzian perspective, such constraints are suspect because they orient toward a transcendent goal rather than focusing on the forces that shape the self.[57] Deleuze's critique holds weight in many instances, as this orientation toward a distant and abstract goal often results in a limited worldview and an inflated ego. This issue arises not merely from the pursuit of transcendence itself but from a lack of depth in reflection and a tainted intention fueled by worldly desires. Thus, the fundamental problem lies less in the pursuit of transcendence and more in the superficiality of reflection and the contamination of intent. The true challenge is to navigate these structures with a deep and discerning approach, ensuring that our spiritual journey is not merely an escape into abstraction.

If we consider the potential dangers inherent in Deleuzian immanence philosophy, might it be prudent to retreat entirely from the social sphere, abandoning Deleuzian thought in favor of a structured spiritual system? Such a retreat into a well-defined spiritual practice could facilitate a profound and focused transformation. Traditional spiritual systems often provide explicit pathways and objectives, guiding individuals through a deep and frequently transcendent process of overcoming the ego. However, this withdrawal can lead to a form of isolation that restricts engagement with the world and its challenges. Consequently, many spiritual traditions emphasize the importance of living within the world and integrating spiritual insights into everyday life. Balancing retreat with engagement often results in a more profound and practical experience. In this context, Deleuzian thought offers a valuable contribution to integrating secular, non-religious approaches to ego-relativization. From a theological perspective, the significance of Deleuze lies in the depth of his analyses rather than in the ethical implications of his philosophy, which suggest a (primarily artistic) model of life oriented toward creativity. The objective here is not to foster creativity but to facilitate a more profound transformation that bridges spiritual insight with the fabric of everyday life.

**56** Lings, *What Is Sufism*, 87.
**57** Hallward, *Out of This World*, 4.

My intent was not to integrate Deleuze into a spiritual system, but rather to view his ideas as a fallback ground that prevents us from becoming entrenched in ego illusions when worldly concerns dominate. Despite the potential pitfalls of Deleuzian philosophy and its seeming irrelevance to our ultimate spiritual destination, the benefits it offers in terms of ego relativization, and deepening thought appear to provide sufficient compensation while living in contemporary society. It is important to recognize that prolonged engagement with Deleuze often signifies an extended phase of world-centric focus. One need not completely detach from Deleuze, provided one remains aware that the ultimate goal transcends his framework. The precise extent to which one should engage with Deleuze, without incurring undue risk, remains uncertain. Perhaps experimentation is warranted, with the understanding that from a spiritual perspective, neither Deleuze nor any other intellectual pursuit holds relevance in a state of profound spiritual awareness; what matters is something that transcends the self entirely. Deleuze ultimately serves merely as a stepping stone. His philosophical contributions can function as a transitional phase in the broader development.

## 4 Practical Implications for a Religious Life

In this section, practical conclusions regarding prayer will be drawn from the preceding reflections. From a religious perspective, a central concept is that while the ego ultimately represents something to be transcended – since it separates the individual from divine truth – it nonetheless plays a fundamental role in the process of its own dissolution. Deleuze offers a similar view when he suggests that one should consciously yield to virtual energies, enhancing one's capacity both to affect and be affected. For him, engaging with and producing philosophical concepts can contribute to this process. However, a key distinction exists for a religious individual: the aim is not merely to lose oneself in the intensity of experience but to discern and evaluate such experiences. This discernment requires a divine standard, allowing the individual to gauge and structure their engagement with intensity within a religious framework.

Prayer often forms the core of religious life, manifesting in a variety of expressions. In examining the following types of prayer, we will explore how a Deleuze-inspired practice might reinterpret or expand each form:

1. Prayers of Praise and Gratitude: These prayers center on expressing gratitude or exalting the divine for its greatness.
2. Petitions and Intercessions: Here, the individual seeks assistance either for themselves or others, addressing material or spiritual needs. This form emphasizes the relational aspect of prayer, underscoring trust in divine intervention or support.
3. Contemplative and Meditative Prayers: More inward-focused and silent, these prayers cultivate a deep, personal connection with the divine. The aim is to transcend ordinary consciousness and achieve a profound sense of unity or presence.
4. Prayers of Repentance: This form involves seeking forgiveness for personal faults or transgressions, serving as a means of spiritual purification and reconciliation. It emphasizes introspection and the desire for moral and spiritual renewal.

In prayers of praise and gratitude, the primary focus is on expressing thanks not only for blessings but also for challenges. This practice positions oneself as a vessel, shaped through divine influence. Often, the more difficult experiences shake the ego so profoundly that gratitude can serve as a calming force, fostering a sense of release and detachment. Although one may later rationalize these experiences as contributing to personal growth, as illustrated in the story of Job, this is not the primary purpose of gratitude. Instead, for genuine thankfulness, particularly under such conditions, the notion of "second death" proves useful. When intense emotions are no longer personalized (e.g., "why me?") and are viewed instead as independent intensities, their negative associations begin to diminish. Experiences happen to us as part of a pre-existing virtual blueprint, one that we might better understand through an encounter with a "zero intensity" of the BwO, perceiving each event as a form of infinite potential. In such a state, we become grateful even for suffering,

because suffering is recognized as part of a divinely ordained unfolding. For the religious individual, this isn't about preserving a personal drive for life (conatus) or heightening one's affective states. Instead, it involves recognizing every occurrence as a manifestation of the divine, one to be met with gratitude and praise. This shift from ego-centered concerns to gratitude gradually facilitates the dissolution of the self, aligning the individual with the divine whole.

Petitionary and intercessory prayers are often driven by secular or self-focused concerns. However, even in these requests, there is a fundamental recognition of dependence on divine grace, rather than attributing success solely to oneself. In daily life, we are typically so absorbed in worldly concerns that we tend to claim personal ownership of our accomplishments and thoughts. Yet, if we acknowledge that we do not fully control our mental processes or emotions – and that these draw from a kind of virtual or collective sphere – we are more likely to see ourselves as interdependent rather than self-sufficient. This perspective leads to a shift in the nature of prayer: instead of asking for specific outcomes for us or others, we may pray to align our lives with what best fits the divine order. In this way, prayer becomes less about concrete requests and more about attuning to a larger, transcendent plan. Such an approach resonates with Deleuze's philosophical framework, in which God is replaced by singularities and prayer by a celebration of difference and creativity. In the face of life's ongoing and unpredictable transformations, I cannot know what is ultimately "good" for me. Thus, any specific request is inherently limited. Nevertheless, the act of petitioning itself emphasizes my dependence, and perhaps through this humble acknowledgment, a new openness to transformation is born.

It is easy to claim, when one is in good health, that the most appropriate form of prayer is a selfless, devoted one in which no personal requests are made. However, there are many people who suffer so profoundly that their deepest wish becomes simply to end their pain, even if that means death. Their suffering becomes so intense that no form of relief seems sufficient. At this stage, the self seems to shrink to a point where all that remains is the agony, a state in which the wish for death emerges as a desperate cry for help rather than any spiritual longing for transcendence. The individual's ego becomes absorbed in a single reality: unrelenting suffering. Thus, sedation or pain relief can play a critical role – not only in providing physical respite but also in deconstructing the rigid boundaries of the ego. Pain relief, in this context, can be seen as enabling the individual to view their suffering as one part of their experience rather than its entirety. As episodes of relief and intense suffering alternate, it becomes clearer that pain, although overwhelming, is merely a fragment of the whole self. This shift in perspective doesn't necessarily stop the longing for an end of life, but it adds a more nuanced wish: a hope for what is genuinely best, whether that be life or release. Even in the depths of despair, recognizing that the ego should function as a witness rather than the central decision-maker marks an important stage of human maturity – a realization with implications beyond just religious belief.

Contemplative prayer appears, at first glance, to help in transcending the ego. Its purpose is to enter into the divine presence. Yet, even when one experiences a sense of connection, there often remains a feeling that this encounter offers little that can be translated into daily life. It is helpful here to think in fragments, too. What surrenders in prayer is often just a small part of ourselves – a part that we try to position as the decisive core or equate with the whole self. However, we soon realize that this approach is ineffective. More often than not, the contrast between the glimpses of selflessness in prayer and our usual ego-centered behaviors is so stark that it leads us to feelings of inadequacy or even self-rejection, creating a sense of something within us as unworthy of the divine. Paradoxically, this very tension is both accurate and revealing; it allows us to confront the complex duality of our nature as both flawed and divinely loved. We recognize our insufficiency, yet simultaneously understand that we have always been embraced by the divine. Only when we fully dissolve the ego in surrender to God do the aspects of sin and separation begin to fade. This duality is one reason why saints are often perceived with two dimensions: the earthly self, which continuously seeks forgiveness (as seen in Jesus' humanity), and the ego-dissolved self that embodies the divine (as represented by Christ). Meditation, then, is only an initial step on a journey that requires divine grace to encompass and transform the entire ego.

This brings us to the topic of penitential prayers and the sinful aspect that resides within us. Experience indicates that atonement is rarely so thorough that it prevents the repetition of the same error; our impulses often overwhelm us, as if we lack control – because, in fact, we do. One of the critical insights derived from engaging with Deleuze is the banality with which the ego nests itself within a religious "common sense,"

shifting between sin and purification without significant transformation of the inner life. If we approach penitence not merely as individuals bearing personal responsibility but as entities largely influenced by the surrounding processes, we find that it is insufficient to simply ask for forgiveness and strength to resist sin. Instead, we must seek to become part of processes that make sin increasingly improbable. These involve singularities that penetrate our instinctual structures, pulling us into realms that underscore the value of a virtuous life. The goal is not to strengthen the ego so that it may defend itself, but rather to beseech divine grace to serve as our protection. We recognize being on the right track through an enhanced capacity to be affected by religious themes, achieving a state of inner tranquility – *mutmainna* in Arabic. This calm contrasts with Deleuzian creativity, often characterized by restlessness and constant dynamism.

In summary, it is essential to recognize that various forms of prayer benefit from an awareness of the different processes involved in ego development. Rather than reinforcing a central ego, such prayers aim to engage the diverse facets of the self in increasingly meaningful and blessed processes. This approach fosters a more dynamic, living relationship with the divine, where the focus shifts away from a specific outcome and toward a present-centered engagement with God's presence as it unfolds in the here and now. From a religious perspective, there remains a need for a central discernment function – one that distinguishes between what is divinely intended and what is not. However, this function acts more as a filtering mechanism than a controlling force over events. In Sunni Islamic theology, this concept aligns with Al-Ashari's doctrine of *kasb* (acquisition), which articulates a nuanced form of predestination. According to this view, while all events unfold according to divine will, humans retain a participatory role by either accepting or rejecting these events.[58] Although individuals lack true agency to alter or control what occurs, they are morally accountable for their responses to predetermined circumstances. This doctrine thus reconciles divine omnipotence with human responsibility, positioning human choice as a form of acquiescence or moral assent rather than as a direct influence over outcomes. Interestingly, this ostensibly conservative view bears a closer resemblance to Deleuze's philosophy than to that of the rationalist Maturidi, who envisions a self-determined free will (*ikhtiyar*) with greater control over one's actions and outcomes through a central instance.[59]

## 5 Discussion

In philosophical literature, there is broad consensus that Deleuze's notion of "impersonal death" is relevant to his philosophy, representing an entry into the infinite.[60] Williams highlights this by noting that "pure difference is the only potential remaining for future repetition and reincarnation," suggesting that what persists in us is what achieves a universal distinctiveness as an unrepeatable singularity.[61] This impersonal death may even be conceived as an event on an individual level, where one can demonstrate worthiness by relinquishing a will that can no longer manifest itself in novel ways. Baugh's analysis underscores Deleuze's marked divergence from traditional existential and phenomenological perspectives, particularly those of Heidegger, who views death as an ultimate horizon defining human finitude.[62] In contrast, Deleuze treats personal death as incidental rather than essential – something external to existence rather than central to human identity or meaning. Life's value is not measured through the lens of mortality. Instead, life acquires meaning through immanence, the inherent vitality and affective force present in each moment of experience. Agamben's analysis further extends Deleuze's notion of immanence, particularly through the idea of "bare life" as a fundamental expression of existence, independent of external structures or imposed forms of limitation,

**58** Power, "Fatalism and Free Will in Islam."

**59** Zhussipbek and Nagayeva, "Epistemological Reform and Embracement of Human Rights. What Can Be Inferred from Islamic Rationalistic Maturidite Theology?"

**60** Brassier, "The Pure and Empty Form of Death;" Beaulieu and Ord, "The Death of Gilles Deleuze as Composition of a Concept;" Phillips, "Metamorphoses."

**61** Williams, "Never Too Late? On the Implications of Deleuze's Work on Death for a Deleuzian Moral Philosophy."

**62** Baugh, "Death and Temporality in Deleuze and Derrida."

underscoring life's intrinsic value.[63] The use of terms such as "reincarnation," "infinity," and "eternity" in these approaches is strikingly close to spiritual themes. However, it often remains unclear how these concepts impact individual human experience in relation to the prospect of death from an immanent perspective. Overall, I agree with the analyses but find the conclusions insufficiently fundamental, which prompted the writing of this article.

The significance of the "second death" in Deleuze's philosophy can also be meaningfully contrasted with the notion of death within Hegel's master–slave dialectic. In both frameworks, the attainment of a higher level of existence involves confronting a process that transcends and potentially displaces the individual, driven by forces beyond one's control. In Hegel's dialectic, the driving force is the need for recognition.[64] He illustrates that self-consciousness cannot achieve self-certainty through mere interaction with the physical world, as it is perpetually constrained. It is only through engaging with another self-consciousness that consciousness can attain certainty without self-limitation. This form of recognition becomes so invaluable that individuals might be willing to face death. The slave, as the losing side in this battle, experiences dissolution into the generality of life without securing individual identity. However, this very dissolution provides an opportunity for self-affirmation and completion, thereby achieving new individuality through labor. This process bears a close resemblance to Deleuze's concept of the second death, but for Deleuze, this second death is not merely the dissolution of individuality but a dynamic process involving the repetition and transformation of the self within an infinite play of possibilities and differences.

All this has both much and nothing to do with the first death. It bears significance because both types of death involve the relinquishment of the ego. However, the second death is irrelevant to the first death as long as the self persists. The self operates as a cohesive entity, despite experiencing intermittent discontinuities. Once this unity is lost, irreversibility sets in, precluding any possibility of an eternal repetition of the same difference. If humanity were to obliterate the entire planet, it would mark the cessation of all creativity known to us. The fear of an eternal void cannot be encapsulated by the second death, as there are no more pre-existing forces capable of facilitating continuous self-transcendence. This negligence echoes Deleuze's engagement with Leibniz and Spinoza: he appears to uphold an interpassive faith in eternal substances while simultaneously rejecting such notions based on his philosophical stance.[65] Deleuze's immanent philosophy offers a compelling alternative to existentialism, rejecting transcendence while still providing hope through its engagement with life's complexities, albeit one that remains blind to the potential heat death of the cosmos.

This highlights a crossroads between joyous atheism (à la Deleuze), nihilistic atheism, and spirituality, centered on how one engages with the concept of nothingness. Joyous atheism rejects nothingness as irrelevant and morbid, viewing it as potentially paralyzing. Following Spinoza, it asserts that dwelling on death undermines our capacity to act and must therefore be repudiated as harmful.[66] Conversely, for nihilistic atheism, particularly in its existentialist form, the thought of nothingness is central. It involves enduring this reality without succumbing to hope. In this view, everything is deemed meaningless, and authenticity in life is achieved by enduring this meaninglessness and perceiving life as a form of rebellion against it. Spirituality, however, bridges these perspectives in a distinct manner. It acknowledges the meaninglessness of the world and rejects simplistic solutions such as a "leap of faith." Instead, it opens up the possibility of a deeper connection to something greater than oneself, a connection that is not solely reached through belief. This search for transcendence is guided by experimentation and experience rather than blind faith. All three approaches are shaped by a profound, non-rational intuition, which determines their respective motivations and, in Deleuze's terms, are carried by different pre-individual forces.

Whitehead's cosmology can be considered to bridge the gap between Deleuze's philosophy and spirituality by integrating both metaphysical and material dimensions.[67] Deleuze describes the virtual as an endless realm

**63** Weber, "Bare Life and Life in General."
**64** Dove, "Hegel's Phenomenological Method."
**65** Ramaglia and Sommantico, "The Contemporary Malaise of Interpassivity."
**66** Deleuze, *Spinoza*, 72.
**67** Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 31.

of potentialities, yet it remains strictly immanent in the physical world. In contrast, Whitehead's concept of "eternal objects" presents abstract potentials that exist independently of the physical realm and are apprehended through mental acts. These eternal objects introduce a space for transcendent possibilities. According to Whitehead, eternal objects shape reality through their realization in "actual entities," which continually evolve through "prehensions" of both physical and conceptual potentials. In essence, each actual entity constitutes itself by incorporating these apprehended elements. Eternal objects provide abstract possibilities – such as the structure or quality of an experience – while physical elements represent the concrete facts of reality. Unlike Deleuze, who rejects teleology, Whitehead envisions the evolution of reality as a creative and directed process, where metaphysical potentials play a crucial role. However, Whitehead's view of death itself remains ambivalent, caught between objective immortality, which refers to a state that persists into the past, and perishable subjective immediacy.[68]

Despite the apparent differences between Deleuze's philosophy and spiritual systems, it is striking how closely certain concepts from Sufism align with those of Deleuze. For instance, the notion of "second death" corresponds to *fana fillah* that signifies the dissolution of the ego into the infinite potential of the divine.[69] Additionally, the Sufi distinctions between Hal (spiritual states) and Maqamat (spiritual stages) correspond to Deleuze's first two syntheses of time. Hal, referring to transient spiritual experiences, reflects the immediate, repetitive practices that shape present states of consciousness. In contrast, Maqamat, representing enduring stages of spiritual growth, involves the continuous integration of past insights into one's ongoing development. Furthermore, Deleuze's third synthesis of time, Aion, resonates with the Sufi concept of *Muhadara* – being in the presence of God.[70] Deleuze typically refrains from addressing the content of experience, concentrating instead on the mechanisms that generate novelty through difference. Despite this, he remains critical of transcendence, regarding it as inherently restrictive to philosophical inquiry.

The question of whether "difference" can only be adequately understood as an immanent concept should be reserved for future inquiry. What I find particularly noteworthy, however, is that Deleuze engages in a form of moral evaluation concerning what outcomes are deemed favorable or unfavorable. This stands in contrast to his primary focus on ethical considerations, which, following Spinoza, are concerned with being rather than with values. Central to this ethical inquiry is the question of what conditions optimize the realization of one's power or capacity. However, what if a newly established relationship with God leads to an enhancement of such capacities? In this context, Deleuze, like Nietzsche, offers a broad rejection, rooted in historical analysis, suggesting that such a relationship would inevitably impose restrictive moral constraints. How can he assert that such a relationship precludes the comprehension of adequate ideas as effective problem–question complexes? He seems to lack the perspective to recognize the nuances in this area, largely because it appears to be of little interest to him. Consequently, counterarguments would have minimal persuasive impact.

In conclusion, Deleuze's philosophy offers three fundamental images: difference-in-itself as a pure relational concept, intensity as the sufficient reason for sensibility, and the nature of problems as catalysts for thought. These images do not correspond to direct empirical experience but instead define the underlying conditions of reality. According to Deleuze, we can best grasp these conditions by liberating ourselves from the constraining mechanisms of common sense and the ego. This liberation is achieved through the "second death," which opens us up to the unpredictable forces that may arise from virtuality. Philosophy can only fulfill its role when it operates in this state, creating new concepts. This process elevates us to the realm of the Idea – a virtual multiplicity composed of genetic elements and differential relations, which, on a more superficial level, manifest through the interaction of recognized objects and signs. The deepest meaning of self-abandonment lies in drawing from a sphere we identify with creativity and the eternal recurrence of the unknown.

**68** Henry, "Does Process Thought Allow Personal Immortality?"

**69** Geoffroy, *Introduction to Sufism*, 14.

**70** Sariyar, "Becoming Child of the Moment through Deleuzian Philosophy and Sufism."

Deleuze's engagement with the concepts of life and death provides a unique perspective. The "second death" involves the dissolution of the ego into the broader field of virtual potential and resonates with metaphysical traditions that speak of the self's integration into a larger, dynamic whole. However, Deleuze's focus on difference and becoming inherently leaves the "first death" – the physical cessation of life – relatively unexplored. His affirmative philosophy refrains from dwelling on this finality, instead directing attention to the transformative and generative potential that transcends it. While Deleuze's ideas should not be viewed as a conclusive guide to the existential questions surrounding death, they offer a refreshing and valuable lens through which to reconsider the boundaries between life, death, and the ongoing processes of becoming.

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