



Luc Geuten

Life and Entre- preneurship

Edited by
Elisa Candela

**Lannoo
Campus**

To Sylvie
Not necessary, not asked, ...
But manu scripta – scripta manent (*)

To Manu, David, Eileen, Maxime, Amélie,
Chloé, Marcus, Alix, Matthieu

And to the Reys (D), Pasettis (I),
friends, partners and acquaintances,
always ready for further
good discussions ...

* for a final time in Latin (see the intermezzo on page 116)

Introduction to *Life and Entrepreneurship*

as translated in September 2025

Over the years, while reading a wide variety of works, I had a habit of underlining passages or folding ears where I felt it was important.

The results of all that underlining and the frequent ‘ears’ still seemed contemporary to me and a nice opportunity for philosophical reflection. As a guide, some themes emerged: what is a meaningful life, does free will exist, is mankind good or evil, is life a valley of tears... or what is happiness, ageing and fear of death, social organization of the future... democracy under threat, God or the neant, Homo Economicus: lucky or smart, what is the truth, whom/what to trust, twisted between yin and yang...

To find a guide through this, the simple concept ‘GLEE ME FEE WE’ seemed to offer an interesting thought pattern going from simple franchising, to marriage, joint ventures and even geopolitics... where self-knowledge, thanks to a lot of introspection, is at the forefront with topics such as ego, greed, sexuality, generosity, jealousy,... and has a great impact on recurring choices (if free will exists?) which are mainly about the ‘ME’ versus the ‘WE’! This includes finding the right balance between one’s own roots versus global citizenship!

With ‘4x20 years’ on the clock, the message is no longer about how it should be... but how funny and sometimes dramatic it is to experience and observe the world around us.

Distance, meditation and permanent reflection can help to cope with that experience and observation. Interestingly it was a Jesuit who put forward '*cynisme salulaire*' (healthy cynicism) as an attitude in life with emphasis on the '*salulaire*' because life is truly worthwhile, and it is so valuable to be lucky enough to live... even if sometimes it can be tough.

Herewith the translation of a book that I – in all humility – wrote (in cooperation with Elisa Candela) and initially published in September 2023... before Ukraine and the U.S. elections!

In the book – perhaps surprisingly – there are the intermezzi, some low hanging fruit recommendations which, beyond the philosophical, have the merits of remaining concrete in life and might also be topics for interesting exchanges and conversations. And, with a wink, I briefly quote Groucho Marx: 'Those are my principles, and if you don't like them... well, I have others!'

Enjoy the reading!

– Luc Geuten

Readers' comments on *Life and Entrepreneurship*

'I very much enjoyed reading the many philosophical reflections acquired during a lifetime. In fact, these reflections gave me much to think about.'

– **Manfred F. R. Kets de Vries** | professor INSEAD

'In times of change and great uncertainty, this book by Luc offers a valuable source of ideas and insights; an inspiring and thoughtful work that is certainly worth reading.'

– **Duco Sickinghe** | executive chairman Fortino Capital

'I read this book with great care and interest, and from time to time was genuinely moved by the intense experience of entrepreneurship as a deeply human activity.'

– **Manu Keirse** | emeritus professor of medicine, KU Leuven

'This book is more than just a manual for business success. It is a true treasure trove of life's wisdom.'

– **Gaëtan & Benedicte Hannecart** | Matexi

‘What appealed to me most were the reflections on democracy and the associated problems that face us in these troubled times, which run the risk of falling foul of a (perception of) ever-increasing inequality in society.’

– **Jan Suykens** | ex-CEO Ackermans & Van Haaren

‘Life and Entrepreneurship is much more reflective than I had expected – more about the life of a widely experienced human being than an entrepreneur.’

– **Philippe Haspeslagh** | professor and honorary dean
Vlerick Business School

‘What a wealth – in all meanings of the word.’

– **Stefaan De Clerck** | politician for CD&V

‘All business leaders would benefit from reading this book early on in their career, so that they can better choose the path they wish to follow.’

– **Dirk Bruneel** | ex-CEO Artesia Bank (Dexia-Bacob-Paribas)

‘This should be compulsory reading for all young entrepreneurs who have the courage to question themselves.’

– **Frank Buysse** | founder of the Buysse & Partners investment company

‘Highly inspiring in both analysis and synthesis (GLEE, ME, FEE, WE), with many fascinating examples from his own rich experiences!’

– **Francis Deprez** | CEO D’Ieteren

‘This is a book well worth reading and contains many interesting ideas that give food for thought. A book to cherish and one that deserves widespread attention, also beyond the world of entrepreneurship.’

– **Johan Van den Driessche** | former managing partner of KPMG and party leader for the N-VA in the Brussels Parliament

‘Why did I study Latin and Greek for six years; the opportunity cost is massive? I fully subscribe to the WE concept; it is not always the easiest path to follow but certainly the most sustainable.’

– **Claude Labeeuw** | chief strategy officer Keplr Vision – US

‘True mastery in explaining complex matters simply, which is no easy task. The GLEE ME FEE WE concept is an excellent example of this. I enjoyed the many wise insights, which at times were also highly entertaining.’

– **Sebastiaan Pot** | managing director Six BV
construction company

*Or in the modern translation:
'When you cry, you cry alone; when you smile,
everybody smiles with you!'*

Table of contents

Foreword 17

1 Introduction – Entrepreneurship with the GLEE ME FEE WE model 24

- 1 **Becoming an entrepreneur** to avoid risk 26
- 2 **Life:** walking the tightrope between GLEE and WE, avoiding the pitfalls of ME and FEE 33

2 GLEE/happiness – Fortune is not what lies in the scales 42

- 1 **Happiness:** does it really exist? 43
- 2 **Entrepreneurship** is like marriage: if you don't talk, you won't get anywhere 51
- 3 **Distrust no one** and accept with humility what cannot be controlled 66

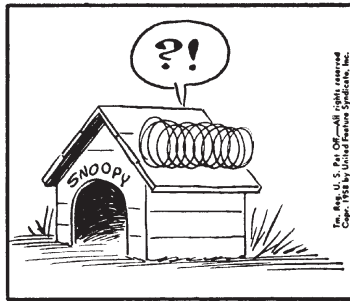
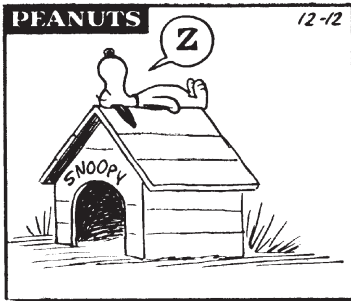
3 ME/I – Man, an evil being? 76

- 1 **Free will** is probably a pleasant illusion 77
- 2 **Most people are decent**, but what should we do about the rest? 94
- 3 **Ego** ruins everything – so park it! 105

4 FEE/the price – Success is priceless, but greed is more costly still 118

- 1 **Sex, power and money** are our prime motivators 119
- 2 **Profit** – like pride – comes before a fall 130
- 3 **No peace without war**, no sovereignty without dependence 144

5	WE/us – You can do nothing alone	176
1	The greatest achievements in the world are the fruits of collaboration	177
2	Solidarity is not the same as collective egoism	182
3	Healthy cynicism , the most important component in a meaningful life	202
6	And what now? How do we survive all this?	208
1	What is the price of a world without God , and does he really have a successor?	210
2	Nobody lives forever, but you can choose how you age	215
3	There is very little we know for certain, humour helps!	224
7	Outro – Final conclusions	230
1	The method: the model and the intermezzi	231
2	The billion dollar question: what is a meaningful life ?	238
3	Real wealth means having time	243
	Word of thanks	248
	Bibliography	250
	Further inspirational reading	256



Foreword

'Life is full of rude awakenings.' Apart from being a 65-year-old Snoopy cartoon – the famous comic strip dog is lying on the roof of his kennel, enjoying the sun and life in general, when he unexpectedly falls off and hits the ground with a bump – this is also a valuable life lesson that has remained with me ever since I first saw it back in the 1970s. The lives of human beings, as I gradually learnt in the course of my own, are also full of unexpected twists and turns that can lead people in many different and often unpredictable directions. Perhaps at some point in our existence we all have a moment when we can lean back in self-satisfaction and congratulate ourselves that we have achieved what we wanted to achieve, thinking that from now on things can only get better, only to discover that this is no more than an illusion. Even so, it seems to me that once you pass the age of seventy some dimensions of life feel different than before. Past and future, for example. You have fewer regrets about things that do not turn out the way you had hoped, and your desires become wiser and more realistic. At a more sedate pace, you switch from the fast lane to a more controlled lane of life. You enjoy things for longer, look around you more often, wave more to neighbours and passers-by, feeling yourself to

be lord and master of your very own life's drama. You become milder. And, with a bit of luck, more serene.

Is it any different for a seventy-plusser who still has a busy and active professional life like my own? No, I don't think so.

Observation as the touchstone for choosing your path through life

I combine my own full and hectic life with intensive reading about other people's lives. This is something I have always done and will continue to do. The question of whether a full life is also a meaningful life is one that occupies my thoughts almost every day. I like to test this question against the things that I have read and remembered, asking myself to what extent I have concretely and consistently lived up to those examples. I also like to test it in dialogue with people with widely differing backgrounds, people blessed with common sense and enquiring and observant minds. In this way, I am able to distil my own thoughts into a form that is respectful, because they are no longer (or hardly) person-specific.

To start collecting these thoughts systematically, I stand in front of my bookcase. I run through the titles, flick through the notes I have made, think about the treasures these pages have given me over the years, treasures that have helped to colour my life in many different hues. Above all, I like to wander around in what I call 'the hall of forgotten themes that still matter'. This is my private playground, a place of dream triggers for an entrepreneur who likes to keep his mind fully stimulated. They are wide-ranging, personal, familial and also societal themes, which have a huge impact on a person's professional life, and

vice versa. At the same time, these themes also have a major (if silent) influence on the functioning of an entrepreneur, as I have come to realise increasingly in recent years. My (scarce but oh so precious) moments of reverie often focus on such things.

What comes to the surface as a result of these musings? In short, that we can only guess at the answers to questions like what is a moral life, what is the purpose of suffering, and so many more. And also, in all honesty, this: that what people call success is often a matter of luck, even if appearances at times suggest differently. In everything that I ever achieved, a fair share of good fortune was also involved.

Everything passes. Nothing lasts forever. And no one is waiting on tenterhooks for the latest book of received 'wisdom'. Yet, paradoxically enough, it was precisely that latter realisation that persuaded me to pick up my metaphorical pen and write. I believe that in the course of the passing years I have acquired a toolbox of abilities that allows me to combine a search for wisdom with amusement and the continuing rediscovery of resilience. Or to put it in the words of the 18th century author Samuel Johnson: '(My) only end of writing is to enable the readers better to enjoy life, or better to endure it.' So perhaps the writing of this book was necessary after all!

Writing, an obstacle-strewn process

'Writing a book is an adventure. To begin with, it is a toy, an amusement; then it becomes a mistress, and then a master, and then a tyrant, and then the last phase is that, just as one is about to be reconciled to one's servitude, one kills the monster.'

– Winston Churchill

You often hear it said that life is a struggle. Or a vale of tears. And who am I to argue with that? But just as universal is Homer's *dakruoen gelasasa* in the touching scene between Hector and his wife Andromache, whose 'laughter amidst tears' represents the ultimate commingling of happiness and sorrow. 'With a laugh and a tear', as we say today – and that suits me better.

Writing a book is also a similarly 'up-and-down' experience. Before I finally began, I balanced for many years on the fence of indecision, struggling to deal with a succession of conflicting absurdities. I realised that everything has already been written – 'Nothing new under the sun', as the Bible puts it – and that no one is interested in my life (or yours, for that matter), nor in what either of us thinks. Lydia Chagoll, a Belgian dancer of Jewish descent, expressed the same sentiments rather more elegantly: 'Every person is like a speck of dust, in the world for just a brief moment and then gone forever.' (DS 9/7/20) But that is okay. No big deal. I am not out to prove anything and have no unique truths to proclaim. All I want to do is share a few random ideas and some amusing 'did-you-knows'.

Having said that, I catch myself constantly dwelling on the same issues, the same themes, always seeking answers to the 'big questions' of life. Are people good or evil? Does free will exist? What is happiness? Is that the same as living a meaningful life? Why does God, if he exists, not care about us more? How scared are we of death and is it really the end? How compatible is the idea of solidarity with our own ambitions and fears? What are the characteristics of 'good' social organisation? How can we keep things together in this world of ours? To make matters worse, in each case, time after time, we are confronted with the same eternal dilemma: what is truly important and what is not? And once we have finally mapped everything out to our