

Philosophy and the Everyday: How should their relationship be tackled?

الفلسفة واليومي: كيف ينبغي مقاربة العلاقة بينهما؟

Mohammed Chaouki ZINE محمد شوقي الزين (mczine13@gmail.com)	Philosophy	Phenomenology and its Applications / Faculty of Human and Social Sciences/ University of Tlemcen/ Algeria
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Abstract (English):

The aim of this paper is to discuss about the relationship between philosophy and the everyday that has never studied thoroughly in the contemporary Arabic studies or rarely almost. The paper purposes to study this topic regarding to five stages: the Thales' story describing the background of the everyday; the philosophical way treating the everyday concept; the enigma of the everyday; finally, the everyday's space and time. The idea is placed into the main problematic concerning the tension between philosophy as a complex reasoning and the everyday taken-for-granted and based on the obvious human action.

Keywords: Philosophy; Everyday Life; Ordinary; City; Kairos

ملخص باللغة العربية

تهدف هذه المقالة إلى مناقشة العلاقة بين الفلسفة واليومي التي لم تُدرس بعمق في الدراسات العربية المعاصرة إلا نادراً. يكمن الغرض في مناقشة العلاقة في خمس مراحل أساسية: قصة طاليس بوصفها أرضية اليومي؛ الطريق الفلسفية نحو معالجة مفهوم اليومي؛ سرُّ اليومي وصعوبة الإحاطة بجوهره؛ وأخيراً مكان وزمان اليومي والمفاهيم المرتبطة بهما التي توطّر نظام الحياة اليومية. تنخرط الفكرة في سياق إشكالية أساسية هي التوتر الكائن بين الفلسفة بوصفها مركّباً معقّداً من التفكير واليومي المعطى بداهةً والقائم على عفوية الفعل البشري، وتدرس العلاقة الجدلية بينهما وطرق الكشف عن هذه العلاقة في ما وراء تناقضهما الظاهر.

كلمات مفتاحية: الفلسفة؛ الحياة اليومية؛ الاعتيادي؛ المدينة؛ كايروس

Introduction:

The relationship between philosophy and the everyday is relatively modern, since the impassable wall between philosophy and literature has been broken down. Indeed, literature is the first realm that the everyday has thoroughly explored, particularly in novels and stories where lives are approached, sometimes with boring hair-splitting. One only has to read some mystery novels in order to find out, with the character as a detective, extensive details of everything about other characters as robbers, murders or victims. Literature gives us an inexhaustible source of everyday actions and unexpected situations. Does this mean that philosophy never studied the everyday?

How about the ancient meaning of philosophy whereby the latter was a way of life, according to the prominent researcher on Hellenistic philosophy Pierre Hadot (1995)?

However, this kind of philosophy was a way to live by means of spiritual exercises including ethical life, how to realize his self-control and how to drive desires and passions out. In this respect, philosophy was an ethical path for a good life. Although, philosophy has never taken the everyday as an object until quite recently. Rhetoric, linguistic turn, and ordinary language, *inter alia*, allow to philosophy a singular matter to track the everyday in its surprising complexity and to describe it attentively and methodologically. I would like to sketch out hereinafter the major points of the everyday with a focus on the basis in Thales' story, the philosophical treatment of the everyday, its enigma, and its configuration by the space and time. Our paper focuses on dialectical method in order to find out the implicit link between them beyond their contrast, and debates with a plethora of texts taking up the topic, which are mentioned at the end.

1. Thales' story: the background of the everyday

In *Theaetetus*, Plato relates a funny story about Thales' fall into a deep well: "Socrates: I will illustrate my meaning, Theodoros, by the jest which the clever witty Thracian handmaid is said to have made about Thales, when he fell into a well he was looking up at the stars (...). He is ignorant, not only of what he is doing, but he hardly knows whether he is man or animal; he is searching the essence of man, and busy in enquiring what belongs to such a nature to do or suffer different from any other." (In Greisch, 2015: 105).

We can find a significant number of lessons derived from this story. The first one is the choice of Thales of Miletus. Unlike Plato who works towards advancing an ideal world separated from sensitive world, called 'World of Ideas', Thales is viewed as a naturalist. He argues that the fundamental substance of the universe is water, following the monism whereby everything depends in its essence and existence on one principle. Thus, everything is made of water and this substance sustains all elements of life. This idea appears in the opposite of what Plato teaches to his disciples, namely a pure idealism. Hence, Thales looks up at the stars as celestial bodies, when Plato considers them as pure Forms. Moreover, Thales explores the universe over his head, but he neglects everything along the way and beneath his feet. Ignoring potential dangers on the way, he falls into a well. The "astonishment" (*thaumazein*), as a beginning of philosophy, makes him forget the obvious.

What 'the sky', 'the well', and 'the way' represent in this story? Is there a symbolism backside these sensitive things? How should those signs be interpreted? Beyond phenomena, stands the metaphoric image. Comparatively with the *Allegory of the Cave*, in which 'the shadow' represents the material world, i.e. the world of illusion, 'the well' can be interpreted as a paradox in

which the philosopher falls (Proudfoot & Lacey, 2010: 291). In another version of the Thales' story, the Thracian handmaid and people being there laugh at him when he falls down. This mockery can be understood that people turn away from an abstract thought and philosophical paradoxes. People bury themselves in daily activities and they have not time to look at complicated reasonings.

In fact, philosophy requires abnegation, abstraction, and deep thinking, which are unintelligible for ordinary mortal. Therefore, the sky in Thales' story means, in Plato's eyes, the ideal world, but Thales, as a naturalist, does not see the sky as a transcendent model of material world; he looks up at the sky merely like a universe with its stars and galaxies. Although the philosopher looks up at the ideal world from which emanate all things, could be able to lead the city and manage the human affairs? How to carry out human affairs on the earth if the philosopher has turned his mind elsewhere? In other words, if the philosopher goes further in his contemplation of the pure Forms, is he in a position to deal with the everyday? What is the task of philosophy when the latter is poles apart from the daily life? How to grasp this contrast? Is there a real contradiction between them?

2. The philosophical path towards the everyday:

For want of leading the city, the philosopher has to find out the everyday's quintessence by means of collection of concepts and methods, among which figures the phenomenological method that stresses on describing what comes up from things (Proudfoot & Lacey, 2010: 300). This method requires a scrutiny of what happens in full view of the philosopher and allows him to be nearby the everyday, because the latter shows how things appear to our consciousness. Being far from the everyday cannot give a right knowledge of it, even less to lead human affairs. Consequently, this process is proving to be a hard endeavor. Is the philosopher ready to meet the challenge of taking account of the everyday? But what is really the everyday? How to define it?

'The Everyday' is an operating concept to describe what we do and what we are in our daily life, both actions and states. However, this basic definition is not enough to reach the reality of the concept. The Everyday is both obvious and ambiguous. This definition is not one to facilitate our understanding of its reality. On the contrary, it creates confusion to think through its organization. Facing the everyday, we are in the same situation of Thales, we confront its ambiguity as a well that we try to avoid falling into or getting locked up in its inextricable situations. In short, it looks like a labyrinth in which one loses sight of the clearness, "The everyday is beneath our attention. On one view this is as it should be: the everyday is a place of perdition" (Sheringham, 2006: 22).

This perdition originates from our tendency to overlook what happens in front of our eyes, namely the 'ordinary', and looking for the 'extraordinary'. Thus, we are in the rigidity to apply scrupulously norms and ideals. By doing so, that is: looking up at 'the sky' in order to find out an

'Ideal World', makes us blind before the possible existence of 'a well' within which our dreams fall. Falling into the well is a metaphor of disillusionment, because our wishes are infinitely large than our capabilities to confront the reality.

Having an unreachable ideal causes harm to everyone unaware of his limits. The relationship between philosophy and the everyday can be interpreted in the light of a tension between ideals and worldliness or by extension, between representations and behaviors. Since Greek era, philosophy has always been seeking for the 'ought-to-be' by way of ethical exercises provided by many schools as stoicism and epicurism, whereas the everyday is immersed in the 'what-exists' actually and what happens in the 'here and now'. This explains the inherent tension in their relationship and why philosophy refrained from looking at the everyday given their recognized incompatibility. However, is this the only argument to illustrate the disinterest *vis-à-vis* the everyday? Is not there any reason to bring to light their disagreement?

In fact, the everyday becomes a philosophical matter when some changes happen in their respective historical evolution. On the one hand, philosophy has already ceased to be the metaphysical field attending the classical being's issues, such as the dualism 'body and soul', the destiny, the cosmogony, the eschatology, and the immortality. Philosophy interests, henceforth, in current issues like health, environment, and consumption. On the other hand, the everyday emerges when the social life becomes more complex, due to galloping urbanization and industrialization, especially since the 19th century. For instance, putting in place a rail network in the age of industrialization allowed to develop the national and international trade and contributed to the growth of cities becoming increasingly megalopolis. As we shall see presently, thinking about the everyday involves due consideration to the development of the city. Indeed, the everyday's notion focuses on the city, including commuting, walking, and spatial stories as the Michel de Certeau's *magnum opus* has shown (De Certeau, 1984). In short, the everyday becomes a topic of common interest when the modernity has overshadowed the old tradition's issues and opened up new manners to think and to take action, "In modernity the everyday becomes the setting for a dynamic process: for making the unfamiliar familiar; for getting accustomed to the disruption of custom; for struggling to incorporate the new; for adjusting to different ways of living. The everyday marks the success and failure of this process" (Highmore, 2002: 2).

3. The enigma of the everyday:

Spreading emerging technologies and high-speed means of communication, the modernity puts the everyday at the center of interest. However, the advent of the technology in our life is not always synonymous of well-being. For instance, Heidegger's question concerning technology (1977)

strives to show how the technology is an inauthentic disclosure of being, inasmuch as it causes a deep modification, not only in the relationship between the man and the world, but also in the nature itself. The technology in the everyday contrasts with the man's searching for meaning and an authentic being, because it is reduced in its 'instrumental' conception and reckless usage, such as war and genetic modification of living things. Although the technology makes life easier for everyone in his daily tasks, it cannot be an authentic expression of being, insofar as it concerns seeming aspect of human existence. The latter expects to be fulfilled by embodiment of meaning in wide-ranging fields that could encompass the life as art, culture, and religion. Nonetheless, the human existence moves forward within a strange chiaroscuro consisting of ambivalence between familiar and unfamiliar, life and death, action and passion, etc., "The everyday is also the home of the bizarre and mysterious" (Highmore, 2002: 3). Highmore deduces it from Conan Doyle's stories featuring Sherlock Holmes' inquiries. Likewise, the everyday needs meticulous investigations for the purposes of bringing to light its hidden truth. The main feature of everyday is that it cannot be understood easily.

What is the way to bring out its reality? Resorting to phenomenology might help us to draw its main characteristic that is really antinomic. The everyday cannot be taken for granted. It would be wrong to believe in its truism, "There is thus an enigma of everyday which 'is due to its self-concealment'; it is regarded as normal and unperceived, even though it represents a 'secret' phenomenon of our existence" (Bégout, 2005: 20). The everyday is not clear, although it makes itself seen as dazzling reality. If we resort to a metaphor, we can say that the everyday is similar to the sun, we cannot see it directly, but we see through it. Things appear by means of brightness and the conjunction between light and shade. The everyday gives us a glimpse of things' mode of appearance, but it hides behind them. It involves both usual and unusual.

We cannot find the extraordinary in the ordinary life, otherwise it is like looking for a needle in a haystack. On the contrary, the everyday is almost ordinary and most frequently characterized by our inattention to routine things and activities, "To say *this is ordinary* is to give significance to what is insignificant" (Olson, 2009: 7). However, as the everyday is vividly antinomic, including contradictory feelings and situations, one can seek the depth within superficiality or heroic acts among ordinary people. In fact, talking about the everyday highlights the irreducible contradiction, in turns between mundane and sublime, both repetitive and singular. As a matter of fact, the everyday plays with 'repetition' synonymous of boredom and 'singularity' containing the surprise. The everyday is always 'itself' by the daily repetition of the same tasks and activities and 'not-itself' by the advent of the unprecedented. These identity and difference are part of the essence of the everyday *per se*.

4. The space of the everyday:

Even if the everyday does not allow itself to be discovered easily, its presence can be followed through the things' visibility. I shall set out and begin to defend the idea whereby the everyday makes itself visible in all objects that occupy the space and all activities taking place there, both actions and productions, *praxis* as well as *poiesis*. I begin with the space before to address the question of time in the next part. The space at which one refers is not the geometrical space as an *a priori* of the human experience according to Kant, but the aesthetical space, that means the paramount role played by the sensibility to configure the human activity. There is no space that is not practiced and filled by the objects. In other words, things and movements allow to the space a tangible configuration. The city, as a configured space, represents a breeding-ground of daily practices, involving commuting, walking, and driving. As Lefebvre points out, the city depends on inherent social interactions as a whole, and it is a consequence of myriad of productions occurred inside it. This idea puts the city at the heart of the creativity.

Lefebvre's idea (1996: 101) focuses on the 'agent' rather than the abstract action. The human being builds a fabric of relations which tends toward a creative condition. Talking about the 'fabric' is a metaphorical manner to showcase both city and social relations as entangled threads. Is it relevant to compare the city with the fabric? The 'urban fabric' is actually an essential notion of the urban and architectural studies in order to define how the urban space is physically and functionally organized. There is no city that is not inhabited, otherwise it seems like a ghost town. The habitability is the 'proper' of human being in the world as Heidgger (2005) counsels it, and it tends to stress the importance of human meeting in the territory, from the basic 'being-with' like a family to the society as a whole. The everyday might be read with regard to this human clustering, establishing hence a human web just like a city. By comparing the latter as a 'fabric', one emphasizes on semantic dimension of living in the space, "The city as a text allows to read the urban space as a system of significations" (Mondada, 2000: 32). In their interaction and their movement in the urban space, the dwellers tend to produce a symbolic system by which they read the social reality and seek out the meaning of their life.

Both framework and object of discourse, the city represents the symbolic field of the everyday, i.e. the whole range of activities on an ongoing basis by the means of language. This course of action permits a wise encoding and decoding of attitudes and behaviors. That amounts to saying that the everyday tends to the horizontal relations, whereas the philosophy seeks the vertical orientation by the means of vision as totality. In his study about the transformation of the urban 'fact' to the 'concept' of the city, Michel de Certeau alludes to this 'all-seeing' and the contrast between 'up' and 'down' according to an enigmatic message set at the 110th floor of the World Trade Center in New York before its collapsing in September 11 attacks, "*It's hard to be down when you're up*". The

author explains this contrast as a contradiction between 'theory' and 'practice', and to some extent also between philosophy and the everyday. The practices are the major foundation of the latter and unfolded on the ground, "The panorama-city is a 'theoretical' (that is, visual) simulacrum, in short a picture, whose condition of possibility is an oblivion and a misunderstanding of practices" (De Certeau, 1984: 93).

Understanding practices goes through interpreting their basic unit, to wit 'the walk'. Moving runs counter to the look as a picture or absolute scene. The process of walking step by step goes altogether against the vision's attempts to freeze anything. It is compared to the language similarly to the comparison between the city and the text aforementioned, "The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to the language or to the statements uttered" (De Certeau, 1984: 98). The combination of pragmatic and semantic fields, on one side the art to use space similarly to use language, on the other side the manner to give the life a sense, leads to an aesthetics of space in the everyday life. The place is called by de Certeau 'strategy' and the space relates to 'tactic' (Buchanan, 2000: 89).

On the one hand, strategy is all economic, rationalistic, and political institutions characterized by strictness and strength. On the other hand, tactic is an ingenious way to use the order and twist it for which it was initially founded. In a nutshell, the strategy is the embodiment of 'philosophical ideas' in the human reason's history, namely the 'objective spirit' according to Hegel, including state, laws, and economical and political institutions. In contrast, the tactic is mainly the free field of the 'everyday' juggling with the order and escaping from its control as *pan-opticon* or literally 'ubiquitous eye', "Many everyday practices (talking, reading, moving about, shopping, cooking, etc.) are tactical in character" (De Certeau, 1984: xix).

Tactics are described as a widespread element sneaking in all territories controlled by the strategy, and having the chameleonic ability to metamorphose. Although many forms of those have been recognized in different cultures like *mètis* in Greeks, *hîla* in Arabic tradition, and stratagem's war in Chinese's old tradition, they are deeply rooted in the wilds of our natural history, "From the depths of the ocean to the streets of modern megalopolises, there is a continuity and permanence in these tactics" (De Certeau, 1984: xx). They are the bedrock of all practices undertaken in the everyday, transporting in their folds as much as possible of unexpected surprises. If strategy deals with the place as a 'controlled space', tactic rests upon a kind of time called *kairos* which is defined as seizing an opportunity. We know about *chronos* or the measured time and divided into hours, days, months, years, and centuries, however we do not really know about *kairos* although we use it daily without our knowing.

5. The time of the everyday:

In fact, *kairos* is an old Greek's notion designating two meanings, 1. Seizing the opportunity at the right time; 2. The wise moderation or nothing in excess. This kind of time was completely overlooked and overshadowed by the emphasis placed on the *chronos* as a rational time that can be measured and introduced into our civilization's process. Looking closer, one can make the connection between *chronos-kairos* and *strategy-tactic* previously studied. Indeed, the strategy requires relatively long time in the sense that the projects debated and decision-making in several economic, financial, political, and military fields can be assessed. Scheduling plays a leading role for the purpose of achieving the objective set. In contrast, the tactic as long as it loses sight of the *place* as strategical territory of control, it forms a close relationship with a short time putting the emphasis on *quality* instead of *quantity* that goes into preparing the strategy (Smith, 2002: 47).

Kairos is 'unique', prior to which nothing is decided and after which everything is already lost. It requires an increased attention to catch it at the right moment. Moutsopoulos (1991: 20) compares it to the bet that offers 'one' possibility among others, following the example of gambling comprising win or lose. The fleeting nature of this time makes it tough to track. It is elusive, hidden in the folds of serendipitous opportunities. Seizing it is like cultured pearl in the seabed, i.e. gaining the precious pearl in the midst of perilous and exhausting hunt. Likewise, *kairos* plays on two situations: reducing the 'minimum' to the 'optimum' or better yet, getting the best result with few means since its aim is the quality, not the quantity. Furthermore, it has the ability to add the ethical dimension to the aesthetical aspect, both 'practical wisdom' called *phronesis* in Aristotle's philosophy of ethics (Dottori, 2009: 306) and 'harmony of life'.

In sum, the practical wisdom puts the intelligence inside the practice in order to lead the latter in the right way. If the Aristotelean meaning of practical wisdom is still relevant today, that is because it helps us to see *how* does the action work in the everyday, by investing the knowledge in the daily tasks and joining the pleasant (aesthetics) to the useful (ethics). In carefully reviewing the operating mode of *kairos*, we realize that the three fields referred to by De Certeau, to wit 'the economic', 'the aesthetic' and 'the ethic', are involved in it. In fact, *kairos* in the everyday is an economical way to get maximum benefits with minimum means. The everyday is indeed the field *par excellence* of bargaining and hunting opportunities. The economical way of *kairos* makes possible the conjunction between ethical and aesthetical modes of everyday's practices.

It seems that *kairos* is the right time of human tasks. As Smith's statement makes clear, "Kairos is mainly anthropological and practical" (Smith, 2002: 48), creating links between man and efficacious action. It is ubiquitous in the technical activities in the broad sense of production. The

Greek word *techné* (or *art*) involves all manual and intellectual tasks, the high-quality manufacture just as well as manner of speaking in rhetoric and politics. In fact, manual labor requires a creative mind in order to shape a matter with the aim of making a beautiful thing as we can see in the process of design, including architecture, engineering, and fashion. Regarding the rhetoric and politics, *kairos* invests as well these fields with art to use a 'word' with dexterity and exactness, with the intention of persuading. It requires a 'right word' in the 'right time' and the 'right place' to prevent verbiage and unnecessary digressions. Indeed, the good rhetorician or politician is the one who uses words adequately in order to attract the public and to spare it the boredom.

In the everyday, *kairos* learns temperance as much as mastering skills, both self-control and proper use of means. As *kairos* is a wave of possibilities, the challenge should be to ride it by enjoying a good fortune instead of going under it and be drowned. This right time seems like a double-edged sword, getting an opportunity pronto or losing it forever. Whereas *chronos* requires a long time to plan something taking into account all possibilities, *kairos* is a short time to seize 'one' of these possibilities, expressly the 'best' one, "*Kairos* means that the problem or crisis has brought with it at time of opportunity for accomplishing some purpose which could not be carried out at some other time" (Smith, 2002: 52).

In sum, the everyday deals with this kind of time more than *chronos*, as meaning that we process in our daily tasks with 'that' time of occupation rather than 'any' time in its multiple sequences. Even if *chronos* leads our tasks by planning and meeting, it cannot manage all human activities some among which involve rapid decisions, mostly in the predicament. We can mention, by way of illustration, an emergency health condition like Coronavirus' pandemic (Covid-19), or the stressful world of stock exchange that requires agility. Our current civilization and daily life are managed by the 'speed' raised to rank of paradigm. Indeed, the everyday with this condition of speed claims the *kairos* as an adequate time of our life, although it does not without the *chronos* as a rational management of human activities, "*Kairos* requires *chronos*, which becomes a necessary precondition underlying qualitative uses of time; when taken by itself, conversely, *chronos* fails to explain the crisis points of human experience – those moments, for example, when junctures of opportunity arise, calling for ingenuity in apprehending when the time is 'right'" (Sipiora, 2002: 15). Thus, the current health, social, and economic crisis cannot be understood without reinvesting this unknown time, yet ubiquitous in our life, called *kairos*.

Conclusion:

In summing up, we can start with the last point of *kairos* that can be the junction between philosophy and the everyday. Although philosophy had never taken the everyday as a 'philosophical

object' besides in the modern and postmodern thoughts, it includes the latter as a 'philosophical life'. From Hegel to Dilthey and beyond, the philosophical ideas and the life of philosophers are one. The philosopher's everyday life offers an inexhaustible source of the beginning and the growing of system of ideas. The philosophical lifetime is the best way to understand the background of ideas' eruption. For instance, Nietzsche's health troubles were a determining factor to switch our conception of philosophy since Aristotle, from the duality 'true-false' in terms of logic to the duality 'illness-health', and the shifting arisen from 'mind' (what one thinks and judges as true or false) to 'body' (what one feels or directly experiences).

This displacing in the philosophy's meaning is crucial to link the latter with the everyday. In addition, the philosophical life is an ordinary one, we cannot separate the philosopher from the sum of circumstances shaping his character and ideas. The way of life, the choice of concepts, and the accuracy of judgement are the ingredients of their intertwining by means of *kairos*. Indeed, the latter keeps the philosophical life in balance, in relation to use words and concepts in the right proportion and banning excess. In fact, all philosophical quests were designated frequently to find an optimal life, by theorizing in existential, moral, cognitive, and political fields. The only challenge is to translate abstract concepts to ordinary language and how philosophizing with modesty and asceticism.

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