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The Everyday Condition of Metaphysics

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Abstract

The question I intend to answer is whether one can speak of a tacit metaphysics, not expressed conceptually, but nevertheless common. If the answer is positive and providing that it is specific to day-to-day life, such metaphysics may be called everyday metaphysics. To this end, I review the meaning of everyday life and its ambivalent character. Next, I present several milestones in the debate on the subject, from authors who have focused on a kind of usual, common or 'natural' metaphysics. Lastly, I formulate the idea under consideration, namely that everyday life implies or underlies a certain metaphysics. I note that it is an implicit metaphysics – not expressed formally – and rather free. Embraced in experience with a certain degree of freedom, it is recognisable by means of certain representations active in our mind, by the manner of speaking or of understanding and by the common forms of expression. Its vibrancy, concrete and relaxed character makes it highly evocative of the mental life of an era. It ensures a truly essential difference in our everyday mode of being.

Keywords: everyday life, habitual and preliminary behaviours, phenomenology of the "as-if", common understanding, publicness of time, presupposition, everyday metaphysics

I. Preliminary considerations

1. I would like to draw attention to a few relatively simple issues, starting from certain recurrent questions in our debates, such as: Can one speak of a tacit metaphysics, not expressed conceptually, yet customary, usually? Can it be viewed as

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habitual or everyday metaphysics? Which authors might encourage such a perspective on metaphysics and what arguments might they invoke to this end? How could such usual metaphysics be justified within what we designate as the everyday life-world?

I would not dwell on these questions were it not for the frequent occurrence of the term "metaphysics" in debates which do not concern any of the doctrines about this concept which have evolved over time. One may find the term in discussions about the prevailing worldview in a particular period (for instance, when referring to "the metaphysics of modern man"). Or in reflections about a meaningful attitude towards one's own existence (such as "natural attitude" and the metaphysics it entails). At other times, the attention is focused on the perspectives opened up by allegorical narratives (for example, the underlying metaphysics in José Saramago's novel *All the Names*). The term is also used to refer to certain convictions assumed by a dominant experience, such as the technological one. Indeed, it has been asserted that the current technique is a culmination of modern metaphysics (Martin Heidegger). They both express the same kind of will and the same beliefs or presuppositions. Nevertheless, I would note that the term "metaphysics" is especially used to designate the power of a language to generate concepts, images or representations. We know, for that matter, that a much debated claim in recent times asserts that any language brings with itself a certain metaphysics (Friedrich Nietzsche). It is an idea espoused by many analysts of language, and certain writers concerned with the link between language and underlying beliefs[1]. Research on natural language and equally on common or everyday language has also rediscovered this idea.

Moreover, others have claimed that modern man, despite what he might think about himself, cannot completely escape the sphere of the historical logos and its underlying metaphysics (Jacques Derrida). This entails that the metaphysical attitude can be traced as a sublayer in diverse activities and pursuits, from the scholarly to the mundane (Richard Rorty). It will not appear necessarily as a well-

structured vision, but rather as presuppositions, beliefs and representations.

Yet none of the situations evoked above fall under the scholarly or academic meaning of metaphysics. They are not related to a conceptually developed theory or to an erudite pursuit of metaphysics. Rather, they most often concern a particular behaviour of the mind, a mode of understanding the state of the self and of the world it is a part of. In other words, the focus is on a concrete manner of understanding, as experienced by someone among us or by a community as a whole. Metaphysics, under this guise, represents a *forma mentis*, therefore it may not appear in the form of elaborate theories and concepts.

2. It is not hard to notice that, in essence, the attitude of modern man towards metaphysics is profoundly ambivalent. On the one hand, one may witness an explicit rejection of metaphysics, especially when it is the doctrine of an author or of an entire school of thought. On the other hand, however, metaphysics may be invoked rather naturally as an obvious level of comprehension[2]. In the latter case, there is a fair degree of freedom in the use of the term and in the acknowledgment of metaphysical representations or perspectives.

Ultimately, it is not necessary to think like Aristotle or Schopenhauer – or even to think what they thought in their own time – to speak of metaphysics. It suffices, say, to use certain representations of the self and of the other, the life-world, temporality and space, appearance and reality. Indeed, whose mind is detached from such representations, ideas or beliefs? When such representations blend into a vision and transgress the empirical knowledge (or "physical", in the ancient sense of the term), they can be called metaphysical. This is also true when their role is that of "first instance" or "ultimate instance", as preliminary elements in the pursuit of knowledge. In such situations they emerge as boundary data or edges of the horizon beyond which the mind cannot go.

II. On the ambivalence of everyday life

1. Habitual and preliminary behaviours

I believe I should state what I understand "everyday life" to be. I do not have a definition for the phrase, yet I am not necessarily looking for one either. The synonymy brought into play by certain dictionaries is not particularly useful to this end. For example, the understanding of everyday life as habitual life, or as regular or publicly exposed life, does not sufficiently clarify this issue. Each of these phrases requires an explanation and, occasionally, may further obscure the meaning of everyday life.

We could say though, to start with, that everyday life is the habitual life, the generic place of habitual behaviours and gestures. I use the word "habitual" in the sense expressed by the past participle of "to habituate". One leads a habitual life when one is habituated with certain behaviours or acts, on the one hand, and with certain regular situations, on the other hand. Yet how does a habitual behaviour become an everyday behaviour?

A habitual behaviour, whether it is thinking, expressing or doing, is regularly an acquired behaviour, that is one which has reached a familiar form, as a habit accepted naturally. It is a behaviour learned over time, yet in a fairly contingent and free manner. Becoming habituated with something means learning a particular behaviour[3]. Behaviour is in this state a reflexive act: you become habituated with walking daily the same road or with the basic use of certain tools. To acquire something, to adopt it as natural and wholly expected, to become familiar with it, all of these pertain to our everyday life. That which is acquired is learned one way or another, depending on one's own manner of relating with the others and the surrounding world. It eventually becomes a familiar fact, accepted as such by almost everyone, sometimes as an instinct of everyday life.

We are all aware of such behaviours and follow them in our own way. Let us consider, almost at random, habits such as reading the paper in the morning, using a means of transport,

strolling in the park in the evening, drinking coffee, going to work every day, making daily notes, using an umbrella or walking stick, meeting friends, wearing a wristwatch, talking about the weather or the death of acquaintances, casually looking outside the window, searching for a quiet place to rest, employing certain tools and machinery, talking on the phone with loved ones, etc. Everyday life consists of such behaviours and gestures. Some are apparently disarmingly simple, yet others seem to contradict the common notion of everyday life.

To be a part of everyday life, habits take the form of stable and relatively free dispositions. For example, the habit of taking down all sorts of data, names and events in a diary is not governed by strictly determined conditions. It is actualised only when one receives an explicit exterior motivation, as when one deems the action to be absolutely useful. It does not require any special preparation. It is dependant rather on elementary and concrete experience. The act does not necessarily involve a certain regularity to become habitual or any particular deliberate repetition.

Indeed, the free acquisition of certain attitudes or gestures indicates the elementary form of human experience. I do not believe that there is any other form of experience that precedes it essentially and exceeds it in scope. We might say that this is in reality a preliminary experience, whether it aids or thwarts other experiences. Its scope is ultimately that of life proper, even when man ends up battling it and opposing it by what he does or thinks. Yet compared with other experiences, it occurs most often by itself. It is usually relaxed and tranquil without any severe exigencies. One cannot properly speak of a technique of modern life or a finely tuned mechanics of its articulations. When harsh exigency or elaborate technique come into play, everyday life breaks down and makes way for a different experience.

What could we observe in fact in such situations of ordinary life? Ultimately, there is a kind of alchemy of habit. It is capable of transforming a specific fact into a common one, an uncanny phenomenon into a familiar one, difference into the unremarkable and the beauty of the moment into something prosaic. That is to say, there exists a genuine athanor of

everyday life. In this athanor, the data of life can change their meaning decisively. Yet – and this is paramount to my comments further on – the change in a behaviour does not mean it is restricted to a univocal sense. When a specific fact becomes common, it does not completely lose its specific character. Similarly, when the uncanny event becomes familiar to us, it does not entail the complete loss of its uncanniness[4]. It will never disappear completely; rather it will undergo a process of concealment or withdrawal.

Each term that casually describes everyday life – as we have seen, the common character, familiarity, indifference or prosaic character – does not mean anything by itself. In their singularity, they signal only one facet of this phenomenon. As soon as we hear such terms, we must think of the term which has been excluded or left on the side. Their correlation is important, as their meaning is brought to light in conjunction, through contrasts or divergences.

My point is that everyday life is not by definition univocal: strictly common or strictly ordinary. On the contrary, it invites the elementary co-presence of contrary terms: common and specific, familiar and uncanny, ordinary and extraordinary, etc. It is not characterised by a single attitude, "natural" or "naïve", as it would have been called once. Rather, in its scope, such an attitude meets the "critical" attitude, and they affect each other constantly. Everyday life is the space of their encounter, of their natural and preliminary "collusion". It does not separate the "opposites", but makes possible their emergence and maintains it in a fundamental, elementary correlation. The differences manifested, for instance between the banal and the significant, do not become separations. When they do take the form of separations, accentuating the oppositions they conceal, consciousness passes from its everyday mode to a different one. Consciousness is then able to deal with a distinct, highly elaborate condition, such as the theoretical and the speculative condition. Ultimately, each human experience can elaborate a different form from the everyday one, more severe or more formal. Yet it never withdraws from the sphere of everyday life. This sphere,

elementary or preliminary, retains it to a certain extent and determines its relation with the others.

I shall return to this issue later in the text, when I consider the uncommon side of the common.

2. Prejudices about what is specific to everyday life

We regularly hear claims that an everyday behaviour is simply common. When referring to something as common, the focus is most often on a univocal meaning of the term: either something ordinary (gross, coarse), or impersonal (average, mediocre, stereotype), or banal (prosaic, insignificant, scarce). Other synonyms – for example, public, vulgar, collective – capture the semantics of the term "common" only univocally and partially. Naturally, certain behaviours can be acquired by several people, especially as the phenomena of daily contagion and imitation remain decisive in the life of any community. Yet it is not this fact that defines everyday life. On the other hand, a common gesture is rather bland (wearing a wristwatch, taking the same route to work, etc.). It does not dislocate the habitual flow of gestures and does not induce a change to the previous way of life. Routine, for example, expresses properly the common fact of being, just as the vulgar standardisation forms do (in fashion, manufacturing, transport, performing arts, etc.). This may undeniably lead to an average or mediocre attitude. Yet everyday behaviour is not in itself mediocre, it does not entail stereotype or vulgarity in day-to-day life. Certain events specific to it are often novel and have unpredictable effects.

Is everyday life the same for everyman, i.e. to "no one"? Definitely not, it concerns each of us individually, even in solitude. An everyday mode of life will manifest the painter as he paints alone in his atelier, the physicist as he spends the day in the laboratory, the judge as he sentences someone to life in prison, the priest as he listens to the confession of a burdened man, the player as he waits on the sidelines for a stroke of luck. Everyday life is not the space of the lack of originality or unpredictability, where everything may occur monotonously and impersonally. It is true, on the other hand, that anyone may invite "everyman" or "no one" in his behaviour. This may

happen at any given show, but also as indifference or apathy or curiosity for common things. Such curiosity conceals man's need to vary, in order to compensate, the monotonous or wave-like surface of common life.

Is everyday life, by definition, an anonymous life? Certainly not, as it does not completely lose the markings of individual or even personal behaviours. Let us admit that an acquired behaviour generally becomes a habitual behaviour. In this case, it is performed in keeping with habit (either someone's habit or the general habit). It follows a pattern, a common mode of expression, which means that it can easily become anonymous. Yet this latter thing can occur only under certain circumstances. That which is "habitual" is not unavoidably impersonal. The same applies to "bad habits", "idiosyncrasies" or "proclivities". The recurrence typical of any habit does not always result in something that is subject to flat generality. The habits of reading or taking a walk or looking out the window do not necessarily induce an impersonal behaviour. Nonetheless, one might detect something impersonal here too: someone takes a walk as a walk is regularly taken or looks in the distance as this act is commonly performed. There is here a tendency towards impersonalisation, more or less visible, yet an equally powerful personalisation tendency, however weak it may appear to us at any given moment. Never is that limit reached where the impersonal character is exclusive and irreversible in human behaviour.

I leave aside the fact that anonymity is not at all a negative or fallen condition by itself. Those who embrace this meaning, modern and highly ideologized, neglect certain elevated forms of anonymity, such as that specific to monastic life, or the soldier fallen or left behind on the battle field, no less than that of the man retired in a laboratory, forgotten by the world, seeking to elucidate some phenomenon on his own. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann discuss an everyday meaning of anonymity (Berger and Luckmann 1966, I, 2). They focus on the manner in which the patterns of social interaction, by negotiating patterns, tend to grow ever more distant from the here and now of face-to-face setting and become anonymous.

In other words, the encounter with the other loses its expressiveness, uniqueness and atypical character.

When Heidegger refers to *das Man* (the impersonal "they"), he does not exclude its modulation. He writes at one point that "Everydayness is determinative for *Dasein* even when it has not chosen the 'they' as its 'hero'" (Heidegger 1986, 371; Heidegger 1962, 422). The subject of everyday life emerges in a distinct manner, which does not completely exclude the personal effect. One's self can withdraw within all others ("everyone is the other and no one is himself") (Heidegger 1986, 128; Heidegger 1962, 165)[5]. In fact, this other is plural ("the others"). Yet as an impersonal instance, it cannot be determined only in this form, not even for summation purposes: "The 'who' is not this one, not that one, not oneself [*man selbst*] and not some people [*einige*], and not the sum of them all. The 'who' is the neuter, the 'they' [*das Man*]" (Heidegger 1986, 126; Heidegger 1962, 164). It is nevertheless a *self*, i.e. a *they-self*, an instance which, although impersonal and non-specific, involves a more complicated design. The force of this self and its compelling dominion, as Heidegger himself states, may vary considerably over time (Heidegger 1986, 129; Heidegger 1962, 167).

Therefore, it is absolutely not appropriate to state that everyday life is impersonal by definition. The one who speaks as *they* speak is still different from anyone else. If we were to view the "*they* speak" as an existential structure, it would still not be enough to describe everyday life. The one who speaks as *they* speak is inevitably different from all the others. His conformity only becomes possible within the framework of this difference. The one who speaks in indistinct or indifferent manner, does so in a way that can never be repeated as such. Consequently, the impersonal functor (for example, the "*they* speak") cannot describe alone everyday life as a phenomenon. Nor can what we call "no one" or "some other". This is not because such hypostases are not specific to everyday life, but because they participate in a much more complicated phenomenon. The voice they announce rather loudly is not the only one that expresses everyday life as such.

I would further add that everyday life must not be considered in itself as being fallen. This is often reiterated, especially as the motive of estrangement tends to seduce many minds in the modern world. When is it usually viewed as such though? Probably when it is considered exclusively in terms of its platitude and vulgarity, scarcity, insignificance and tediousness. Everyday life is described then in its minor forms, relying on old clichés. Beyond all these, what is at stake is the attitude by means of which we open up to the world. The world cannot be considered negative in itself. Discussing it in terms of a polarised assessment – positive or negative, authentic or inauthentic – means missing its mode of being from the very beginning.

Is everyday life, in itself, insignificant, deprived of any elevated or symbolic gesture? Certainly not. What ends up as habit, already accustomed, does thereby lose all its significance. Becoming accustomed to certain gestures does not equate with missing their meaning in all respects. One may actually also become familiar with what makes a thing unexpected, such as the image of exotic places, the fact of travelling by oneself, going on a risky hunting trip, fighting in wars abroad, flouting the law, etc. The facts that one has become accustomed to may denote a kind of routine, but also something embraced through effort and great risk. They may express both a certain mechanics of daily life and a long-lived experience. In the former case, the formal side of actions matters. Moreover, it can become a mere training or social mechanics, as consciousness submits to external rulings. In the latter case, each man is tested individually. Habit becomes the name of the trial that man must face. Or the name of a demanding exercise, ultimately a kind of everyday asceticism.

Therefore, there are always two voices of everyday life, yet we cannot state that one expresses the deep level and the other the surface level. If we were to employ classical terminology, we would say they involve a dual nature. Its ambivalent character often goes quite far, as one and the same fact may be described in apparently mutually excluding terms. Thus, that which is common (for example, going to work every day, even taking the same route and means of transportation)

appears as specific from another perspective. The common fact ends up being felt as a specific fact, as in the case of the character in Leo Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. The common and the specific element jointly provide the substance of the same everyday act. This also applies to everyday indifference. What appears as indifference (for example, „ignoring" the presence of others) can be the sign of a form of loneliness. Here, eccentric, solitary indifference and difference seem to merge into a single gesture. The menace of maximum scarcity and the indication of maximum difference occur in the very same act.

3. Ordinary and out of the ordinary in everyday life

When referring to ordinary behaviours we usually think about regular or routine ones. Yet, this in itself is hard to fathom, indeed incomprehensible. In the "ordinary" course of a day, all kinds of events take place. Some of them are genuinely common, at least at first sight, such as when we travel to work, buy regular products, greet acquaintances, listen to the news, browse the newspaper headlines, rest after a few exhausting hours, etc. However, this is not all that happens when we perform these actions. Ordinary actions are not necessarily customary, routine (leaving aside the fact that the term "routine" carries an uncommon meaning in certain situations: "experience", "trial", "temptation")[6]. All these actions are accompanied by many others, occurring either in our senses and our minds, or in our encounters with other people, not to mention anything that may happen accidentally.

Yet supposing we do not reject outright the idea of certain ordinary behaviours and indeed we should not, how can we grasp the presence of something out of the ordinary in everyday life? What could we say about our everyday behaviours? That they are ordinary in one respect and out of the ordinary in others? Or perhaps ordinary at a particular moment, but also out of the ordinary at other times? We probably face this situation sometimes, even though we might not fully appreciate what is extraordinary. There is another option, when the ordinary – gestures, words, events – conceal in

their very ordinary nature something different altogether. This latter situation is relevant for the underlying ambivalence of everyday life.

In his dialogues with Claude-Henri Rocquet, Eliade (1978, XI, § 1-2) enumerates such situations where ordinary life conceals something out of the ordinary. For example, the occurrence of an event which, although it might not announce anything initially, suspends unexpectedly the ordinary succession of time and makes way for a different temporal flow. The simple deviation from a known route, encountering a stranger, the vivid and persistent memory of a dream, such occurrences can affect the rhythm and quality of experienced time. In other situations, however, the obsessive yearning for change may interfere or perhaps the desire to surpass the human limits, which are experienced profoundly every day. This involves the motif of the double (for example, "the attempt to love two women at the same time, with equal sincerity"), the desire to transgress certain social rules (such as the one imposing monogamy) or the need to change the mental state (as in the case of the use of narcotics). This also refers to the daily yearning to gain access to a different reality, such as the virtual one – by reading science fiction stories, watching films or art performances or the free interplay of images. In such situations, everyday life unfolds on two separate levels. It involves a double mode (the waking and oneiric states, according to Eliade), so that the empirically verified reality makes easily way for utopias and phantasms as well as for myths and certain forms viewed as ideal.

Consequently, we ought to speak of a double or equivocal structure of everyday life. How could we then properly understand this?

In temporal terms, it consists of distinct flows, which sometimes appear distinct from each other. They differ not only in terms of rhythm, but may also be found at different levels, such as the pragmatic and oneiric, as we have noted above. Each of them possesses a distinct and irreducible quality. Nevertheless, they tend to intersect unpredictably, which may lead to some odd, shocking or at times violent events. This may concern a double underlying tendency of mental life. To borrow

Eliade's own terms, it appears as both diurnal and nocturnal. In the nocturnal mode of mind, it may be under the influence of ancient images or archetypes (an issue explored comprehensively by Carl-Gustav Jung). Everyday life is also known to be prone to unpredictable, hardly detectable transformations, in the form of happenings. An act becomes possible by always allowing for freer, looser relationships.

4. A simple example: *Vincent's Chair with His Pipe*

The researcher invoked above invites us to recall the Van Gogh's famous canvas *Vincent's Chair with His Pipe* (1888-1889). The chair painted there is plain and empty. The pipe itself, rather randomly positioned on the chair, accentuates the fact that the chair is empty. An ordinary chair in a nondescript place, nothing more. Its reality and that of the space it occupies are rather ordinary, almost banal. The few elements that constitute such a reality belong, to a certain extent, to the painter's simple and ordinary world: a door on one side, odd items in a chest, a pipe left on a chair and a plain wall.

Yet even in this ordinary space, there is something that gives pause. It is that empty, solitary chair itself. Should you dwell too much on it, your mind will be taken elsewhere, to something absent or concealed. This absence is ultimately the single genuinely significant aspect in this painting. It is a dense, persistent absence that grabs hold of your gaze and focuses it where you cannot actually see anything. However, you can sense something there, either the shadow of someone who left somewhere, either another, foreign gaze, of the painter himself, looking forlorn and wistful at the place of his absence. Yet it is not only this dense and persistent absence that troubles the gaze, but also the overwhelming loneliness of that space. It does not derive from the fact that Vincent's chair sits alone there, just as the other few surrounding items, i.e. a pipe, a wall. A single thing, even when you expect to find many more, does not generate by this fact alone the sense of loneliness. Such a feeling originates elsewhere, namely the odd perspective on the items, which apparently lack any obvious relationship, as though any of them could be absent or be present in another

place. It is a sort of total, absolute contingency, which causes things to be so foreign one to the other that you are immediately stricken by the loneliness of the one who saw them through this perspective. Someone who is truly alone cannot find his own place. More precisely, there is no place for him in the world which he can nevertheless see in a certain manner. The lack of a place makes everything appear as an accident or void, his loneliness viewing things only in these terms. The empty chair in the painting expresses therefore the total loneliness of the gaze. All of these things can be said of a space that, at first glance, might seem completely ordinary.

Consequently, Eliade is right to repeat an idea that he is obsessed about: "It is certain that this bleak reality /in Van Gogh's painting/, this daily life camouflages something else. This is my profound conviction" (Eliade 1978, XI, § 2). To him, such a view entails multiple consequences. One such consequence concerns the need to grasp the double or complicated structure of everyday life. Another one refers to the way in which we represent our own life and seek to express ourselves, whether it is a simple account, or certain literary or research works. All novels can create a feeling of a certain camouflage of the uncanny in the life of the ordinary. This is not dependent on a certain type of writing – such as fantasy stories – or on a particular style. It does not depend on a particular form of creativity, such as literature. Rather it concerns any of our life spaces and any form of creation, from those viewed as minor to the truly elevated ones.

One of Eliade's confessions is remarkable in this respect: "In all my stories, the narrative unfolds across several planes, in order to reveal progressively the "fantasy" hidden in everyday banality. Just as a new axiom reveals a certain design of reality, unknown until then – in other words, establishes a new world – fantasy literature discloses – or rather creates – parallel universes. This is not about escapism, as philosophers of history would claim, but *creativeness* – on all levels and in all meanings of the term – as the hallmark of human condition." Indeed our image about the everyday life could change considerably if we paid closer attention to its emergence and to what is particular to man.

5. On the meaning of usual things

I would like to make a further comment on Eliade's assertions (Eliade 1978, XI, § 2). When he speaks about everyday life, he refers to certain usual acts, as he terms them. The term "usual" calls to mind either something that is common and recurrent, repetitive, or something that over time has become outworn. In fact both meanings may be at play: what becomes common and occurs almost mechanically day in and day out ends up wearing down its meanings. It loses much of its significance, as it is performed out of inertia or the mere force of things (as is the case for securing drinking water or equally habitual tending some flowers on the window sill). In time such activities tend to become like old worn coins which, although they may serve for regular economic transactions, tend to have flattened engravings. Moreover, at a certain point they lose even their economic worth, as wear and tear excludes them from practical economic exchanges. A sort of semiotic erosion comes into play, as the relation with those who do use them tends to become indifferent.

Nevertheless, usual acts, just as worn coins, will preserve in discrete forms a certain symbolical significance. If we examine them carefully we will realise that they are not performed at random. They cannot be done in a purely haphazard manner, disregarding one's disposition or state. This means that, beyond their usual character, they retain certain symbolical rules pertaining to the rituals of day to day life.

Unfortunately, we often tend to use the term "ordinary" as a mere synonym for "banal" or even "insignificant"[7]. However it expresses something performed according to a custom or code of life in the community. For example, what is habitual in the home of a family or in their community, in their private life cannot be violated at any cost. Behind such facts there are always certain beliefs, representations and symbols whose power is difficult to ignore. I would like to stress that the phrase "ordinary behaviour" ultimately refers to norms instituted for a long time. It reflects the existence of a diffuse code of everyday life. This code is its concealed side, which often fades into an unrecognisable state. Its presence – and that of

minor, yet not insignificant rituals – is nowadays more thoroughly camouflaged. In other words, ordinary things hide diffuse codes of human coexistence. Behind the ordinary – whether we realise it or not – there lie certain basic and elementary rules, beliefs and symbolical representations. It is difficult, therefore, to state that they are simply banal and contingent, lacking any significance.

Well, let us accept for now that there are no ordinary acts or gestures deprived of significance. Could we infer that everything is significant in our everyday life and that nothing is without meaning?

Not at all, as there is much without meaning in what we do and say, in our gestures and decisions. Yet lack of meaning is not necessarily a feature of everyday life. The absence of meaning does not have a privileged place in the life that we call ordinary and view as everyday. Are there not enough statements without meaning in supposedly academic discourse or in philosophical texts? Aren't there many questions without meaning posed in discussions with a scientific or philosophical intent? Our conceptual language sometimes exceeds in meaningless terms and semantically empty sentences. We are constantly faced with countless purely formal terms and bizarre hypotheses as though scholarly literature attempted to compete with the Dada literary experimentations. Not to mention the myriad absurd projects or decisions, which signal not only the mere absence of meaning, but also its violent or barbaric rejection. Such projects and decisions make up the contents of many events in our life, especially non-daily ones. What happened in the years during the Second World War and in subsequent years, in concentration camps and gulags, in prisons, in defaced or destroyed living spaces, in exile and solitude, all surpass the boundaries of everyday life. Unfortunately, such ordeals became a matter of everyday life, yet their sources were not in the least common. Absurd gesture ended up providing the contents of a historical era, without being considered ordinary. What barbaric or cruel rules could underlie such appalling gestures? What kind of strange code could regulate from within what happened through the decades?

As we can clearly see, things are much more complicated than they appear at first sight. Yet reviewing such a dark landscape, where the non-sense and the absurd regulate the ordinary, can provide a further argument for the assertion that everyday life is never something simple and ordinary.

6. A phenomenology under an *as-if* regime

One may wonder, in this case, what kind of ontology is specific to the everyday fact, which exhibits this dual, alternative voice. Is it an ontology similar to the Platonic one? Does it allow for inequalities that can lead to profoundly dual relationships, such as those between substance and appearance? Specifically, does everyday ontology conceal a certain dualism? Or, on the contrary, does it cancel such inequalities at once with the Platonic meaning of the terms at stake? Could this latter case be one of plain and evanescent phenomenalization of tendencies or meanings?

It is difficult to choose between the two already known perspectives. Rather, I would believe the answer lies elsewhere. In everyday attitude, as we know, the mind of man does not reject the idea that existing things have substance or conversely that everything may be a game of appearance. It does not mean that the human mind contradicts itself all the time. When something is accepted as substance, it is not however something "general" or "ultimate". The same applies for the appearance of existing things. On the other hand, what is at stake is not wholly subjective and arbitrary, for in this case the reference points of life would be lost. However they are never lost, even though their power might greatly decline under certain circumstances.

It is noteworthy that in everyday life itself man experiences something indeterminate in the face of the subjective will, something that overcomes it and reveals man's own limitations. Paul Ricoeur referred at one point to the presence of already-there of life and of our understanding (Ricoeur 1967, 205-218). Their meaning is not one of pre-established conditions, but rather phenomenological: they are existentially constitutive and manifest only at once with that

which they themselves make possible. Above all, this is about the fact of situatedness in the world, which erects impassable limits to consciousness and reflects its elementary facticity. In addition to this fact there is the fact of the presence of the living body, the condition of temporality or life in history, the constant presence of the other, the language we speak and free will. Indeed, these are some absolutely fundamental terms: the world, the body, time, the other, language and free action. Obviously, this is not the only way we can think of or perceive what exceeds man's subjective will.

I wish to return to my claim above, namely that in everyday life that which is regarded as substantial and apparent is not taken to be definitive. I will set aside for now those attitudes – be they aesthetic, technical or religious – that may profoundly modify the ontology of everyday life. Nevertheless nothing appears as pure essence or as pure fiction. If facts make their substance visible, the latter does not completely escape the condition of temporality. This means that it is seen *as if* it were so. The same is true of the appearance of existing things. Both terms of perceptions are under the influence of *as if*. This is not about extreme fiction or the perception of all things in a purely spectacular mode. That is why I would like to refer now to a certain type of phenomenology, situated beyond the radicalism secured by the sheer power of Husserlian reduction. It is a phenomenology typical of the *as if* attitude, therefore freer or more lax[8]. It easily allows for dissimulation and game, the recurrent ambivalence of certain behaviours and the equivocal of certain forms of expression.

I would stress again though that the space of everyday life does not become, as a result, an endless spectacle. Can not understand any in terms of game, simulation and spectacle, no matter how hard certain specialists, sociologists in particular, may try to impose the latter idea.

III. References for an awareness of everyday metaphysics

1. "The common understanding of time" (Heidegger)

I will first return to a few pages from *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (Heidegger 1997, II, § 19, b), where Martin Heidegger discusses "the common understanding of time (*vulgäres Zeitverständnis*)". I believe that such understanding of time, beyond its problematic aspects, illustrates the workings of metaphysics in our daily life. Simply put, the common or vulgar understanding of time can indicate the presence of a common or vulgar metaphysics. I would prefer to call it everyday metaphysics, or metaphysics for everyday use.

We know that Heidegger often deals with the multiple manner of signification of the being. He discusses both the pre-ontological signification and the ontological, or ultimately, metaphysical signification. He states at a certain point that "we live in an understanding of Being" even though the meaning of Being is sometimes veiled in darkness (Heidegger 1986, § 1). In other words, the *Dasein* "is ontological", not in the sense that it inquires theoretically about the Being of entities, but "being in such a way that one has an understanding of Being" (§ 4). As regards man, there is a "predilection for metaphysics" (as he notes in a phenomenological study on the *Critique of Pure Reason*). The idea brings to mind the notion of natural disposition (*Naturanlage*) for metaphysics once asserted by Kant (1968, 41). Yet such remarks do not focus on the metaphysics viewed in the Aristotelian tradition, as examination of the being in general. They also do not deal with metaphysics viewed as a mode of understanding the being in opposition with time (hence, either as "Platonism", as Nietzsche preferred to say, or as "ontologism", a thematisation in relationship with "*what* truly exists"). And they focus even less so on metaphysics understood as an era of forgetting the Being (Haeffner 1981). In light of these three great meanings of metaphysics, to be found especially in certain reference doctrines, Heidegger refers to a type of metaphysics where "every time we live already". We live, that is, to the extent that

that we live in "an understanding of the Being". In other words, this is about experienced metaphysics, assumed through the senses and already presupposed by what we do or think in our everyday lives.

Time as a sequence of nows. At the outset, Heidegger remarks that, in the Aristotelian tradition, time is viewed primarily as "*sequence of nows* where it should be noted that 'the nows' are not parts from which time is pieced together into a whole" (Heidegger 1997, 362; Heidegger 1982, 256). This is actually the "common, pre-scientific understanding of time". He refers to the common understanding of time (*vulgäres Zeitverständnis*), common time (*vulgäre Zeit*) and common conception of time (*vulgärer Begriff der Zeit*), each of these relating to the meaning of original time (*ursprüngliche Zeit*). If the phrase *vulgäres Zeitverständnis* were translated as "vulgar understanding of time", the term "vulgar" should be taken in its neutral sense, considering its Latin etymon (*vulgaris*, meaning "common" or "ordinary", "public", "valid for many").

How exactly does this representation of time become obvious? This meaning is at stake every time we measure time. For example, when we use a clock, "we measure time whenever we need it" (as when "we take time or let it pass"). We use easy to a fore-understanding of time ("When we look at a clock, since time itself does not lie in the clock, we assign time to the clock. In looking at the clock we say 'now'") (Heidegger 1997, 368; Heidegger 1982, 260-261). What does this fore-understanding of time consist in?

First of all, the time determined reading a clock is a usual time, which serves a purpose. As Heidegger states, "the time I am trying to determine is always 'time to', time *in order to* do this or that, time that I need *for*, time that I can permit myself *in order to* accomplish this or that, time that I must take *for* carrying through this or that" (Heidegger 1997, 364; Heidegger 1982, 258). We are thus already taking time into account and reckoning with it whenever we measure it.

Therefore, we orient ourselves in advance based on a "now", without reflecting on it ("In looking at the clock we say 'now'"). This "now" we are directed to is not a naked pure, now,

but “that wherefore and whereto there is still time now” (Heidegger 1997, 365; Heidegger 1982, 259). It expresses my distinct relationship towards things or towards other people. Thus "whenever I say "now" I am comporting myself toward something extant or, more precisely, toward something present which is in my present” (Heidegger 1997, 367; Heidegger 1982, 260). Heidegger calls this comportment *Gegenwärtigen*, “enprésenting of something”.

The enprésenting attitude is correlated with two other comportments, expecting something (expressed by “forthwith”) and retaining something (spoken of in the “earlier”). Their unity is not elucidated in the common understanding of time. To be elucidated they ought to be placed in a relationship with an “original time”, by way of which the different moments of time could be understood, even in their possibility. Yet such unity is at this point greatly obscured.

As we have already noted, ordinary consciousness understands time “as a sequence of nows from the not-yet-now to the no-longer-now”. This sequence has meaning, an “intrinsic direction from the future to the past”. That is precisely why we usually “say that time passes, elapses” (Heidegger 1997, 368-369; Heidegger 1982, 260). This sequence is “directed uniformly”, in accordance with an irreversible movement. Moreover, about the sequence of now we tend to designate it “as infinite”. Therefore, the common understanding of time is that of the sequence of nows, in a single irreversible and infinite direction.

Belief in the existence within a natural time. This common time is viewed as “already given to us” (Heidegger 1997, 365; Heidegger 1982, 259). Being “already given to us”, we can take time, let it pass, measure it and use it in various other ways. The “given” of time does not raise any doubts or questions (such as for instance, by whom exactly is it given? And to whom? Is it given naturally or in some other way?). We take time for granted, as we are already accustomed to this relationship with time and do not question how it was actually constituted.

In the common understanding, time appears as appropriate and inappropriate time for something specific. "All time we read from the clock is time to …, 'time to do this or that', *appropriate* or *inappropriate* time [...]. We designated by the term "significance" this totality of relations of the 'in-order-to', 'for-the-sake-of', 'for-that-purpose', 'to-that-end'" (Heidegger 1997, 369-370; Heidegger 1982, 261-262). In light of this character of significance, time understood as appropriate and inappropriate time is a "world-time [*Weltzeit*]" (Heidegger 1997, 370; Heidegger 1982, 262). Yet the common understanding of time is "little aware of […] significance" (Heidegger 1997, 372; Heidegger 1982, 263) and cannot thematise it.

We ordinarily believe that we live in a natural time, yet this does not exist. This statement, shocking at first, reflects the specific results of existential analysis. "[…] This does not mean that the time we read from the clock is something extant like intrawordly things. We know, of course, that the world is not an extant entity [*Vorhandenes*], not nature, but that which first makes possible the uncoveredness of nature. It is therefore also inappropriate, as frequently happens, to call this time nature-time or natural time. There is no nature-time, since all time belongs essentially to the Dasein. But there is indeed a world-time [*Weltzeit*]" (Heidegger 1997, 370; Heidegger 1982, 262).

Dating seems to rely on calendar dating, yet in fact things are more complicated. Heidegger refers initially to datability ("this relational structure of the 'now' as 'now-when', of the 'at-the-time' as 'at-the-time-when', and of the 'then' as 'then-when'") (Heidegger 1997, 371; Heidegger 1982, 262). Indeed it makes possible the dating of time, and the date we express may be indefinite, uncertain or different from the calendar date. "Nevertheless, the common conception of time as a sequence of nows is just as little aware of the moment of pre-calendrical datability as of that of significance" (Heidegger 1997, 371; Heidegger 1982, 263).

Temporal moments usually appear to us as though they were free-floating "relationless, intrinsically patched on to one another and intrinsically successive" (Heidegger 1997, 371; Heidegger 1982, 263). Likewise they appear as definite points.

To deconstruct this meaning, Heidegger discusses their character of "meanwhile" (*Inzwischen*) or spannedness. Each time moment is a meanwhile (a "during" or a "from now till then") (Heidegger 1997, 372; Heidegger 1982, 263).

The publicness of common time. In the common relationship with time, the 'publicness' (*Öffentlichkeit*) of time is also involved (Heidegger 1997, 369-374; Heidegger 1982, 261-264). It expresses "the now" within an essential relationship with the other, which Heidegger terms *Miteinandersein* (being-with-one-another). "When any one of us says 'now', we all understand this now, even though each of us perhaps dates this now by starting from a different thing or event: 'now, when the professor is speaking', 'now when the students are writing' or 'now, in the morning', 'now, towards the end of the semester" (Heidegger 1997, 373; Heidegger 1982, 264).

This public character of time entails something paradoxical. "Although each one of us utters his own 'now', it is nevertheless the 'now' for everyone. The accessibility of the 'now' for everyone, without prejudice to the diverse datings, characterizes time as public" (Heidegger 1997, 373; Heidegger 1982, 264). What can we infer from this? The existential structure called *Miteinandersein* does not cancel the solitude of each individual man. Ultimately, every single person is alone and yet with the others. Everyone is alone as they give a distinct understanding of their temporal "now", dating it according to their own needs and the demands of their various preoccupations. However, everyone is able to understand the "now" uttered by others, to the best of their abilities. The other's "now" is accessible to each; this is how "the 'now' is for all" must be understood.

Likewise, the fact of being-with-one-other makes us equal rather in terms of what we do not have or do not possess. The publicness of time declares that ultimately, to a certain extent, time does not belong to anyone. Like death, as a matter of fact. Yet this deprivation is compensated in a certain manner. "On account of this character of time a peculiar objectivity is assigned to it. The 'now' belongs neither to me, nor to anyone else, but it is somehow there. There is time, time is

given, it is extant, without our being able to say how and where" (Heidegger 1997, 373; Heidegger 1982, 264).

All that is common – the common conception of something or its public character – does not therefore belong to anyone. In other words, we should not claim that a "common representation" or a "common meaning" exists in someone's mind. Such common meaning is not constituted as such in one's mind, but exists providing that each one, in their solitude, is being-with-one-another.

The sense of losing time. Common time seems to be given to us only in a univocal expression (such as "there is time" or "there is no time", "we have time" or "we don't have time"). Yet, as Heidegger notes, each characteristic of time reflects both what we feel in a particular way and its opposite. Hence he speaks of a specific fact in the common understanding of time, namely losing time. "We also lose time, just as immediately as we constantly take time for ourselves. We leave time for ourselves with something, and in fact in such a way that while we do so the time is not there. As we lose time, we give it away." Perhaps in the vulgar understanding of time, we turn it into a thing, an object, which, consequently, might be had or lost. We ignore the fact that certain intentional attitudes play a role ("as we lose time, we give it away"). Likewise, we disregard the fact that time is not there, is not given and at-hand.

At this point, Heidegger discerns another aspect – in absolutely admirable fashion. It is the fact that prior to losing time we take time or reckon with time for our preoccupations. Consequently, losing time emerges as a way in which we leave time for ourselves: "But losing time is a particularly carefree leaving time for oneself, one way in which we have time in the oblivious passing of our lives" (Heidegger 1997, 374; Heidegger 1982, 264). Thus losing time is explained by a kind of indifference in how we make use of time, an indifference which is, in its turn, an everyday form of oblivion.

Yet, what kind of oblivion is there in the everyday mode of life? Oblivion to what? If we take into account that everyday time must be placed in relationship with an "original time" and how it shapes the overall understanding of the being

(Heidegger 1997, 367; Heidegger 1982, 260), then oblivion relates precisely to this "original time". It also concerns the distinct understanding that this relationship makes possible. Indeed the first to lose its condition of possibility is one's realisation of the meaning of being.

Common time and original time. The relationship between the vulgar representation of time and its elaborate philosophical representation is rather convoluted. In a rather peculiar manner, Aristotle is said to have represented time in a similar way to the common one (Heidegger 1997, 367; Heidegger 1982, 260) as did other prominent philosophers, from Augustine to Kant and later Bergson. They did not go, supposedly, beyond the vulgar understanding of time and did not deconstruct it completely. This was due to their primary focus on what happens with things "in time" and "naturally".

This means that, to a certain extent, philosophical consciousness can easily encounter common consciousness. Sometimes philosophical consciousness relies on the data provided by the common consciousness. Phenomenologically though, one can observe that the common conception conceals the true structure of time. To unveil it, Heidegger distinguishes between several attitudes or intentionalities (enprésenting, retaining and expectation), and their self-exposition (the three determinants: *now, at-the-time* and *then*, and their modulations). He discusses their origin in the unity of the three intentionalities and the horizons specific to each of them (to the present, the prior and the posterior). He also qualifies the structural moments of time: significance, datability, spannedness and publicness (Heidegger 1997, 369 sq.; Heidegger 1982, 268 sq.). He argues that the vulgar comprehension of time derives from its original understanding, which is possible due to one of its intrinsic modifications, namely "levelling".

Heidegger assimilates, up to a certain point, "the traditional understanding of time", inspired by Aristotle, with the vulgar understanding of time. His objections refer to both conceptions. For example, in both cases, the distance between concept and something understood is considerable. However,

this is debatable. Furthermore, I do not know whether for common consciousness the nows are "free-floating, relationless". Why would they be seen as floating freely and without relation to each other? In this case, how could one account for the idea – typical of the common consciousness – that there is an ineluctable order of time? How could we refer to dramatic situations, such as the "burden of time" or the "terror of history"? We do know that in each cultural or ethnographic space there have been many explorations on the "popular representations of time". Should we then distinguish clearly between the popular understanding of time and the common one? Or does the common understanding involve several levels, ranging from the one described by ethnography to the one specific to a scientist or indeed to a philosopher, provided that the latter do not question certain concepts or representations? It is possible that Heidegger, like Husserl before him, focuses on the latter variant of common understanding[9].

2. Common representations and beliefs (Collingwood)

Robin G. Collingwood examined at length the topic of common thought and understanding. He argued that the thinking operations always occur against the background of common beliefs and representations, which he termed presuppositions. The act of thought does not involve mere statement, however subtle it may appear at a given point. In addition to the specific statement, the act of thought presupposes a question that it may provide an answer, and the common belief by reference to which a question is usually formulated. Thus, three elements converge to describe the act of thought: the statement itself, the question that may correspond to the statement and the presuppositions of a mental space.

Examples of such presuppositions are well-known, especially as many are particularly resilient, such as those relating to existence, the self, time and space, reality and appearance. To a certain extent, they engage our deepest convictions, although they vary from one era to another and from one mental space to another. Such is the instance of the representation of time as circular, which was the foundation for

the development of natural sciences in ancient Greece. One is only rarely aware of their presence and significance. They underlie the questions of an era and how people ask those questions and what questions they are ready to answer. They include the belief in a natural order of the world or in the causal relation, interpreted differently from one era to another (Collingwood 1998, 49-55). One cannot argue that such beliefs are true or false, but rather active or inactive.

Some of them can be considered truly metaphysical, for at least two reasons: firstly, because they refer to the nature and being of extant things; secondly, because they do not derive from other beliefs and consequently appear as "absolute" to us (Collingwood 1998, chap. VII). For example, the belief in a natural order of the world can be viewed as metaphysical only when it does not derive from another belief.

I would like to focus on a rather peculiar aspect of presuppositions of a metaphysical kind. We are only rarely aware of their presence or significance. We rarely acknowledge them as 'final instance' data. Considering their condition, they cannot appear to us as true or false. They are never mere propositions, because they do not constitute answers to definite questions. They often emerge as *a priori* data, in which case they may be considered as "absolute presuppositions", as designated by Collingwood. They are not the same with our presuppositions or subjective, reflecting what one might believe. They are not derived experience; on the contrary, they guide human experience[10]. They are accepted in advance and implicitly, sometimes for an entire era.

Let us dwell for a while on this latter aspect. The presuppositions that we may call metaphysical have their own distinct history. They will emerge vigorously at a given moment and dominate an entire era in the life of humanity. Over time, they fade away, are eclipsed or less active. They are then substituted by others, without disappearing however. Their history seems to trace certain boundaries for the unfolding of real history. Over time they are subject to the effects of the passing of time, and their erosion means that one historical era must make way for a new one. This happened when the Greek-Roman tradition encountered the New-Testament tradition. As

Collingwood states, "the pagan world died because of its own failure to keep alive its own fundamental convictions" (Collingwood 1998, 225). Therefore, when metaphysical convictions fade away, a form of civilisation becomes extinct. This happens in the first instance, in the everyday life of people.

Metaphysics is therefore viewed in its two meanings, first of which as an implicit mode of comprehension, specific to an entire community. This refers above all to those "absolute presuppositions" active in people's minds. Yet metaphysics also means the profound reflection on these presuppositions of the mind. Collingwood terms it simply "metaphysical analysis". He is actually aware of his personal affiliation with both forms of metaphysics. As a regular person, living in a particular community in Western Europe, he shares many beliefs and images specific to his community variously related to history, the world, time or the everyday relation with the other. As a philosopher, he is driven to an analytical examination of these presuppositions, especially those which pertain to the nature of extant things, their being and the boundaries of their existence.

As for the exploration of presuppositions, it has taken various forms, thanks in particular to epistemologists or historians of ideas (Holton 1978). Their own metaphysical analysis, as conducted by Collingwood and later by Strawson, Suppes, Searle and others, differs in numerous ways, as we will show below.

3. An implicit and symbolical metaphysics (Eliade)

Let us recall what Mircea Eliade states in the last pages of *Images and Symbols* (especially in the section *Remarks upon Method*). He focuses on a condition in which one may recognise the "metaphysical attitude" of people in traditional societies. He remarks, firstly, that certain modern scholars such as Edward Burnett Tylor or James George Frazer considered that the spiritual life in exotic lands was dominated by superstitions ("the product of ancestral fears or of 'primitive' stupidity", as he concludes). They referred in particular to their religious life, difficult to separate from their aesthetic or technological experience. Eliade explains this view by the fact that these

scholars were educated in an era that imposes a positivist perspective of human acts. Their statements about certain ancient beliefs ignore both the practical meaning of such beliefs and their elevated, symbolic character.

In light of these perspectives, Eliade observes that archaic humanity reveals an "existential consciousness" concerning the Cosmos and himself. Moreover, it sheds light on a distinct metaphysical attitude. "Where a Frazer could see nothing but 'superstition', a metaphysic was already implicit, though it was expressed by a pattern of symbols rather than by the interplay of concepts: a metaphysic – that is, a whole and coherent conception of Reality, not a series of instinctive gestures ruled by the same fundamental 'reaction of the human animal in the confrontation with Nature'" (Eliade 1952, 187 sq.). Such metaphysics deals with the elementary distinction between appearance and reality (in fact between what "appears to be real" and the "true reality"). Such a distinction relies on the belief that "true reality" of the world does not emerge in the first stage of experience. It is not linked to the immediate state of things, rather it is archetypal in relation with them. Such consciousness seems to indicate, according to Eliade, a certain metaphysics, that is a vision of what may be considered real in the life-world. However, this vision is implicit, not explicit. It is expressed mainly by symbolic images and representations, not by highly elaborate concepts. The world it describes appears as an open and interconnected world ("everything is held together by a compact system of correspondences and likenesses). The symbolic images at play are proof of the awareness of "limit-situations" and the situation of man in an open world. Similar ideas were developed by Carl-Gustav Jung, Ernst Cassirer, and later on by Gilbert Durand, Jean-Jacques Wunenburger and others.

Eliade's idea is important, as it highlights that there is always a metaphysics at play, even in the quoted case of an implicit metaphysics, expressed mainly by symbolic images or representations. Eliade's claim does not refer directly to the common behaviour of man. More precisely, it does not refer to everyday behaviour as being merely ordinary, without discontinuities and singular moments. As we know, it concerns

a series of symbolic representations related to the mythical and religious behaviour or to the practice of magic. Such behaviours dislocate and – eventually – suspend the ordinary sequence of time and open up paths to other possible interpretations. Yet these behaviours are too a part of everyday life, making up its uncommon or out of the ordinary side.

4. Shared conceptual schemes (Strawson)

Similar to other 20th-century philosophers, Peter Strawson argues that the object of metaphysics is not nature as such (the nature of real things, possible principles, kinds of objects, etc.). Rather, it describes the actual structure of our thought about the world, meaning those concepts and categories which we use in order to think and to represent our world (Strawson 1959). Are they the same for all people, every time and everywhere? Do they explain the nature of man – his rationality, for instance – in terms of its characterizing universals? Or, on the contrary, does it entail considerable distinctions from one era to another and among different communities?

Strawson's notion of shared conceptual schemes is particularly important. The shared conceptual scheme is composed of concepts operated in everyday life. They interconnect to create a sort of tissue or web, which describes shared thought, and provide the basic elements for a mode of understanding the world, under variable temporal and spatial conditions. They represent the forms we use to demarcate and imagine the reality itself and our own situation within it.

Yet never is a single conceptual structure active on its own. Consequently, such structures are bound to be competitive or, in certain situations, operate in alternation. Strawson focuses in particular on the conceptual scheme active at a given moment. He argues that this is the object of metaphysical reflection, more precisely of descriptive metaphysics. He interprets the presuppositions of knowledge as conceptual schemes, considering both common or everyday knowledge, and elaborate knowledge. The concepts in use are revealed as we utter them. In fact, the language we use predisposes to a distinct metaphysics (as we exhibit category-preference, favouring for instance the category

of relation or of process). The privilege claimed by a category modifies the meaning of a whole range of other categories.

We may retain at least two aspects for the purposes of our discussion of everyday life. First, we can mention the fact that the metaphysician has turned his attention even more directly to the shared mode of thought. In this respect, what matters is not only the theoretical mode of thought but indeed the everyday or ordinary one. Second, each way of speaking – including the everyday one – activates a certain metaphysical inclination. Language – including everyday language – directs us to certain images of a metaphysical nature. It enables a vivid configuration of presupposition and thereby a metaphysics that we may call of common use. It is commonly and tacitly used. Commonly used, as the beliefs and concepts which express it sustain the concerns or expectations of an entire community. Tacitly used, because it is not articulated as such logically or formally. In their daily life, people do not necessarily seek to explain conceptually such beliefs or images. On the contrary, people effortlessly use them as references, rely on them for their statements or activities, because they take them for granted.

5. "The metaphysical burden of social reality" (Searle)

John R. Searle opened one of his later works, *The Construction of Social Reality*, with the rather startling subtitle "Metaphysical Burden of Social Reality". He explained it in the opening lines of the book, by describing a problem that had puzzled him for a long time: "there are portions of the real world; objective facts in the world that are only facts by human agreement. In a sense there are things that exist only because we believe them to exist. I am thinking of things like money, property, governments, and marriages" (Searle 1995, 1). Therefore, certain things, though they "exist only because we believe them to exist", are nevertheless real. Although they are dependent on our mental or subjective life, they do possess a dense, resilient objectivity.

To use the author's example, this happens when you go to a café, sit in a chair at a table, call the waiter and order a coffee. The waiter brings what you ordered, you drink it, leave

some money on the table and leave. "An innocent scene, but its metaphysical complexity is truly staggering, and its complexity would have taken Kant's breath away if he had ever bothered to think about such things." (Searle 1995, 3) Why would such a scene leave Kant flabbergasted? Not necessarily because the German philosopher would have avoided entering a café, having a beer or a coffee and gazing outside the café window. But for another reason: if one attempted to describe what happens in this scene, one would not be able to capture the features of the description in the language of physics or mathematics. That is because the facts presented above become real on account of human beliefs and our language. Considering the case of the person who goes to the café, he is served exactly what he ordered, finds that the price is exactly the price quoted on the menu and notices that he is left alone for some time. There is here, as Searle notes, "a huge, invisible ontology" (Searle 1995, 3), which underlies everything that may happen to all of us, on an absolutely ordinary day.

Appropriately, Searle invites the reader to embark on a metaphysical analysis of these ordinary events, which originate in the conventions we observe and our manner of speaking.

He brings into play the notion of *Background,* as "a set of Background abilities, dispositions, and capacities that are not part of the intentional content and could not be included as part of the content" (Searle 1995, 132). He describes in great detail the functioning of the background, which enables linguistic and perceptive interpretations, gives an air of familiarity to conscious experiences and even a narrative or dramatic form. He also discusses the notion of *Background presupposition*, arguing that there exists a realism external to the subjective life (Searle 1995, chap. 6-8; Loux 2002, chap. 9). It becomes particularly important in everyday life, because it is a condition for the intelligibility of any discourse. Absent such presuppositions, many statements would be unintelligible and we would fail to follow a particular line of thought. It is, as Searle argues, a necessary presupposition for a large chunk of thought and language. It is not an empirical thesis, but rather it is construed as a necessary condition of intelligibility for certain types of theories. We can develop many theories on the

existence of objects in space or on space itself, yet none of them will eliminate this condition of intelligibility: "our notions of 'objects' and 'space' have to be radically revised, as in fact they have been revised by atomic theory and relativity theory, all the same, ER [external realism] remains untouched" (Searle 1995, 182). This condition presupposed that there "is a way that things are that is independent of all representations of how things are" (Searle 1995, 182). The idea does not "identifies not how things are in fact" or determine their existence one way or another. In other words, it does not concern such issues whose solution is unfathomable or infinitely variable. Yet it achieves something of great importance, "it identifies a space of possibilities" (Searle 1995, 182). The meaning of any statement (for instance, "I have no money at all in my wallet") becomes possible only on account of "the presupposition of the existence of money" (Searle 1995, 183). In other words, the meaning of the statement is articulated "against a space of possibilities of having money" (Searle 1995, 183). The idea of the reality of external things articulates "a space of possibilities for a very large number of statements" (Searle 1995, 183). It is connected with a background of presuppositions, each with a rather formal character, as horizons of possibilities.

I would like to recall that Ludwig Wittgenstein, John L. Austin, Patrick Strawson, Nelson Goodman and others are often quoted for their research on everyday language.

As in the case of Collingwood's thesis, metaphysics, in this case, engages two levels in our lives. On the one hand, it refers to certain human conventions and some capacities which are manifest in such experiences that constitute social acts. In other words, they are indicative of the invisible web of social reality – the "huge invisible ontology", as Searle terms it (Searle 1995, 3). On the other hand, it denotes the conceptual analysis one conducts with reference to the construction of social reality. The whole debate about non-intentional capacities, for instance, or the background of presuppositions and its functioning revolves around the metaphysical analysis of social reality.

IV. The idea under consideration and several conclusions

1. I believe that the situations described above indicate that there is, indeed, a metaphysics specific to everyday life. It appears as present constantly and before everything else (*zunächst und zumeist*, as Martin Heidegger says). Ultimately, every human experience – in the relationship with the others, the effort to acquire knowledge or things, in private life, in creative work and in religious life – underlies such metaphysics. Regardless of one's pursuits or level of education of the mind, it is present at least in an implicit manner.

Such metaphysics is not one and the same for all of us and at the same time. In the discussion so far I have recurrently used the singular form of a phrase, i.e. 'an everyday metaphysics'. Yet this is due to the need for simplicity in expression. Because such metaphysics is related to the mental life of people or communities (Robin G. Collingwood), it is always plural. We might say, therefore, that there are as many everyday metaphysics at work as the distinct mental spaces we can recognise. They may coexist in a single mental space or can be in competition, sometimes clashing openly. This should not come as a surprise. On the contrary, their vibrant co-presence helps to explain certain typical phenomena in everyday life: fragmented forms of consciousness, deeply equivocal behaviours, duplications or hypocrisies in relations with the others, impersonal modes of life, and attitudes of total indecision or indifference.

We might call it, in certain cases, usual metaphysics, for at least two reasons: 1) it is a set of representations and meanings already active, that is, in use; 2) such representations or images become familiar and spent semantically, at least in certain situations.

As far as I can observe, the presence of this everyday metaphysics is acknowledged most often indirectly. There are references to implicit metaphysics, such as it is assumed on account of particular modes of thought (Robin G. Collingwood), or symbolic practices (Mircea Eliade). A latent or underlying metaphysics has also been invoked (Williard Van Orman

Quine), especially with reference to statements of existence and modality (related to the possible, necessary or contingent character of certain relations). This is practically unavoidable in the case of *de re* formulations, especially descriptive ones, about the states of things or events. It also concerns the deontic or moral modalities, as they are matched by ontological assumptions.

Taking into account the way of thinking of some of those who reflect on the issue of metaphysics, Jacques Derrida argues that in their case there is a concealed, camouflaged metaphysics, of which they are most often unaware; or even a residual metaphysics because, while they provide arguments against old ideas ("principle", "reality taken for granted", etc.), they allow unwittingly similar representations in their own discourse. Richard Rorty often makes reference to the presence of an underlying metaphysics, recognisable by in-depth language analysis. Beliefs commonly in use and the common way of speaking constantly actualise a common metaphysics (John R. Searle). Highly relevant in this respect are the shared beliefs against which the reality of everyday and social order is articulated. Moreover, such situations do not engage only the one who relies on common language, but also the speaker who may possess a certain theoretical training.

Ultimately, this type of metaphysics can be viewed as trivial, as Vincent Descombes terms it, commenting on Quine (Descombes 2000, 13). This designation plays on the ancient meaning of the word (the Latin *trivium* used to define the place where three roads meet, an easily accessible crossroad, where a weekly fair would be held). In other words, such metaphysics is specific to the life of a fair or market – precisely why it applies to everyday life. It becomes clear now that it is articulated, to a certain extent, through the regular and negotiated use of certain images or ideas.

2. As we can notice, ordinary or common metaphysics has been discussed frequently. It is viewed either as latent, or hidden, camouflaged. In certain respects, it involves residual elements. To the extent that it is common, it will sometimes be called vulgar or even trivial, as has been shown above. Through each

of these terms will come to light its everyday character, the fact that it is active in people's everyday lives.

We know that in the past there were also discussions about *metaphysica naturalis*, considered to be real in that there is an inevitable inclination of the human mind to formulate certain ideas or questions which go beyond any sensitive experience (for example, ideas of the possibility of free action, of the nature of the human soul or of the existence of God). Such metaphysics must be re-assessed in critical terms, as Kant argued, for instance (Afloroaei 2008, 9-12). We could accept, in the case of everyday life, the prevalence of "natural attitude", yet what the phrase expresses should not be viewed as something deficient. Its "natural" condition does not exclude it from the scope of reflection proper, however simple it may appear to us at a given moment. However, it should not be confused with "popular metaphysics", unsystematic, which modern authors often quote, for instance Hegel, in his lectures on the history of philosophy, or Schopenhauer, in *The World as Will and Representation* (Schopenhauer 1958, vol. II, chap. XVII).

Metaphysics, therefore, may be encountered in an everyday form, as a tacit or underlying metaphysics of our understanding in our day-to-day life. I would note that precisely this usual or everyday hypostasis of metaphysics has been increasingly under scrutiny, especially since Nietzsche. Consequently, like our everyday life or, considering its sources, the life of our collective unconscious, it calls for ever more extensive and varied interpretations. I would place the interest in such metaphysics in an analogous situation with the focus on common, natural language or with the research on the mental life of communities. We know that this interest has grown enormously over the past century, especially after the Second World War, which profoundly changed our everyday and cultural history.

NOTES

[1] This is a possible interpretation of Charles Péguy's statement, in *Notre jeunesse* (1910), that every person has his own metaphysics, manifest or latent, otherwise

they would not exist as man. This proposition was borrowed from – and, to an extent, assumed by – Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1948, 53; 1964, 138).

[2] Highly illustrative in this respect is Emil Cioran's attitude towards metaphysics, knowing that he did not accept himself as philosopher, less so as metaphysician (Cioran and Jaudeau 1990).

[3] Peter L. Berger & Thomas Luckmann (1966, II, 1 b-d) describe the constitution of everyday reality in relation to the data of common sense and ordinary knowledge, founded on common sense. The meaning of ordinary life can be delimited in a more general manner, as Charles Taylor (1989, III, 13. 1) did, when referring to aspects of human life related to work, producing the necessities of life, and life as sexual beings, including here marriage and family. This is what Aristotle considered when he stated that the purposes of political association are "life itself and the good life" (*zên kai euzên*). In other words, ordinary life spans everything necessary to achieve in order to sustain and restore our life.

[4] It would be useful here, I believe, to recall Sigmund Freud's assertion in the essay *Das Unheimliche* (1920), precisely on the actualisation of the dual meaning of the term uncanny, *unheimlich*. He observes in advance that the sense of uncanniness is generated either by "outdated" beliefs, or by suppressing certain complexes.

[5] Cf. Sloterdijk (1983, I), especially the section "Anyone, or: The Most Real Subject of Modern Diffuse Cynicism". The issue has long been in focus, if we consider, for instance, Erving Goffman (1959).

[6] Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966, I, 1) insist on the ordinary or routine side of everyday reality. Many of their claims are highly debatable. Thus, the authors state that everyday reality does not appear as problematic and as a result people suppress immediately certain possible doubts. Reality, they argue, does not make room for dreams or to personal activities related to one's free time, less so to play, aesthetic or religious experience. The temporality of everyday life would appear, in such a case, to be levelled and finite, coercive, and linked only to certain strictly pragmatic preoccupations.

[7] However, banality may also require a different approach. This is called for not only in an excellent title: Alexandru Dragomir, *Utter Metaphysical Banalities* (Dragomir 2004), but also researchers such as Jacques Le Goff. Specifically, in mediaeval France, the term *banalités*, in the plural form, indicated a range of items (mill, wine press, oven, breeding animals, etc.) considered to be common and ordinary. More precisely, they served all the people on a seigniorial estate, provided they paid certain taxes in exchange. The seignior was the only one who had the legal right to own them and grant use, being therefore the true master of banal things.

[8] Especially after Hans Vaihinger (1965), we have been well aware that theoretical attitude itself is not detached from the *as-if* consciousness. This means that, separate from the *as-if* mode specific to technical or conceptual attitude, one must carefully delimit the mode typical of everyday life. As regards the ontology of everyday life, cf. Jean Baudrillard (1968, chap. I); Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann (1973); Claude Romano (1998). I refer to them especially because of their reflections on everyday life and on communication – or understanding in the space of this life, although their thematisations are vastly different from each other. A noteworthy study on these writings and the issues related to everyday life has been published by Ciprian Mihali (2001).

[9] From a phenomenological perspective, such analyses would later be continued by Hans-Georg Gadamer (centred, for example, on the speculative structure of language), Jan Patočka (1988), Paul Ricoeur, in essays concerning psychoanalysis, such as the "Reflection: An Archaeology of the Subject (Ricoeur 1970, 419-459), Bernhard Waldenfels (exploring the question of the other, *Fremdheit* (Waldenfels 2006) and others.

[10] Commenting on Collingwood's idea, Stephen Toulmin (1988, 8 sq.) does not overlook what Thomas Kuhn would later claim, namely the presence of paradigms of the cognitive and research practice. He also quotes Alasdair MacIntyre, who would describe, in *Short History of Ethics*, those conceptual configurations whose changes profoundly shaped Western moral thought. Important books on this topic have been written by Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975, part II, § 3), directly referencing Collingwood (concerning "the logic of question and answer"), or Patrick Suppes (1985), who placed metaphysical presuppositions in relation with the language we speak and whose grammar code we take for granted.

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