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Daimonic Disclosure in Arendtian Action

A Response to Critics

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Abstract: This essay begins with a personal account of how I came to explore Arendt's theory of disclosive political action via earlier research on the work by Charles Taylor, who presents a different notion of the way that praxis reveals dimensions of the self and the world. Alongside this biographical narrative, I articulate the core intention and argument of my book, *Hannah Arendt's Theory of Political Action*, where I discuss Arendt's performative and non-sovereign theory of freedom and political action, with special focus on action's disclosure of the unique "who" of each agent, along with disclosing aspects of the shared world. Arendt proposes that in pluralistic, secular public spheres no metaphysical idea can authoritatively validate political actions or opinions absolutely. At the same time, she sees action and thinking as revealing an inescapable existential illusion of a divine element in human beings, a notion well represented by the *daimon* metaphor that appears in Arendt's own work and in key works by Plato, Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, and Immanuel Kant, with which she engages. While striving to provide a post-metaphysical theory of action and judgment, Arendt ends up performing evidence to the fact that many of the legitimating concepts of contemporary secular politics retain a residual vocabulary of transcendence. The essay concludes with my response to the commentaries of three critics of my book.

Keywords: Arendt, Hannah; the *daimon*; political action; the "who"; divine; transcendence.

My book on Hannah Arendt's theory of political action presents an account of Arendt's performative and non-sovereign theory of freedom and political action, with special focus on action's disclosure of the unique "who" of each agent, and aspects of the world that situates action.[1] I argue that giving interpretive priority to the notion of action's disclosure of the "who" and the world can best illuminate Arendt's account of action, and its place in her writings. This helps one to understand what concepts she has adopted and transformed from her teachers in existential philosophy, Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers. It also clarifies the stakes of her critique of G. W. F. Hegel, Karl Marx, of totalitarianism, mass consumer society, the work model of freedom, and of teleological philosophies of history. Much of the book is a critical exegesis of Arendt's theory of action, from a perspective that privileges Arendt's effort to rejuvenate political action as an activity that individuates agents, realizes their dignity, and helps to create and preserve an intelligible world.

The book also posits a novel, albeit more contestable thesis. Arendt proposes that in pluralistic, secular public spheres, no metaphysical or religious

[1] Trevor Tchir, *Hannah Arendt's Theory of Political Action: Daimonic Disclosure of the "Who"*, Cham, CH: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017. [Henceforth cited as *TPA*]

idea can authoritatively validate political actions or opinions absolutely. At the same time, she sees action and thinking as revealing an inescapable existential illusion of a divine element in human beings, a notion represented well by the *daimon* metaphor that appears in Arendt's own work and also in works by Plato, Heidegger, Jaspers, and Immanuel Kant, with which she engages. I argue that while striving to provide a post-metaphysical, imminent, and secular theory of action and judgment, Arendt's own writing serves as an example of how many of the legitimating concepts of contemporary secular politics retain a significant residual vocabulary of transcendence. In the book I challenge readings of Arendt that see her accounts of thinking and action as straightforwardly secular and completely post-metaphysical. In the context of the current Author meets Critics session,[2] the critics asked an important and difficult question: If the *daimon* is merely a metaphor, and the divine is merely an illusion, then what is the fuss all about? Why do I concern myself insisting on a divine or transcendent element in Arendt's account of action and thinking, one that can be explored through unpacking the meaning of the *daimon* metaphor, when her commitment to a post-metaphysical account seems sustained, and when, as Frederick Dolan argues, a strictly human, this-worldly account serves Arendt's purposes just fine, those of critiquing the ills of modernity and promoting a revitalization of world-building civic virtues and republican political institutions?[3] I will address this point later on, when I respond directly to the three critics. For now, I would like to share how I came to write the book.

Growing up in central Alberta, I went to French language Catholic school and was baptized in a Ukrainian Catholic church. At age 17 I attended the University of Ottawa where I specialized in political theory. At that young age my whole worldview was challenged and relativized by studying the Western canon of political thought, particularly its tradition of secular humanism. While the Christian faith of my childhood was seriously altered, I remained fascinated by questions regarding the place of God, by notions of the absolute, and by the transcendent in political life. I was also interested in a related question, namely how people of different faiths, comprehensive doctrines, or moral ontologies could peacefully, fairly, and meaningfully engage with one another in political deliberation. This personal preoccupation lead me to do my Masters thesis on the philosophy of Charles Taylor, who himself is Canadian, a Catholic, and is interested in some of the same questions. In this context I explored the modern sources of selfhood as well as an expressivist and communitarian theory of identity steeped in the philosophy of Hegel, in respect to his account of concrete rational autonomy, and his ethics of mutual recognition. The question of the ontological status of Hegel's notion of Spirit began to interest me, too, and I think back to it as I consider my critics' questions with regard to what exactly Arendt's *daimon* figure is meant to disclose: something divine, something transcendent, or something rather worldly, secular, and imminent?

I still remember reading Arendt's *The Human Condition* for the first time, one rainy night in Ottawa, on a long bus ride to the recording studio.[4] What was this I was reading? It seemed to speak to the main figures of the tradition, but to say something quite different, about the very phenomenology of political action, speech, and the decentering of the self before others, that Arendt called "spectators." I had not yet read Heidegger or Jaspers, so this sounded quite original and really made a mark on me. At the same time, Gilles Labelle introduced me to the writings of Claude Lefort on the subjects of Machiavelli, Marx, and Merleau-Ponty. Labelle and Lefort are both part of a contemporary tradition of French speaking political philosophers interested in the question of the relative permanence of theological categories in Western politics, as well as in the Arendtian and, indeed, Machiavellian notion positing that there exists a relatively autonomous sphere of the political.

While pursuing a PhD at the University of Alberta, I revisited Arendt's account of political judgment, based on a particular reading of Kant's aesthetic critique. Arendt captured my interest in that she offered a different reading than Taylor on the place of the

[2] My heartfelt thanks to the organizers for including my book in the program of the 40th Annual Meeting of the Karl Jaspers Society of North America and to the panel host and the critics, who very generously gave of their time to read and think about the book, and to engage in discussion.

[3] Frederick M. Dolan, "Political Freedom: Human not Divine," *Existenz* 14/2 (Fall 2019), 72-75. [Henceforth cited as *PFH*]

[4] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1958. [Henceforth cited as *HC*]

transcendent in politics, a different account than Taylor of how identity is disclosed and recognized in public, and a different account of how actors with a plurality of perspectives can meaningfully deliberate with each other. Best of all, Arendt examined in eye-opening ways as to how Plato and Aristotle used metaphors from the world of art, both productively and performatively, in order to explain the nature and purposes of politics.

During all the time that I had studied political theory, I had also pursued my passion for music. I was, and still am, an amateur singer, songwriter, musician, and recording artist. So much of what Arendt wrote about, particularly in *The Human Condition*, in her *Between Past and Future*,[5] and in her lectures on Kant,[6] spoke to my experiences as a musician. One aspect of my artistic activities was the crafting and recording of songs that would add something new and lasting to the world long after I am gone, thereby increasing my chances of attaining a very limited degree of earthly immortality. My artistic avocation has provided me with some helpful perspective on Arendt's phenomenology of labor, work, and action, as well as on the relationship with the human concerns for self disclosure that each of these modes of the *vita activa* has, namely one's search for meaning in life, transcendence, and permanence.

There were, in fact, several aspects of my experience as a musician that Arendt's writing illuminated, as readers of Arendt will recognize. For example, my songs had lyrics that were narrative in structure, so I acted as an interpreter or spectator, as a judge of the meaning of my fellows' words and deeds. They are written with some knowledge of musical *techne*, and thus are reminiscent of what Aristotle describes to be the process of *poiesis*, of productive art.[7] In contrast, I also play music live for diverse audiences, oftentimes in concert with other musicians. Regardless of my persona on stage and in the media, and regardless of the demonstrated musical virtuosity, ultimately the experience and interpretation of the audience spectators is not in my full control, as different listeners perceive songs differently. This lack of control and the exposure to others often left me feeling anxious. It took some courage to leave the comfort and privacy of my home and to face being scrutinized on stage. Playing with others allowed me to let go of the desire for full musical control. As the group follows a guiding melody, chord structure, and time signature, there is plenty of room for improvisation and, oftentimes also mistakes or miscommunication happen. Once a performance is over, the curtains close and that moment is gone forever, except perhaps in occasional memories of and stories by the performers and audience alike.

These diverse experiences attracted me to study Arendt's theory of political action, where she engages deeply with a distinction she makes between the political metaphors of productive and performance art, a distinction that is often used in ancient Greek thought. It sheds light on the fundamental features of action as being non-sovereign, as containing its own end, as being the actualization of natality and as being situated by plurality.

The writing of this book really began in earnest with my research into Arendt's relation to Marx. I read *The Human Condition* in the context of seminars that focused on Hegel, Marx, and the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, as someone sympathetic to their critical spirit and dialectical method. What stood out to me then was Arendt's unique, albeit not always sympathetic, treatment of Marx. I was curious about how Arendt seemed to charge Marx with aggravating some of the worst effects of capitalism, such as the "rise of the social" and the glorification of productive labor at the cost of leveling down qualitative distinctions, or world disclosive capacities, of the products of what Arendt calls work. I had taken it for granted that Marx was critiquing these effects. How could he be making it worse, as Arendt contended? I was particularly interested in the story of how Arendt undertook the work of *The Human Condition* to justify Marx in the eyes of Jaspers, but how she changed her views on Marx in the midst of the research, by way of arguing that while Marx cared much for justice, he cared little for freedom. Marx would not care about freedom? Certainly, he cared about arriving at a historical moment that would mean that human beings would labor in a way that was non-alienating. Was this not freedom of some kind? What I began to understand was the significant extent to which Arendt's own notion of freedom differed from Marx's concept of non-alienated labor, and even Hegel's work concept of freedom, which focuses on the

[5] Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought*, New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1977. [Henceforth cited as *BPF*]

[6] Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Beiner, Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1992.

[7] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, transl. David Ross, Oxford, UK: Oxford World Classics 1998, Book VI, pp. 102-17. [Henceforth cited as *NE*]

concretization of the moral and rational will, and laid the groundwork for Marx.

At the same time, some colleagues and mentors, particularly those whose research centered on the Hegel-Marx-Critical-Theory tradition, began to ask me why I was focusing on Arendt, who, to their minds, has so little to offer in the way of an account of social and material justice. Their questions paralleled those posed by much of the secondary literature on Arendt, much of which saw her concept of freedom as experienced through political action, as well as her description of the public, as far too removed from considerations of necessity, of economic justice, and of social equality, to inspire a comprehensive normative critique of our contemporary world. Yet, I was getting more and more enamored with Arendt as I continued my research. What was it that I felt she had to offer?

In hindsight, I think that this kind of criticism of Arendt is fair, in part. Her account of the political risks being vacuous without a more robust account of the economic conditions that would be necessary for allowing the meaningful participation of, and action by, the great majority of human beings in public spaces of appearance. Given, Arendt does not take much time to develop this idea, one does not read Arendt for a detailed analysis of how economic conditions of greater material equality might enable greater human happiness and freedom. Arendt did make it clear, however, that there is an economic pre-condition to freedom, as the experience of acting in the public sphere, namely that the daily demands of basic necessity are met, that individuals are free from worry about where their food and shelter is coming from. The productive forces of capitalism allowed, for the first time, for the possibility that everyone's basic necessities would be met, if only, according to Marx's view, the political problem of class exploitation could be solved too. Arendt does not disagree that capitalism provides the potential economic pre-condition for a greater number of human beings to experience freedom. Unfortunately, as Arendt shows, the tradition of Western political philosophy since Plato has helped to frame a dominant understanding of freedom in terms of keeping one from properly experiencing it. Freedom is understood within the logic of work or labor, as productivity itself, or in a way akin to the master craftsman, as sovereignty in terms of controlling nature and making a world that expresses one's will. In the book I argued that the best way of understanding Arendt's unorthodox engagement with Marx is by keeping in mind what I think is her most important thesis overall: that the political action through which human beings experience freedom discloses the unique "who" that they are, the "who" that is impossible to fully reify in products of labor or work. Arendt's most important commitment is to the dignity of each person as being an irreplaceable human agent, and to creating the conditions necessary for that person to appear to others and have their existence, dynamic as it is, seen and confirmed. This motivates her analysis of totalitarianism, the way it destroys the human as unique moral agent by disclosing it instead as superfluous specimen. This also motivates her critique of the Western tradition of political philosophy, in general, and Marx, in particular, with their glorification of labor and their philosophy of history that subsumes and conceals the unique "who" under its dialectical categories of winners and losers.

Arendt's championing of political freedom, understood as action that discloses a unique "who," remains her most important contribution to contemporary politics. It inspires a civic republican spirit that is crucial for the augmentation of legal and political institutions that protect human dignity in the face of neo-totalitarian forces. At the time of my writing these words at the beginning of the twenty-first century, populist leaders around the world threaten to erode constitutional protections of individuals' rights, the legal implementation of the moral significance of public appearance, in a dubious claim to speak for the will of the majority, or to hold the answers needed to lead the authentic members of the community back to their rightful place, namely the place where they were back in the days when their country was great, according to the new national myth that is being forged, for example, in the United States. Arendt's defense of human dignity extends to everyone. Each person, born to the world, has the existential possibility and, indeed, calling, to re-affirm one's uniqueness through action. One can notice the huge influence of Augustine's concept of natality in Arendt's thought is noticeable here. In it, the human condition of natality coexists with that of plurality, and Arendt seems to celebrate the sheer diversity of Being as its own end. Each person has an utterly unique and irreplaceable existence, despite simultaneously being part of the same species. This very uniqueness is what Arendt defends as being worthy of disclosure, at least in her most democratic moments. For example, in North America, contemporary political struggles such as Black Lives Matter and Idle No More, that demand recognition and respect of the actors in the wake of

generations of undignified treatment at the hands of a powerful majority and the coercive state institutions that they have created, reflect well Arendt's spirit and intention. I admit that there are other moments in her work that do read like a kind of glorification of Greek and Roman heroism, and this tension created by the coexistence between more or less elitist accounts of action, will not go away. Within Arendt's body of work, it is the more democratic account of action and public space, that which is available to everyone and that does not necessarily create conditions of fame, long lasting monuments to history, that is most valuable and needed today.

I began to better understand Arendt's critique of Marx after reading Heidegger's *Being and Time* and the notes from Heidegger's lectures that Arendt attended as a young student. I was amazed at just how much of Arendt's phenomenological approach to the various modes of human disclosure were adaptations of Heidegger, in particular of his reading of Aristotle's account of the intellectual virtues. One point that I noticed when reading Heidegger's lectures, and in particular about his notion of truth as *aletheia*, was his frequent references to the *daimon* figure. I noticed that Arendt referred to the same daimon figure in what stood out to me as one of the most powerful images in *The Human Condition*, where the decentered "who" is disclosed more clearly to spectators than to the actor. I was interested if this figure had special significance for Arendt, and was intrigued to find several appearances of it, not only in other of Arendt's published works, such as *Life of the Mind*, but also in her unpublished lectures. Further, it resonated with the work of other thinkers with whom Arendt engaged, notably Plato and Kant. Not only did Arendt use the *daimon* metaphor in order to explain the disclosure of the "who" through action, but also in order to reflect upon moral thinking. This link between action and moral thinking was largely what lead me to question the hard distinction that most interpreters of Arendt read between these two modes of disclosure. But above all, I found it bewildering that Arendt would refer to a figure representing the divine, a figure of Greek religion, when explaining what most readers took as secular and post-metaphysical theories of action and thinking. In the book I argue that Arendt understands human action and thinking as inescapably revealing the illusion of a divine presence, and it spends some time questioning the ontological status of the *daimon* in Arendt's approach. What I aimed to question was, if Arendt indeed wanted to leave no room for interpreting her account of self-disclosure as revealing any kind of divine alterity, why would she repeatedly cite a metaphor deeply steeped in otherworldly connotation?

This line of questioning connects with something that I still reflect upon, concerning what I earlier called Arendt's commitment to the dignity of each unique human being, and one's potential as an individualized actor whose dignity is countenanced by others in the space of appearance. I wonder if Arendt's argument for the universal dignity of each unique human being hinges upon an ontology that conceives the human as connected with the divine and sacred. Arendt argues that for one to make good on claims to recognize the dignity of others, and respect their human rights, requires the foundation of particular political communities where citizens agree to respect certain rights, that are being translated into positive law. She argues that all humans have the right to have rights, but for many, such as stateless refugees and even marginalized citizens within states, these rights go unrecognized. Where does the right to have rights come from? In trying to answer this question, Arendt neither commits to a natural law explanation, nor to a transcendent one. She seems to leave the question unanswered, as though signaling that its impossibility to answer is one of the great existential tensions that has and will continue to condition politics. It is as if to say, even though one cannot answer this question as to the ultimate source of human dignity, uniqueness, and right, nonetheless it is universally preferable, if one agrees to recognize these rights for this allows for much greater freedom and, I shall add, happiness. Arendt's use of a metaphor steeped in the transcendent and the divine, despite herself, is symptomatic of the Western tradition's lingering reliance on such concepts, even when trying to develop a secular and post-metaphysical account of the human as a moral agent worthy of dignity, the meanings of political actions, and the source of political authority. Did she do it on purpose? I still keep wondering about this. I turn now to respond to three critiques of the book, all of which had valuable insights that threw what had become my too-comfortable interpretation of her work into a more exciting position of doubt and renewed curiosity.

Response to Karin Fry's Critique

Karin Fry holds that much of my argument, which she claims posits the *daimon* as a kind of aesthetical relation

that governs political action and judgment, assumes a direct and relatively clear connection between aesthetics and politics. Fry finds my argument to be ultimately unconvincing as it does not adequately account for the problematic and complex relationship between art and politics in Arendt's work. She notes that it does not recognize Arendt's view that oftentimes the relationship between art and politics is one of conflict, nor does it address that a conflation between art and politics leads to a distortion of the meaning and ends of politics, when, for example, the state is regarded as being a work of art.[8]

Fry holds that my argument could be strengthened if I drew out the distinction that Arendt makes between productive and performative art. I certainly tried to bring this distinction to the foreground in chapter two, as it is vital to understanding Arendt's account of action and freedom. In that chapter, I explain that Arendt sees the tradition of Western philosophy's understanding of politics as dominated by concepts such as rule, sovereignty, and mastery, and she thinks part of the reason for this is that politics was often explained by Plato and even Aristotle through metaphors from productive art, or according to the same process as *poiesis*, with its intellectual virtue of *techne*, or instrumental reason. The dominance of this way of seeing politics leads to all sorts of problems: the will of rulers to dominate others, the manipulation of nature and human beings as mere means to one's ends, the devaluing of citizen engagement in politics, and the notion that politics is over and done with when a well-constructed constitution or regime is established. In *The Human Condition* and in the essay "What is Freedom?" (*BPF*), Arendt revives a forgotten Greek tradition by which politics is instead understood through the metaphor of performance art, which has much in common with Aristotle's account of praxis, with its intellectual virtue of *phronesis* (*NE* VI). Fry highlights that political action and performance art share the need for an audience of spectators in order to ultimately determine its meaning. They also share a few additional features. They are auto-telic, or contain their own end, according to Aristotle and, later, Arendt. The whole point of performance art is to play well, or with virtuosity, and the final purpose (*telos*) is contained in the doing itself, with no separate object left behind. Similarly, the purpose of action is *eupraxia*, a kind of experiential good linked to living well, happiness (*eudaimonia*) in Aristotle's theory, and in Arendt's, I argue, linked to the disclosure of the "who" and the world, and the redemption of one's initial beginning in the world, one's biological birth, through a second beginning.

Arendt writes,

> it is more than likely that the "who," which appears so clearly and unmistakably to others, remains hidden from the person himself, like the *daimon* in Greek religion which accompanies each man throughout his life, always looking over his shoulder from behind and thus visible only to those he encounters. [*HC* 179-80]

One of the interesting aspects that the *daimon* metaphor accomplishes when Arendt cites it in this decisive account of action is that it helps evoke the image, from Plato's narration of the Myth of Er, of the spiritual companion that is assigned to humans at birth. The myth tells that humans pick their life stories or identities, albeit according to an order established by lot, and then begin their life accompanied by one's assigned *daimon*.[9] By citing the *daimon*, Arendt invites a quick re-visitation of the Myth of Er, and reminds readers that action is beginning, and that this is a response to one's first beginning, namely one's birth. Similar to each art performance, action introduces something new to the world. Through the Myth of Er one is also reminded that political action discloses a "who" that is only ever partly in control of the results of one's act, one's life story, and the identity one performs. Humans are decentered, non-sovereign actors, similar to the musician's performance in an improvisation concert, comparable to the protagonists in the myth whose order of selection is determined by lot, or to political revolutionists who start a new world altogether, without knowing the outcome of such action.

In the second main movement of her critique, Fry asks me to justify further the connection between the disclosure of the agent in action, the daimon, and Kant's concept of the aesthetical genius, given that Arendt was suspicious of the romantic notion of genius justifying unequal privileges and notions of racial superiority (*APA* 79). I agree with Fry's reasoning that Arendt was suspicious of the romantic notion of genius. In what is perhaps a weakness of the book, any discussion of the concept of genius is concerned exclusively with

[8] Karin Fry, "Aesthetics and Politics in Hannah Arendt," *Existenz* 14/2 (Fall 2019), 76-79. [Henceforth cited as *APA*]

[9] Plato, *Republic*, transl. Robin Waterfield, New York, NY: Oxford World Classics 1998, Book X. [Henceforth cited as *REP*]

Arendt's treatment of Kant's account in his *Critique of Judgment*, in relation to which Arendt develops her own account of political judgment. As Fry points out, Arendt compares the political actor to Kant's genius, since both depend on an audience of spectators, through their intersubjective judgments, to clip the wings of genius and make what the artist or actor contributes to the world intelligible. I do not think that Arendt meant to speak of the actor in any romantic sense that would designate one as somehow superior, more authentic, or more entitled than anyone else. Arendt's opposition to romantic notions of an authentic self, as well as to any arguments positing a natural human hierarchy, is clear and sustained. Indeed, what Arendt saw in Kant's genius was a possibility for every human being when they act. She was evoking the *sui generis* element of action, tied closely to the concept of natality, whereby action discloses something new and unexpected to the world, that it has the potential to introduce new and inspiring principles or stories to the world, if their meaning can be made intelligible to spectators. Further, one has difficulty accounting for where these new principles, inspiring ideas, and actions come from. Arendt overtly rejects that they are grounded or sanctioned metaphysically, by God or a Platonic Idea. Again, this is why I find her use of the *daimon* metaphor so apt. These ideas seem to come from within the human being, but this locus that one calls "within myself" is itself a site of duality (the two-in-one of thinking) and alterity that reflects the plurality of others situated in the world. The interiority of the agent does not consist of a stable or static self. This is another way in which the *daimon* metaphor effectively illustrates one dimension of the human condition. When Arendt briefly compares it to the notion of the genius it is so because the *daimon* is standing in, as a metaphor, for the existential illusion of the divine element in humans that comes from one being unable to fully account for one's source of thinking and acting. Humans feel that one is a self with a relatively stable identity and a center of experience and willed action; but one is decentered by the actions and judgments of co-actors and spectators, by one's ancestral past, and by not standing in a position of complete sovereignty in relation to the how or where one begins one's acts and thoughts.

Response to Frederick Dolan's Critique

Frederick Dolan writes that, in my reading of Arendt, "the *daimon* lifts the political actor out of the world of ordinary motives and aims," but Dolan finds

> the idea that creative political action requires one to exclude considerations of the actor's motives and aims…difficult to accept. [*PFH* 73]

Dolan highlights a very important tension or difficulty in Arendt's account of political action, namely that she relegates the actor's moral intentions to the category of the "what" and thereby excludes moral motives from how spectators are to judge "who" is disclosed in one's political action. At the same time, Arendt claims that actions are motivated by inspiring principles that are disclosed in action, and these principles suggest moral deliberation and forethought occurring before the act. I attempted to highlight this problem with Arendt's account in the book, and argue that the inclusion of the *daimon* in what I see as a decisive account of action's disclosure of the "who" makes little sense if one is to exclude any consideration of the actor's moral motivation when judging the meaning of "who" this actor is, as disclosed in their politically salient words and deeds (*TPA* 103-4). The *daimon*, after all, is a moral guide in Plato's Socratic dialogues. In her *laudatio* to Jaspers, Arendt seems to describe voicing one's political judgment in public as a moment where, faced with a boundary situation, one is bringing one's moral considerations to bear on an important worldly issue, and thus disclosing "who" one is along with one's moral standpoint on this issue.[10]

So the line between moral thinking, political judgment, and political action becomes very thin. I argue that the appearance of this *daimon* figure makes Arendt's earlier hard line between moral thinking and action's disclosure of the "who" rather untenable. What Arendt does maintain consistently is the idea that the rational or moral determination of the will is not what makes an action free, as it does in Kant's moral theory. This rational or moral intent can, however, be an important determinant of the meaning of the action, as it is judged by observing spectators. Actors will be judged for having been motivated by honorable, or good, or selfish, or evil principles. She sees these ethical principles as existing only by way of speech and action, with no permanent metaphysical grounding or sanction, no universal moral law. Humans are free to

[10] Hannah Arendt, "Karl Jaspers: A Laudatio" in *Men in Dark Times*, New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. 1968, pp. 71-80, here pp. 73-5. [Henceforth cited as *KJL*]

act according to good or evil principles, and as much as the spontaneity of action holds the promise of freedom, it also holds the seeds of danger and destruction. So much of Arendt's thought, particularly her late writing on judgment, has to do with explaining how we might establish principles and more or less institutionalized practices of deliberation that can limit the *agon* of action.

I agree with Dolan that Arendt never develops, and gives quite short shrift to the realm of the intimate, the domestic, and the private, as a realm of self-disclosure. This is where someone such as Taylor is stronger. I think that she did this because she saw, under totalitarianism, that without the chance to appear publically, the legal, worldly, rights bearing aspect of the human being is threatened. One does not exist for the world if one is kept from appearing in it, relegated to the private realm. Does Arendt not describe how one retreats to the realm of the intimate, or the realm of hobbies, when one is feeling of having to make an impact in public life? This is not just a feature of totalitarianism, but also of liberalism's promise of the freedom from politics, its disclosure of individuals primarily as market actors rather than citizens, and the significant economic inequalities that it facilitates. After all, by returning to Aristotle and indeed to Arendt, the economic production of subsistence plus a margin is necessary for exerting the freedom to appear in public.

I can appreciate Dolan's assessment that perhaps Arendt's most important contribution today comes in the shape of her civic republican defense of shared, healthy political institutions (*PFH* 75). This is especially important given the global rise of populism. However, I see her defense of institutions as closely tied to her theory of politics as a forum for individual expression. Certainly, civilized political institutions must focus on sound economic management and the safety of every citizen, fundamental elements of necessity, or the sustenance of life itself, which allow for the elements of the intimate parts of human life to be enjoyed, and make life worth living. Yet, healthy institutions also secure the possibility of self-elected individuals to participate, engage, speak, or inform the debates on issues and policy questions that shape civic life. The very opportunity or freedom to appear in public is crucial for systemically marginalized peoples, and is at the core of Arendt's call for one's right to have rights. Arendt is not being read for protecting the right of members of the privileged class to strut around in public forums for the sake of feeding their egos or shaping legislation in ways that will continue to serve that privilege. Rather, her work is still read for her account of action's disclosure of the "who" in part because of this Aristotelian element of her thought that sees political praxis and appearance in public as integral to human dignity, both in that it allows one to exert a certain degree of self-governance, by shaping the laws and policies that determine the terms of living together, and also in that in appearing before others, one is recognized and included as a rights holding and equal member of the community.

To clarify, in my book, I avoided the word "expressive" for I find that it is associated closely with the expressivism of a Rousseau or a Taylor and the discourse of authenticity, whereby the actor's ideal aim is to express, through their action and speech, some relatively stable or authentic essence of the self, determined in relation to their most deeply held moral convictions, or, in some accounts determined by what Arendt calls categorical "whats" of one's identity. Arendt emphasizes instead the idea that the disclosure of the "who" occurs in narrative form over the course of one's life, in an interaction between worldly contexts of action, the actor's political aims or objectives, the performance of their act or speech, the given "whats" of their identity that they cannot but appear with and to which they are responding in some way, and the spectator's judgment of the meaning or result of their action. By this account, self-disclosure is never fully accomplished, and it is revisable, which allows the actor more freedom than an essentialist theory of the self.

I think that Dolan's most significant critical claim, the one that cuts most directly to the heart of my book's main argument, is that we do not need a reading of Arendt that highlights any transcendental or divine sources of the agent's thinking, action, or disclosure, in order to properly capture Arendt's argument that thinking and action can be spontaneous, or her critique of the ills of modernity. Dolan asserts that the *daimon*, after all, is just a metaphor, and that a purely secular reading of Arendt does her the most justice and is most accurate. I will address this critique simultaneously with one of Jennifer Gaffney's questions below, as they overlap.

Response to Jennifer Gaffney

In a question that raises concerns similar to Dolan, Jennifer Gaffney asks what precisely is the status of the *daimon* in Arendt's discourse on action. Gaffney

recognizes that I acknowledge Arendt's use of the *daimon* to be metaphorical. Furthermore, Gaffney writes:

> As Arendt asserts in *The Life of the Mind*, metaphor has been used throughout the history of Western metaphysics to bridge an unbridgeable gap between the visible and the invisible.[11]

Gaffney wonders if Arendt's account of the use of metaphor in *The Life of the Mind* might shed light on why Arendt in fact mobilizes the specific *daimon* metaphor, not, as I suggest, to reveal an actual divine element in human action, but rather in order to point to "our inability to name the ground of action…no less than the possibility of complete self and world disclosure" (*DM* 82). There is an overlap of concern with Dolan's question since, if the metaphor merely reveals our inability to name the ground of thinking and action, and does not reveal an actual divine element in human beings, then a purely secular reading, with no transcendental assumptions, is most appropriate.

These are key questions with which I wrestled throughout writing the book, and still do so today. I do not think that Arendt uses the *daimon* directly to evoke absolute Being or truth in a way that suggests that human thinking or action can be grounded, sanctioned, or validated by a metaphysical idea or divine will. She is too committed to the notion of action and thinking as free and spontaneous in the non-sovereign sense. I find Arendt's clearest answer to this question of the precise status of the *daimon* comes in the section of *The Life of the Mind* when discussing Socrates' two-in-one thinking process, when she says that thinking appears to reveal the insurmountable existential illusion of a divine element in humans, one that comes, as Gaffney says, from one's inability to account for the source or ground of thinking. Arendt explains that the fact that the source of our thinking seems to come from both inside and outside of us is likely at the root of our very notion of a spiritual realm (*LM* 44-5). Arendt calls the public realm a spiritual realm in the context of her *laudatio* about Jaspers, and the concept of *humanitas* (*KJL* 73-5). When humans render their judgment of the meaning of human affairs in public, they disclose their spirit, and while this may not be something absolute, it is certainly something valid and meaningful. The *daimon* is useful in metaphorically highlighting some features about this spirit of the actor. Particularly in light of the account of the *daimon* in the Myth of Er, I think Arendt uses the *daimon* to portray the notion of human alterity, difference, and all of the elements of "who" one is, disclosed in action, that one does not control. There is much of oneself that is merely given and that one cannot assert sovereignty over in one's self-conscious public acts. When acting, one carries a responsibility for at least two sources of alterity: the past members of one's community whose lives and actions lead to be brought into the world, and the other people who live with one in the world today, one's co-actors and co-spectators.

In a related question, Gaffney asks whether by claiming that disclosive action makes the public realm a spiritual realm, where transcendent being is revealed, I would not draw too close a connection between Arendt and Heidegger with regard to his disclosure of being and truth through authentic *Dasein*? Arendt distinguishes the provisional and open disclosure of meaning in the pluralistic realm of appearance from the disclosure of truth. Does this not complicate what I read as her appeal to the divine (*DM* 82)? I agree with Gaffney that there is an important distance between Arendt and Heidegger, one that I hope I drew out in chapter three. As Gaffney rightly points out, for Arendt, a disclosure of the "who" and of the world that is meaningful takes place in the pluralistic and immanent realm of appearance. It depends on other spectators and often on other actors. The meaning takes the shape of a narrative, and this relies on linguistic representations to disclose phenomena that would otherwise stay concealed. This meaning is a matter of interpretation and debate. The truth of the disclosure depends on facticity and attention to the detail of worldly contexts, not on truth in an absolute sense. As I mentioned in my response to Fry, this is why Arendt found the structure of Kant's aesthetic critique so promising for a phenomenology of political judgment, one that is reflective, focused on particulars, and aims for garnering a limited degree of agreement, or intersubjective validity, around the meaning (not truth) of an event.

I also agree with Gaffney that there is a complicated tension between Arendt's immanent and worldly accounts of disclosive action, intersubjective judgment of meaning, and her references to the divine, which traditionally evoke the absolute, the other worldly, and

[11] Jennifer Gaffney, "The Daimon as Metaphor: Naming the Ground of the "Who" in Arendt's Theory of Political Action," *Existenz* 14/2 (Fall 2019), 80-82, here p. 81. [Henceforth cited as *DM*]

the complete disclosure of being and truth. As I claim in the book, I think that Arendt performs, sometimes despite her own intentions, that one's ways of thinking and communicating about politics, ethics, and morality are still caught up in the grammar of transcendence. I acknowledge that Arendt uses the *daimon* as a metaphor, that she writes that it represents an existential illusion of the divine. Perhaps there were no metaphors available that could equally capture the alterity of the human agent and deliberative structure of moral thinking, but that have no metaphysical, other-worldly baggage. I doubt it. Despite my admission that the *daimon* is merely a metaphor, and that what it displays is, Arendt writes, an illusion, I still think that Arendt, in certain moments in her writing shows that she found something divine and sacred in human beings, not just metaphorically, and that she wanted to show that this element appears and participates imminently in the realm of appearance and plurality through action, thinking, and judgment, not in a separate metaphysical realm. She leans very heavily, after all, on another concept, aside from the *daimon*, loaded with connotation of transcendence, namely Augustine's notion of natality, which signifies not only the seemingly miraculous spontaneity of action, but also the uniqueness and irreplaceability of each individual. Arendt has an important reason, politically, to argue for this quasi-divine uniqueness and irreplaceability of each person, which may be disclosed through political action in the public realm, as a way of fighting against totalitarianism's and, indeed, mass consumer society's disclosure of people as superfluous, mere instances of life, or primarily as animal *laborans*. I acknowledge that most readers, including the three critics whose engagement I am sincerely grateful for, understand Arendt as a post-metaphysical writer. I hope that my book has convincingly argued that this categorization of Arendt's thought is not straightforward.