

***Daimon* Appearances in Arendt's Account of Disclosive Action by Trevor Tchir – University of Alberta**

[I]t 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.¹

–Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*

Hannah Arendt argues that political action discloses *who* the actor is, as it discloses the *world*. Following Arendt's notion of *natality*, action consists of deeds and speech that disclose new or unexpected aspects of the world in ways that break normalizing social processes. It can also manifest a new space for further action. It is widely acknowledged that Arendt's notion of action is a re-working of Aristotle's notion of *praxis*. As such, action may take the form of public debate about the ends and meaning of the political community, a re-articulation or augmentation of the constitution, understood as a shared political way of life. According to Arendt, the meaning of an actor's disclosive speech or deed is retrospectively judged, through interpretive argument, in a discursive community of spectators. She further holds that action is only meaningful through the disclosure of *who* the actor uniquely is, a form of revealing that she posits as the basis of human dignity, and suggests that disclosive action's existential achievement is a form of redemptive reconciliation to one's existence.²

In the following, I propose two theses. I want to argue first that Arendt's notion of disclosure helps us to rethink the individuated actor, not as a sovereign and self-transparent subject whose action expresses an authentic individual essence or constative *what* of the self, but rather as a decentered and ecstatic *who* whose action, in plurality with others, reveals meaningful dimensions of the world and of the agent's unique situation in history, through the performance of acts and speech before public spectators. The idea that no actor can stand in a position of control with respect to his life story, that no one can *make* his story, extends to a critical displacement of the notion of freedom understood as sovereignty. This line of argument leads us to explore Arendt's creative appropriation of the thought of Martin Heidegger.

My second argument is that by tracing the appearances of the *daimon* figure in Arendt's published work, lecture notes, and in the work of her most important theoretical influences, we may come to a new reading of Arendt's notion of the *who* disclosed in action. The ancient Greek *daimon* is a figure that emerges in Arendt's own texts and lectures, but also in Plato's Socratic dialogues and the myth of Er, as well as with thinkers with which Arendt engaged in developing her account of action and judgment – particularly Heidegger's notion of Dasein's disclosure of Being, Jaspers' *valid personality*, and Kant's notion of *genius*. Understanding the *who* in light of the *daimon* figure problematizes the distinction usually read in Arendt between the political space of appearance as a secular realm and another, spiritual or metaphysical realm, inconsequential to politics. Arendt has been read as offering a post-metaphysical reading of the engendering of meaning in the public realm, a phenomenal account of political action removed from questions of the actor's relationship to a transcendent realm. It is my contention that the *daimon* figure at the basis of Arendt's account of the *who*

illuminates an underdeveloped possibility for Arendt's account of action: that action reveals a divine element in actors in that it engages the actor as a decentered discloser of transcendent meanings of Being and of the duality of thinking.

The *daimon* also implies that action publicizes the *who* as a valid personality, while preserving alterity within and outside of the actor. Alterity within the actor is marked by the two-in-one of conscience, which can be read as the internal, anticipatory representation of the plurality of spectators who will judge the act. Actual spectators are the second order of alterity. This reading occludes some of Arendt's most famous theoretical distinctions. It problematizes the distinction between the aesthetic and the moral - what the actor makes appear and what the actor intends, prior to action. However, Arendt occludes these distinctions herself. References to the *daimon*, read along with the Socratic dialogues, show that moral deliberation, the internal conversation of the two-in-one of thought, is more closely bound up with public disclosure of the *who* than Arendt suggests in published texts prior to *The Life of the Mind*. Arendt also occludes these distinctions in her account of reflective judgment, inspired by Kant. Here, we see that the figures of the actor and spectator may reside in the same individual, both in the notion that to publicly render one's judgment as a response to an event consists of a form of action, and in the notion that the actor must tame his or her *daimon*, or inspiring spirit, in order to be made intelligible to his anticipated spectators. The anticipated spectator is immanent to the deliberation of the two-in-one of thinking, prior to action.

I. Action's Decentered Disclosure of the *Who*

There is a curious contradiction in action's disclosure of the *who*, between the actor's self-stylized performance that self-consciously attempts to present one's virtuosity to the public, and the ultimate impossibility for the actor to control *who* he or she discloses in the performance. On one hand, the disclosure of the *who* is achieved through the public presentation of a defined and coherent personality. The actor stylizes him or herself for public display, and changes him or herself and his or her surroundings as he or she acts or speaks. Dana Villa suggests that the self prior to action, understood biologically and psychologically, is fragmented and dispersed, lacking objectivity or worldly unity and reality.³ It is marked by a multiplicity of conflicting drives, needs, feelings, wills, and not-wills. Arendt holds that even action's motives are hidden from the actor's own introspection. The fragmented self is also the thinking self, caught up in an internal conversation with itself, the two-in-one. Public appearance and discourse with others calls the divided self out from its divided interiority, where it may speak and act as one recognizable voice. This recognized shape is the achievement of a distinct style of action or virtuosity. For Arendt, it is the stylized actor, the public *persona* or *valid personality* that appears before others in public, that constitutes the reality of the actor.

But Arendt also holds that the disclosure of the *who* is implicit in everything the actor says and does, including features that cannot be willfully concealed from the view of spectators. While the *who* may appear clearly to spectators, the actor him or herself never knows exactly whom he or she discloses, despite his or her best attempts at the stylization of a public personality.⁴ Even for those who encounter the actor, either as engaged with him or her as a co-actor or as an observing spectator, it is impossible to

fully conceptually reify, without remainder, the way in which the *who* appears “in the flux of action and speech.”⁵

So, who is disclosed, exactly? Arendt argues that most attempts to identify the *who* lead to a description of *what* he or she is, a description of universals shared with others, categories of social function or general standards of human behavior, which conceal the *who*'s uniqueness. Within the category of the *what*, Arendt includes the actor's talents or shortcomings, the person's function in the totality of social production, their biological traits, objects that represent their life's work, and even their moral intentions.⁶ Arendt's relegation of moral intention to the category of the *what* and its exclusion from action's disclosure of the *who* lead some readers to see Arendt's notion of the *who* as vacuous and meaningless. I propose that Arendt's reference to the *daimon* re-introduces moral deliberation to the phenomenon of action and its disclosure of the *who*. This is especially so if we understand the *daimon* figure in the context of the Socratic dialogues, an important source for Arendt's writing on the two-in-one of deliberative thinking, and in the context of Arendt's theory of judgment, inspired by Kant's aesthetics.⁷

Arendt presses the distinction between the existential *who* and the categorical *what* to further distinguish properly political affairs as those which deal with a plurality of *whos* whom political actors and spectators can never ultimately dispose of, as stable entities, according to a principle of reason or will.⁸ Given the plurality of unique *whos*, the logic of *techne*, which depends on stable and namable entities, is inadequate for fully reckoning with the complexity and dignity of human affairs. The impossibility to identify a human essence in the *who* is due in part to the historicized conditionality of human co-existence.⁹ The identification of the *who* of action thus entails an identification of decentering conditions that situate action as a response to events in the world. It is inseparable from the disclosure of meaning within the shared world. Great deeds and speech disclose the significance of a historical time and the everyday relationships of that time. Action is world disclosive, and has a revelatory capacity to become historical, since it takes place between discursive subjects who overlay the world of durable things and make it a place of appearance and meaning.¹⁰

Heidegger and Arendt both seek out historical-existential structures of disclosive activity. But while Heidegger denies the essential unity of a self-transparent self prior to its various determinations, he still admits that ontologically, there is a *who* that maintains itself as identical through changes in experiences and behavior.¹¹ But *who* is this? Much of the existential analytic of *Being and Time* attempts to answer this question. Heidegger concludes that the question of *who* Dasein is can only be answered by demonstrating phenomenally the ontological origin of the unreified Being of Dasein.¹² Heidegger presents Dasein not as a punctual, self-transparent subject of will, but as a “clearing,” an open structure of free play, through which entities stand out as mattering in some determinate way, provided the context unconcealed by Dasein's taking a resolute stand. This account of human existence, fundamental to Arendt's own thought, suggests why in tracing Arendt's notion of the *who*, it often appears as vacuous, if one is looking for a substantial, self-willing subject, rather than a conduit for the emergence of various forms of Being.

To Heidegger, freedom entails a “letting-be”¹³ at odds with the notion of freedom as the assertion of will or the humanizing of nature through conceptual or material labor.

Similarly, Arendt defines action as free insofar as it is neither under the dictates of intellect nor will, but free from motive and its intended effect. This is not to say that freedom and the performative disclosure of the *who* has nothing to do with the faculty of willing. To the contrary, Arendt writes in *The Life of the Mind* that action is the redemption of the inner war between the will and its counter will, between *velle* and *nolle*.¹⁴ As Jacques Taminiaux interprets, the will is “the mental organ of the freedom of spontaneous beginning.”¹⁵ Action that discloses the *who* is spontaneously propelled by the will, but free action must not be conceived by a particular determination of this will, be it moral or logical, for then the will would not be spontaneous. Freedom is here not a question of a subjective disposition of the will, or the successful objective actualization of this will, but is rather grounded in a particular existential disposition within a shared world marked by contingency. Arendt is committed, like Heidegger, to a repudiation of standards provided by reason, nature, the cosmic order, or discursive rationality, which would determine action or ground the will. In Heidegger’s sense, the German word for “open,” *frei*, reveals its etymological significance as the root of “freedom,” *Freiheit*. The open, as the free, salvages Being.¹⁶ Understanding freedom as an existential, open comportment to Being, rather than as a disposition of a grounded subjective will, posits a *who*, rather than a *what*, as the disclosed actor.

Heidegger describes Dasein as an entity whose exhibited characteristics are not properties present-at-hand, categories by which the *what* of Dasein can be understood. Rather, Dasein is an entity whose characteristics are *existentialia*.¹⁷ Dasein exists only in the performance of acts and the projection of possibilities in a world of reference relations into which Dasein is thrown. Dasein’s thrownness means that Dasein finds itself already in a world it does not control, with a finite range of possibilities received historically and culturally. This thrownness is what makes Dasein uncanny or unhomey, never quite at home in the world into which Dasein is thrown. Dasein first encounters beings within a totality of involvements, where each entity is pre-reflectively met as equipment ready-to-hand for whatever project Dasein is concerned with.¹⁸ Entities are projected upon a whole of significance or reference relations: the shared world. Discourse, in what Heidegger calls its primordial purpose, is the articulation of the intelligibility of the “there” in which Dasein is disclosed along with the meaning of entities that speech picks out from the totality of reference relations.¹⁹ When an assertion gives a definite character to something present-at-hand, it says something about it as a *what*. In appropriating what is understood, interpretation no longer reaches into a totality of involvements.²⁰ This parallels Arendt’s idea that when an actor is referred to through categories pertaining to a *what*, the possibilities of myriad disclosures of reference relations is cut short.

Authentic Dasein and Arendtian Plurality

Arendt’s notion of plurality is an important alteration of the Heideggerian notion of *Mitsein* (with-being), the idea that Dasein always exists among others. This difference is fundamental to how Heidegger and Arendt differ in their answers as to how the *who* is disclosed. According to Heidegger, for the most part Dasein lives in an inauthentic way in relation to others. Heidegger refers to others as the anonymous, public *das Man* (the *They*).²¹ The *They* maintains itself in an average verdict of what it regards as valid,

successful, permitted, or of interest. This tends to level what is unique and exceptional, and to gloss over the original meanings of linguistically transmitted cultural sources by treating them as long well known, common sense. It distributes an average understanding and state-of-mind with regard to beings and events.²² The average ways things are interpreted provide self-assurance, covering over the essential groundlessness of interpretations. Like Arendt's image of "rule by nobody" in the bureaucratized world that is a symptom of her "rise of the social," Heidegger's image of the *They* implies an agency of which one can say: "It was no one."²³ Fallenness refers to Dasein's tendency to become lost in fascination with the public interpretation of the world, of the *They* that bears an average intelligibility and appears falsely as a complete disclosure of Being. Dasein forgets that there can be other elements of Being that can be disclosed, that the public disclosure of meaning rests in concealing other possible interpretations and possibilities of Being.

Heidegger presents the possibility of another, more authentic kind of comportment. Dasein's own Being is the sole authentic *for-the-sake-of-which*.²⁴ Heidegger's description of the authentic Dasein in *Being and Time* picks up from his earlier reading of Aristotle at Marburg. Heidegger interpreted Aristotelian *phronesis* as an activity concerned not with the achievement of particular ends, but rather with Dasein's self-contained comportment as the *arche* and *for-the-sake-of-which*. In his image of authentic Being-toward-Self, Dasein's authentic attitude is not geared toward a variety of posited ends, but rather from Dasein's care for itself.²⁵ Villa rightly suggests that Heidegger's disclosure of the "there" in Dasein's projection of possibilities prefigures Arendt's account of political freedom, in that it transcends questions of utility and of ultimate success in the attainment of ends.²⁶

To find itself out of the *They*, Dasein must first have its potential for an authentic Being-one's-self attested to through the *voice of conscience*, revealed as a *call to taking-action* and to its own potentiality-for-Being-its-Self, which Heidegger calls *resoluteness*.²⁷ The call of conscience instructs nothing and never suggests content for action, never tells Dasein anything useful about the assured possibilities of taking action that are calculable. The resolution *is* the disclosive projection of what is possible at the time. It is the fact that the call of conscience comes from Dasein itself that its unequivocal character becomes free. However, this call to Dasein, by Dasein, comes not in a self-willed, voluntary form. The contradiction at work here brings us to the heart of the *who*. Arendt accentuates these ecstatic elements of action's disclosure of the *who* in her references to the *daimon*, which, in the Socratic dialogues, is a voice of conscience, a call, one which arises in specific worldly situations but which instructs no content for action, and comes in an uncanny way, both from within and from outside the actor.

There always remains a projected potentiality for Being that is still outstanding. Dasein never reaches wholeness until death.²⁸ This remainder partly explains how a complete image of the *what* of the self cuts off or conceals further possibilities of Dasein, in its reification. It is also a reason why Dasein itself, as a constant *not-yet*, can never get a full grasp on its own *who*.²⁹ Dasein's projection of possibilities in the face of its own oncoming death is, for Heidegger, the source of Dasein's individuation, its *principium individuationis*. This influences Arendt's argument that the *who* of the actor can only adequately be narratively rendered by spectators once the life of the actor has ended. Until then, there still remain possibilities, situations in which to act. Here Arendt

engages the Aristotelian idea that man is only *eudaimon* at the end of a complete life.³⁰ Similarly, according to Arendt, self-disclosure can only become fully manifest at the end of a complete life, when the spectator's judgment and consequent narrative is rendered. Arendt, however, reverses Dasein's primacy of Being-toward-death, in favor of the notion of natality, or action as a redemptive response to one's birth.³¹ Arendt proposes that the actor individuates him or herself by responding to the fact of his or her birth, by responding to his or her first beginning with further beginnings, much like the Roman concept of *augere*.

The notion of the authentic resoluteness of Dasein as a groundless projection of possibilities re-emerges in Arendt's notion of public courage and performative disclosure that contains its own *arche* and *telos*. This performance is delivered into an intersubjective web of relationships, one that recasts Heidegger's notions of thrownness and guilt. There is a crucial difference, however, between Heidegger and Arendt regarding the possibilities of individuation in relation to others. Heidegger maintains that the publicness of the *They* is something into which Dasein falls, and that authentic existence can only occur by transcending this realm. Conversely, it is precisely in the realm of the public, the intersubjective realm of appearance and *doxa*, where Arendt proposes that freedom and individuation may occur, despite the risk of the appearance of unreflective *doxa*. Arendt admits that guilt, contingency, and thrownness are part of public performance, that this is part of why it takes courage to appear in public, where our acts become part of the web of relations that we cannot control, and our image becomes determined by the opinion of spectators. The actor stands in a non-sovereign position in relation to his or her disclosure. This, however, does not mean that we fall away from an authentic realm of disclosure, or attunement to Being. Rather, it is only in public, among others, that we individuate at all and come to learn about the situation that provides the context of our actions, the *world* that we disclose, without which there is no *who*.

II. Appearances of the *Daimon*

Arendt argues that most attempts to define *who* one is usually revert to notions of the superhuman or divine.³² When explaining how the *who* is disclosed to spectators in action, Arendt herself evokes man's connection with the divine. If we move beyond Arendt's published texts and uncover the meaning of the *daimon* in Greek literature, we see that the *daimon* is a mediator between the gods and mortals, and a giver of advice in the manner of the Oracles. Arendt notes: "Socrates used the same word as Heraclitus, *semainein* ('to show and give signs'), for the manifestation of his *daimonion*."³³ Julia Kristeva notes that the manifest signs of the Oracles were "condensed, incomplete, and atomized" in a way that gives rise to the "infinite action of interpretation."³⁴ Like the *daimon* of ancient Greece, the *who* is disclosed behind the back of the actor, visible only to spectators, but never fully controlled by the actor. Arendt relates that in Sophocles, Oedipus' grasp of his own *daimon* is inevitably distorted, a form of self-blindness that is the "misery of the mortals," while the chorus, themselves a form of interpretive spectator, asserts that they see and know Oedipus' *daimon* as an *example*.³⁵ According to Waterfield, a translator of Plato's *Republic*, this personal deity is likely Pythagorean in origin³⁶ and was understood as "the *genius* or guardian spirit of your life – which,

ultimately, makes you the particular individual you are, with your predilections and life-pattern.”³⁷

The Myth of Er, *Aletheia*, and the *Daimon* as Discloser of Being

The *daimon* makes an appearance in one of the central legends of the Occidental tradition, the myth of Er, which Heidegger calls a primordial myth. The myth of Er is told in the final chapter of Plato’s *Republic*, and relates what becomes of souls between one life of earthly appearance and the next, the relative roles that necessity and choice play in determining man’s destiny. We may read this as an account of the uncanny call of Being coming from both within and outside the actor. According to the myth, souls spend ten times the length of their last human life in the underworld or in the heavens, where they receive punishment or reward for deeds in their last earthly life. After this time, souls return to a meadow where they encounter the three Fates, the daughters of Necessity: Lachesis (who sings of the past), Clotho (who sings of the present), and Atropos (who sings of the future). As the souls prepare to be reborn to another earthly cycle, Lachesis, the Fate of the past, throws lots into the crowd of souls, determining the order in which each then chooses from a collection of sample lives. After the souls finish choosing their deities, they approach Lachesis, who gives “each of them the personal deity they’d selected, to accompany them throughout their lives, as their guardians and to fulfill the choices they had made.”³⁸ With their *daimon*, they then pass under the spindles of Clotho and Atropos, and under the throne of Lady Necessity, thus fixing their chosen destinies. The souls then travel to the Plain of Oblivion (or *Lethe*). Here they camp by the River of Neglect (or Carelessness), from which they are all required to drink a certain amount, before being thrown back to Earth, like shooting stars, to be born again.

This myth serves to illuminate many dimensions of Arendt’s account of disclosive action. Here, the *daimon* is described as the soul’s birth attendant, a connection to the Arendtian phenomenon of natality and beginning. Further, it articulates one’s fateful thrownness into a situational context of action, the impossibility to fully control *who* one discloses. In the story, the order of tokens is assigned from without. But, on the other hand, the souls choose their own accompanying *daimon*. There is a degree of self-choosing after the order of choice is assigned. One can decide how one will act given their situation. Thus, the myth expresses the essential contradiction between thrownness and freedom at the root of disclosive action.

Along with the *daimon*, the plain of *Lethe* is another key component of the myth of Er that finds its way to Arendt’s thought, via Heidegger. *Aletheia*, according to Heidegger, was the central concept for understanding the truth of Being in the pre-Socratic Greek experience. *Aletheia* signifies an unconcealment, unveiling, or unforgetting. It is the opposite of *lethe*, which translates as oblivion, forgetting, or concealment. Heidegger’s recovery of truth as *aletheia* and his depiction of Dasein’s relation to Being both influence Arendt’s conception of the disclosure of the *who* as a decentered phenomenon in which the *world* is also disclosed. Heidegger’s notion of *aletheia*, recast in Arendt’s notion of *disclosure*, gives Arendt a framework to consider action in a way that abandons a teleological approach based on a given definition of the *what* of human nature and its ends, to focus rather on the conditions necessary for the disclosure of meanings of the *who* and of the *world*. In the Marburg lectures that Arendt

attended in 1924-25, Heidegger depicts *aletheia* as an *event* (*Ereignis*) of disclosure that must be differentiated from the notion of truth as a *correspondence* between a thought, representation, or predicate, on one hand, and a given state of affairs, on the other. According to Heidegger, whereas the ontologically primordial notion of *logos* is as an *existentiale*, a mode by which Dasein reveals a relation to Being, performed within a dialectic between the hidden and the disclosed, *logos* eventually became identified with the gesture of *assertion*, so that grammar and subsequent language philosophy sought their foundations in the “logic” of *logos*, which was based on the ontology of the *present-at-hand*, where there is no hidden remainder.³⁹

Understanding truth as *aletheia* means that assertions do not merely represent the world, but rather disclose it at the same time as they disclose the speaker.⁴⁰ Speech is a way of orienting in the world so that a state of affairs can show up, so that certain relations stand out from the matter or situation that, before the speech, were apprehended in a pre-predicative, unarticulated totality. The first pre-predicative notion of unconcealment means that we are properly disposed to, or can find our way within, the unarticulated, practical totality from which propositions then can make certain aspects of the situation manifest. Those aspects that we pick out and find salient will depend on *who* we are.

In Plato’s *Symposium*, the priestess Diotima, speaking to Socrates, alludes to the *daimon*’s mediating role in communication between the divine and humans.⁴¹ Socrates communicated with his *daimon*. This experience, according to Socrates, “does not result from mere earthly causes,” since “fortunes are not a matter of indifference to the gods.”⁴² Would Arendt agree? Does her reference to the *daimon* that accompanies humans in action imply that action is in some way a moment of access to the divine? In a course on Plato delivered at Columbia in 1960, Arendt explicitly relates the *daimon* to *Theos*, “the divine working principle.”⁴³

We recall that, for Arendt, action is a mode of disclosure of the *who* in which the *daimon* of the actor appears to spectators. In his Freiburg lectures, Heidegger explains the *daimon* in the context of the Greek experience of man’s ecstatic or decentered role in the unconcealment of Being. Man is *eudaimon*, according to Heidegger, if he is properly attuned to Being. The divine, or *daimon*, looks out into the ordinary, points, and gives signs to man.⁴⁴ The *daimon* makes a claim on man, as the bearer of *logos* and *mythos*, as he who is historically destined to help clear the way for Being to appear: “Where the *daimonion*, the divine which enters into unconcealedness, the uncanny, must be said explicitly, there the saying is legend, a *mythos*.”⁴⁵

There are conflicting notions of the *daimon* to be found in Arendt’s publications and lectures. On one hand, the *daimon* remains behind the shoulder of the actor. This implies the decentered, non-sovereign nature of self-disclosure and its retrospective, narrative unfolding, in the hands of judging spectators. While in intimate communication with the actor, the *daimon* of Arendt’s *The Human Condition* can only be unmistakably perceived by spectators. Read in light of the myth of Er and Heidegger’s account of *aletheia*, Arendt’s references to the *daimon* within her account of action portray the *who* as an ecstatic discloser of Being, of transcendent meaning. We recall that the *who* of *The Human Condition* was emptied of moral intention, something Arendt saw as pertaining to the universal categories of the *what*. On the other hand, in subsequent lectures and in *The Life of the Mind*, the *daimon* is mentioned in the same breath as the two-in-one of

conscience, though not always equated with it. Read in light of Arendt's treatment of the Socratic dialogues, Jaspers' *valid personality*, and Kant's theory of judgment, Arendt's *who* regains a moral-deliberative force.

The *Daimon* as Moral Conscience

If we think of Socrates, he alone was in communication with his *daimon*, while others had no access to it. Arendt describes Socrates' two-in-one, later called *conscience*, as the fellow who awaits Socrates at home, with whom he converses in quiet.⁴⁶ By Arendt's reading, Socrates' *daimon* is a sign sent by Apollo, the God of the oracles, and makes Socrates examine his own life, a life in service to the God through activity and full awakensness. She writes that Socrates' "life is a service to the god because he makes others do what his daimonion made him do."⁴⁷ Elsewhere in these lectures, Arendt wonders of the *daimon*: "Is it conscience?"⁴⁸ In these lectures Arendt concludes that the *daimon*, as the divine principle for Socrates, is precisely the capacity to think, the two-in-one as a thinking dialogue between me and myself. For Socrates, it is that which helped him think through the *aporia*, the perplexities, that he encountered in this inner dialogue.⁴⁹ But in a footnote to "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy," Arendt writes: "[The daimon] is a voice which comes from without and cannot be answered – very different from *conscientia*. And this voice never tells me what to do but only prevents me or warns me away from doing."⁵⁰ Similarly, in Plato's numerous references to Socrates' *daimon* and in contrast to Xenophon's accounts, this spirit only advises in the negative form.

In Plato's *Apology*, Socrates tells the jury at his trial in Athens that on that day, his *daimon* never once objected to his course of action. Socrates' fellow appears in the case of unexamined opinions, but it does not give positive prescriptions. If the *daimon* does have a close relation to conscience, so that conscience is the *who* that the actor discloses in action – a contestable claim given that elsewhere Arendt subsumes moral intention to the category of the *what* – it is worth examining what Arendt understands by the two-in-one. In *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt proposes that thought is marked by duality, a conversation between myself and I, an activity of asking and answering. Conscience's criterion for action is "whether I shall be able to live with myself in peace when the time has come to think about my deeds and words."⁵¹ In the activity of thought, other individuals, either alive or dead, are represented in the internal dialogue. Thus, the duality of the one's thinking reflects the essential alterity of the space of appearance. This two-in-one of thought, this original duality, is the internal reflection of the plurality of the external world and "explains the futility of the fashionable search for identity."⁵² On the other hand, unity of self only occurs when the outside world intrudes on thought – when the thinker is called back into the world of appearances.⁵³

It is fair to wonder why Arendt refers to the *daimon* in her account of disclosive action if it is merely prohibitive, merely advising against certain actions. If we understand the *daimon* as Arendt's two-in-one of conscience, our answer might be that the *daimon*'s silence signals its approval of an intended course of action, an indication that one side of the interior duality can "live with" the other side. In the internal dialogue, the deliberation of the two-in-one of thinking prior to action, a prospective spectator is represented.

There are admittedly good reasons to question if it makes sense to dwell on Arendt's references to the divine at all. If we understand the divine as the ultimate sovereign power, then to assert that action accesses or discloses the divine could be interpreted as legitimating acts with the authority of this ultimate power. But this is clearly incompatible with Arendt's sustained promotion of non-sovereign freedom. If we understand the divine as the ultimate Idea, in Plato's sense of truth accessible to the few through *nous*, then disclosure of the divine is restricted to timeless, quiet contemplation or intuition of absolutes. Here, disclosing the divine would imply a full disclosure of Being, or presence, which is impossible for both Heidegger and Arendt. *Nous* puts an end of the Socratic activity of thinking, which is dialogical, and related to the temporal, tied to the physical person's situation or engagement in the city. Plato establishes a distinction in man between his body, or physical element, and his soul, that which accesses the divine understood as the Ideas. One inhabits the city of men and engages in politics, while the other engages in philosophy, apart from the city. This division is the basis of sovereignty and tyrannical rule, the notion that only those that can master themselves are fit to rule others. In the Platonic account, self-mastery is thus rooted in the divine element, the soul, ruling the body. Arendt posits this as the fundamental source of the Western tradition's division of politics and philosophy.⁵⁴ Contrarily, Socrates teaches how, through thinking and dialogue, humans can disclose the truth inherent in one's *doxa*, or how the world appears to us. This thought and argument disclose the political and temporal truths related to men. Being able to communicate between these valid realities discloses the commonness of the world, thus raising them above strict subjectivity.⁵⁵ The thinker endures the *pathos* of wonder, and does not dogmatically hold on to an opinion without submitting it to critique.⁵⁶

Some skepticism over action and thought's relation to the divine could also be fueled by Arendt's rejection, most explicit in *The Life of the Mind*, of a traditional two-world metaphysics that posits a realm of Being and Truth separate from the realm of appearance. According to the two-world view, Being, or the thing-in-itself, provides a higher ground and cause for the mere appearances or imperfect representations that it produces and that are available to human sense, while Being never itself appears.⁵⁷ In rejecting this type of metaphysics, and by instead positing the unity of Being and appearance, Arendt rejects the notion that what we call the divine merely *causes* appearances, while she opens up the possibility that action, thought, and judgment disclose it directly.

The origin of our thinking activity – that by which we bring out the truth of our various *doxai* – is impossible to represent to ourselves. Arendt suggests that the notion that our reason, ideas, and thoughts come from another realm, is a semblance inherent to the paradoxical condition of human beings insofar as we are part of a world of appearances but possess a thinking faculty that permits us to withdraw from it.⁵⁸ This activity accesses thoughts that “of course are never anything like properties that can be predicated of a self or a person.”⁵⁹ The origin of our thinking activity, that which appears to men as a divine element, is uncanny in the sense of coming from both inside and from outside of the thinker, like Heidegger's call of conscience and Socrates' *daimon*. Arendt writes: “The experience of the activity of thought is probably the aboriginal source of our notion of spirituality in itself...”⁶⁰

For the deliberation of the two-in-one to be performed and appear as the *valid personality*, a public theatre of spectators is required. One of Arendt's most eloquent explanations of performing one's thought before others, a form of public disclosure of the *who* where judgment and action meet, can be found in Arendt's *laudatio* to Karl Jaspers. Arendt links the notion of the disclosed *daimon* and the spiritual dimension of the public realm to the performance of one's thought as a *valid personality*, the public testing of one's judgments, which is to "answer before mankind for every thought."⁶¹ This passage speaks to the relation between the Socratic, conscientious *daimon* of the two-in-one, the performative public disclosure of the *who*, and the way in which this disclosure is decentered, both by the *doxa* or *opinion* of spectators who judge its meaning, and by the world situation to which it responds:

This *daimon* – which has nothing demonic about it – this personal element in man, can only appear where a public space exists; that is the deeper significance of the public realm, which extends far beyond what we ordinarily mean by political life. To the extent that this public space is also a spiritual realm, there is manifest in it what the Romans called *humanitas*. By that they meant something that was the very height of humanness because it was valid without being objective. It is precisely what Kant and then Jaspers mean by *Humanität*, the valid personality which, once acquired, never leaves a man, even through all other gifts of body and mind may succumb to the destructiveness of time. *Humanitas* is never acquired in solitude and never by giving one's work to the public. It can be achieved only by one who has thrown his life and his person in the "venture into the public realm" – in the course of which he risks revealing something which is not "subjective" and which for that very reason he can neither recognize nor control.⁶²

Genius vs. Taste: Political Judgment and the Kantian Spectator

Judgment makes thinking manifest in the world of appearances. According to Arendt, this manifestation is the ability to tell right from wrong, and beautiful from ugly. Richard Bernstein criticizes Arendt for calling judgment the political ability *par excellence*, but then engaging it to tell right from wrong, a form of moral judgment, which elsewhere Arendt finds to be suprapolitical.⁶³ But what Arendt finds suprapolitical is the adoption of moral principles as binding truths, universals under which particular cases only need be subsumed. Arendt turns to Kant's aesthetic model to develop her own account of political judgment because the judgment of the meaning of acts, whose initial ends and moral motives may be frustrated in the phenomenal realm, is a matter of opinion dealing with particulars, where judging right versus wrong is not a simple matter of verifying results or the formal universalization of maxims.

By Arendt's reading, Kant's question "What ought I do?" only deals with the conduct of the self in isolation and is geared toward the attainment of inner felicity, rather than how the political world ought to look.⁶⁴ Kant derives the standard of publicity that combines political action with right, from the criterion of self-consistency in his moral philosophy. The maxim of action must be consistent with publicity in that it must be just.⁶⁵ Arendt calls on Machiavelli to explain the different standard at work in political judgment and its care for the world: "Though it is true that, by resisting evil, you are likely to be involved in evil, your care for the world takes precedence in politics over your care for your self – whether this self is your body or your soul."⁶⁶

As Ronald Beiner argues, for Arendt, political judgment is a matter of judging appearances, not purposes and intentions.⁶⁷ Arendt suggests that in politics, as opposed to moral theory, everything depends on public, rather than private conduct. Arendt's insistence on performative virtuosity in disclosive action means that the spectator must judge the actor for how he or she actually acts within his or her situation, not only what principles or morals supposedly motivated him or her, but also what change to the web of human relationships was actually effected in his or her act. Since to judge aesthetically is to judge according to how one wants the world *to look*, to judge an actor is to judge what he or she brings to the world – it is to judge, retrospectively, the inspiring principle and the act inseparably, as they appear, rather than according to the moral force of the principle regardless of the act's effects. We may wonder how to reconcile this with Arendt's thesis that an act's meaning is separate from questions of success or failure. I suggest that Arendt's spectator judges according to the actor's virtuosity given the conditions of action, as well as what he or she discloses about him or herself and mankind in general, separate from considerations of whether a universal history would judge it a success or failure.

Arendt is not suggesting that the position of actor and spectator be forever separated, or that those who act have no access to judge the political implications of their action. By Arendt's reading, Kant posits the idea of an original compact of mankind that, if man is to be called humane, should regulate not only the spectator's judgments, but also act as the inspiring principle for actors. When the original compact of mankind becomes the principle for both actor and spectator, actor and spectator become one.⁶⁸ But here it is as though Arendt sees the positing of this original compact as a kind of return to the moral imperative of universality, albeit through communicability, that determines action in advance.⁶⁹ If an actor acts according to how he or she wishes to appear, according to the potential judgment of his internalized spectator, according to the demands of communicability, and according to the possibility of the realization of an original human compact, does this self-limitation mean that his or her act is no longer *sui generis*, no longer free and spontaneous? By Arendt's account in *The Human Condition* and "What is Freedom?"⁷⁰ we may assume that the freedom of an act inspired by the principle of an original human compact would consist in its virtuous performance (*I-can*), rather than in the universality of the principle. One is free to act by principles or maxims that are not morally universal.

Spectators face the challenge of judging the significance or virtuosity displayed in particular acts, but without the solidity of universal measures under which to subsume the phenomena. Arendt asserts that deeds are to be judged according to their greatness, their virtuosity, their beauty, their potential imperishability, their unprecedented breaking of norms and routines, and for what they disclose of the actor and the world. Arendt found the main difficulty of reflective judgment to be the linking of the particular with the general that the spectator must identify. To help regulate one's reflections within judgment, Arendt turned to Kant's notion of *exemplary validity*, which implies that particular deeds may be taken as valid examples by which to judge other cases. This establishes a historical tradition that provides the origin for concepts and deeds that are their heirs.⁷¹ This notion is crystallized in the word *principium*, both a beginning (premiere) and an ideal (principle). The community of spectators re-articulates, through

continuous argument, the *sensus communis* from which the meaning or intelligibility of these principles and their historical examples arise and in which they are conserved.

What may serve as grounds for comparison are not abstract concepts, universals as in the case of determinant judgments, but valid examples from the past, remembered deeds, the narratively reified acts of genius, that embody similar principles within them. Arendt emphasizes that the example remains a particular that reveals the generality that otherwise could not be defined. It is up to the spectator to judge what principle is disclosed in the actor's deed, just as only a spectator can see the *daimon* behind the actor's shoulder. This communicable universal is generated from the particular phenomenon witnessed by the spectator. While imagination provides conceptual schemata for cognition, it also provides examples for judgment that enable a synthesis between intuited particularity and the intellected universal principle. A judgment has exemplary validity when it compares the present deed or actor with an example of the same principle, made present out of the past by the imagination. Choosing a suitable example is like a matter of taste, not purely subjective, but a choice that calls for assent.⁷²

In judging and in choosing valid examples, the spectator emerges as a sort of actor, in that he or she changes the world by bringing a new interpretation to the web of human relationships that can be further augmented by new acts and new interpretations. The interpretations that a particular spectator offers discloses *who* they are. Further augmentation of initial spectator judgments may be facilitated by the very structure of aesthetical ideas. Kant writes that an aesthetical idea is a representation of the imagination associated with a concept to make it available to sense, but which is bound up with other partial representations. To this concept is added other ineffable thought to which there is no adequate concept, so that it cannot be encompassed entirely by language. While imagination submits to the understanding that "clips its wings," it can also provide the understanding with an overabundance of representations which excite the cognitive faculties. The concept becomes aesthetically enlarged,⁷³ available to future interpretation.

The notion that the spectator is the final arbiter of an act's meaning emerges in Kant's account of the relation between *taste* and *genius*. *Genius* is a notion that Kant likens to each individual's particular birth attendant. In *The Critique of Judgment*, Kant explains genius as the innate talent, mental disposition, or harmony of faculties, through which nature gives the rule to art. Genius produces that for which no rule can be given; it is marked by originality.⁷⁴ As Arendt reads Kant, *spirit*, as "that which inspires the genius and only him,"⁷⁵ enables genius to find an expression by which his or her state of mind may be communicable. *Spirit* requires seizing the quick play of imagination and unifying it with an original concept that furnishes a new rule that can be communicated without the constraint of any other rules.⁷⁶

As in Arendt's retrospective narrator, Kant's spectator must abstract the rule from the work of the genius.⁷⁷ Taste "clips the wings" of genius, limits it so that it might remain subjectively purposive, or intelligible to the spectator, and serve as an example that hands down the rule to posterity, serves as a standard of judgment for others.⁷⁸ The relation between genius and taste remains consistent with Arendt's decentered, non-sovereign model of disclosure of *who* the actor is. The *who* is disclosed in the reaction that the actor's deed provokes in the spectator. I want to suggest that Kant's rule-giving voice of nature, the *spirit* that inspires genius, is similar to the *daimon* seen by spectators

behind the backs of actors. Kant writes that the common usage of the word “genius” is derived from “that peculiar guiding spirit given to a man at his birth, from whose suggestion these original Ideas proceed.”⁷⁹ Like the *daimon*, *genius* is depicted as a birth attendant that whispers guidance to the actor.

Arendt argues that since taste is the faculty that guides the communicability of genius, the actor must imagine his own prospective judges in order to make himself understood: “[T]his critic and spectator sits in every actor and fabricator; without this critical, judging faculty the doer or maker would be so isolated from the spectator that he would not even be perceived.”⁸⁰ The intelligibility of genius, as set by the understanding of the spectator, sets a limit to the otherwise radical spontaneity of action. Thus, the co-existence of the imagined, prospective spectator and the deliberating actor is also encompassed by the figure of the *daimon*, a duality inserted into the oneness of the *who*, an uncanny double.

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- ¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1959), 159-60.
- ² *Ibid.*, 187.
- ³ Dana Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 90.
- ⁴ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 159-60.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 161.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 159.
- ⁷ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, trans. J.H. Bernard (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2000), §46, 188-190.
- ⁸ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 162.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 162.
- ¹¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 150.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 34, 72.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 143.
- ¹⁴ Arendt, *Life of the Mind* (San Diego: Harcourt, Inc., 1978), 101.
- ¹⁵ Jacques Taminiaux, *The Thracian Maid and the Professional Thinker: Arendt and Heidegger*. Edited and translated by Michael Gendre (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 213.
- ¹⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 143.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 67, 71.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 99.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 80, 191, 204.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 200.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 164.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 212.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 165.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 117.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 369.
- ²⁶ Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger*, 138.
- ²⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 313-18, 341-43.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 236, 279-80.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 292.
- ³⁰ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 1998), 1.7, p. 14.
- ³¹ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 111.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 13.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 351n.
- ³⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt*, trans. Ross Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 74.
- ³⁵ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 353n.
- ³⁶ Robin Waterfield, translator's note, in Plato, *Republic* (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 1998), 418n.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 457n.
- ³⁸ Plato, *Republic*, ch. 14, 620e, p. 378.
- ³⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 209.
- ⁴⁰ Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 12.
- ⁴¹ Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 1994), 203a, p. 44.
- ⁴² Plato, "Apology," in *The Last Days of Socrates*, trans. High Tredennick and Harold Tarrant (London: Penguin Classics, 1993), 41d, p. 67.
- ⁴³ Arendt, "Plato," seminar at Columbia University, New York, N.Y., 1960, Subject File, 1949-1975, Hannah Arendt Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., image 1. The Arendt archives of the Library of Congress were accessed through the Arendt Center digital archive at the New School for Social Research, New York. At this archive, documents are listed according to image number.
- ⁴⁴ Heidegger, *Parmenides*, trans. Andre Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 117.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

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- ⁴⁶ Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, 190.
- ⁴⁷ Arendt, "Plato" seminar, image 10.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., image 1.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., image 6.
- ⁵⁰ Arendt, "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy," in *Responsibility and Judgment*, Jerome Kohn, ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), 280n.
- ⁵¹ Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, 191.
- ⁵² Ibid., 187.
- ⁵³ Ibid., 183.
- ⁵⁴ Arendt, "Socrates," in *The Promise of Politics*, Jerome Kohn, ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 27-28.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., 18.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., 36.
- ⁵⁷ Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, 25.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., 45.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., 42.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., 44.
- ⁶¹ Arendt, "Karl Jaspers: A Laudatio," in *Men in Dark Times* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995), 75.
- ⁶² Ibid., 73-74.
- ⁶³ Bernstein, Richard. "Rethinking the Social and the Political," in *Philosophical Profiles* (Cambridge & London: MIT Press, 1986), 233.
- ⁶⁴ Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, 19-20.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid., 48-49.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid., 50.
- ⁶⁷ Ronald Beiner, "Hannah Arendt on Judging," interpretive essay in Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, 141.
- ⁶⁸ Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, 75-76.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid.
- ⁷⁰ Arendt, "What is Freedom?" in *Between Past and Future*.
- ⁷¹ Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, 85.
- ⁷² Ibid., 81-85.
- ⁷³ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §49, 197-202.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid., §46, 188-190.
- ⁷⁵ Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, 63.
- ⁷⁶ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §49, 197-205.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid., §47, 190-93.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid., §46, 190.
- ⁸⁰ Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, 63.