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The Concerted Praxis of Being Human:
A Philosophico-Anthropological Essay on Being and Provocation

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Abstract

This essay considers the political character of human existence. In close conversation with Heidegger's and Arendt's explorations of the sharedness of the being of the human being, a philosophico-anthropological account of the concerted praxis of being human is presented. In the light of this account I consider the possibilities for such a concerted praxis in situations of extreme political pathology, where this human praxis no longer has any place in which to unfold. The question then becomes how this praxis in an emphatic sense can begin anew, where there is no established space for it to appear and take place in. Through a phenomenology of the "provocative action" of Mohamed Bouazizi, who sparked the Tunisian Revolution of Dignity, I point to those special instances of liminal praxis that are able to call forth (i.e. pro-voke) and tear open new spaces for the concerted praxis of being human.

Keywords: praxis, phenomenology, philosophical anthropology, responsiveness, provocation

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> The philosophers have only flattered the societies in different ways: it is a matter of provoking them.
> - Peter Sloterdijk, *Die Verachtung der Massen*

Introduction

In the last decade prominent socio-cultural anthropologists have called for something like a new *philosophical* anthropology more attuned to the first-personal, often ethically charged experiences of being human (Crapanzano 2004, Jackson 2005, Mattingly 2010, in press). This essay is a response to this call.

While a number of anthropologists – many of them writing within the bourgeoning field of study often called the anthropology of ethics (Laidlaw 2002, 2014, Lambek 2010, Robbins 2007, Zigon 2007, 2009) – have already come a long way in freeing anthropological thought

from the rigid collectivism that characterized earlier theoretical paradigms, none seem to have seized radically and systematically, in this general movement toward the singular existence of human beings, the opportunity of coupling the analysis of concrete human action with the universal question of what characterizes human existence *as such*. Pursuing such a line of thought, the aim of the following considerations will be to provide a robust philosophico-anthropological account of the human being by exploring the living, communal enaction of humanity; that is, by exploring what I shall call *the concerted praxis of being human*.

The essay falls in three main sections. The first section raises the question of political action as an ontologico-anthropological question. In dialogue with Heidegger and Arendt, I sketch the rough phenomenal outlines of the concerted praxis of being human and seek out the liminal regions of the phenomenon. The section culminates in a consideration of the beginning of action, which seems to run into an ontological impasse. The second section is devoted to qualifying conceptually this problem of beginning by examining it under circumstances of extreme political pathology. It finds that, in the despairing powerlessness that otherwise characterizes such political pathologies, a last remnant of power can be located and with it an outermost existential possibility of reinvigorating political action in spite of the circumstances. Finally, the third section undertakes a concrete analysis of Mohamed Bouazizi's act of self-immolation that sparked the Tunisian Revolution of Dignity in 2010/11. The hypothesis that guides these considerations is that we in this event find a liminal kind of praxis – *provocative action*[1] – that exactly is able to mobilize this last remnant of power and reopen those spaces of possibility that the concerted praxis of being human need in order to unfold freely.

Section I: Political Action as the Concerted Praxis of Being Human

When asking "what *is* political action?" we are asking for an ontological characterization of such action. In this section I shall give a first, approximating account of what political action

[1] I have explored the theme of provocative action in an earlier article, see Dyring 2011. The present article expands heavily on this earlier account.

is in an ontological, philosophico-anthropological perspective by foregrounding some political aspects of Heidegger's account of being.

In a late television interview, Heidegger discusses what he calls a lack of foundation in Marx's 11th thesis on Feuerbach; that "Die Philosophen haben die Welt nur verschieden *intepretiert*, es kömmt drauf an sie zu *verändern*." (Marx 1845: 49) This lack of foundation consists in the fact that Marx's dismissal of the *idle talk* of a philosophical tradition that merely interprets the world in favor of the radical activism of a thinking that explicitly sets out to change the world, actually leaves in a blind spot the fact that this activism itself must rest on some interpretation of what it means to *be* in the world (Cf. Hemming 2013: 18-19). What Heidegger thus points to is that *concrete political action* ontologically hinges on *a responsive relationship to being*.

In *Sein und Zeit* Heidegger attempts to capture this responsive relation of being by stating that the mode of being that is human – *Dasein* – is a mode of being that *revolves around* this being itself (*SZ/BT* §9). This means two things: first, it means that the being that I am is always mine – it is *je meines* – and that the *essence* of being human *is* the responsive self-relatedness of existence – "Das Wesen des Daseins liegt in seiner Existenz", as Heidegger puts it (*SZ* 42, *BT* 67). While this strong first personal emphasis on this characterization of human existence in *Sein und Zeit* must be acknowledged, it is important not to understand the aspect of the in-each-case-mineness – the *Jemeinigkeit* – as the promotion of an ontology of individualism. That being is always mine, does not mean that it is *exclusively* mine, nor that it cannot at the same time and equally primordially be being shared with others; being is in each case ours.

Contrary to the character of the sharedness of being emphasized in this essay, Heidegger himself, in the passages of *Sein und Zeit* dealing with *Mitsein*, mostly writes of communitary being as an inauthentic, *fallen* mode of being. One passage in *Sein und Zeit* in which Heidegger briefly does discuss the possibility of an authentic mode of being-together is the section on historical *repetition* (*Wiederholung*). Yet, although repetition is necessarily done in the context of *Mitsein* – since a historical fate is something shared between generations –

Heidegger does not describe this authentic mode of Mitsein in terms of a *concerted* praxis unfolding *between* a multitude of singular beings, but rather in terms of the appropriation of possibilities inherent to the *collective* fate of a people (*Volk*) performed by the *singularized* (qua *vorlaufend zum Tode*) Dasein (*SZ/BT* § 74, notably pp. 384/435-6). However, in Heidegger's 1924 Lectures on the *Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie* (*GA18*) the reader is offered both a clear view of the thoroughly Aristotelian roots of *Sein und Zeit* and a much less disparaging account of the foundational communitary character of human existence. As Heidegger relates the ontological meaning of the famous anthropological formulations from Book I in Aristotle's *Politics*, that the human being "by nature" (physei) is a zoon politikon and as such a zoon logon echon (*Pol* I.2 1253a8-18):

> *Polis* is a being-possibility [Seinsmöglichkeit] of human life, a being-possibility that is *physei*… *Physei on* is a being that is what it is from out of itself, on the basis of its genuine possibilities. *In the being of human beings themselves, lies the basic possibility of being-in-the-polis.* In being-in-the-polis, Aristotle sees the genuine life of human beings. To show this, he refers to the fact that the being of human beings is *logon echein*. Implicit in this determination is an entirely peculiar, fundamental mode of the being of human beings characterized as 'being-with-one-another,' *koinonia*. These beings who speak with the world are, as such, through *being-with-others*. (*GA18*: 45)

Where we above related *Sein und Zeit's* basic formulation of the human mode of existence, as a mode of being that revolves around itself, we might with these qualifications of the proto-political dimensions of human being-in-the-world say that this 'revolving around itself' specifically assumes the shape of what I shall call a *concerted praxis of being human*. Being human hence means always already being *in medias res* of communitary action taken toward our shared being. This does not mean that everything we do is political in a narrower sense of the term, but that the question of the existential configuration of our being-together fundamentally is a question left open for *us* to respond to (it is in each case ours), and a question to which we *qua* our being-political are always already in the process of responding. Ontologically our shared humanity *takes place* in and through the responsive processes of such being- qua acting-with-others – *Das Wesen des Mitseins liegt in der Co-Existenz*, we might say.

The Political Pathology of Rootlessness

As mentioned, Heidegger predominantly considers *Mitsein* in its inauthentic, existential configuration. Most notoriously, Heidegger writes that human existence often and for the most part is not itself, but exists instead in a publicly mediated and levelled down mode of being that is emblematically concretized in the German word *man*, which is best translated with the English *one*.[2] As Heidegger writes,

> [w]e take pleasure and enjoy ourselves the way *one* enjoys oneself; We read, see, and judge about literature and art the way *one* sees and judges; Likewise we withdraw from the 'great mass' the way *one* withdraws; we find 'shocking' what *one* finds shocking. The 'one', which is nothing definite, and which all are, though not as the sum, dictates the kind of Being of everydayness. (*SZ* 126-7, *BT* 164, translation modified)

When we hence say that we do this or that, because that is what *one* does, we are in fact subjected to a kind of *dictatorship;* but a dictatorship without a dictator properly speaking. Or rather, *one* is the dictator. But who, then, is this "one"? – everybody and nobody. When each of us in our busy, daily lives to a large extend allow our actions to be governed by this "one", we effectively, but largely unnoticed and in the hidden, *expropriate* to the responsive schemata of an anonymous force those fundamental aspects of the praxis of being human which pertain to *responding* to existence. It is further important to notice that this expropriation of existential responsiveness is not explained by saying that a singular person simply lets another singular person respond in his or her name; where *one* rules the plurality of singular beings is reduced to the unanimity of this *one*. Hence, when we act as one does, Heidegger writes,

> [t]his Being-with-one-another dissolves one's own Dasein completely into the kind of being of 'the Others', in such a way, indeed, that the others, as distinguishable and explicit, vanish more and more. In this inconspicuousness and unascertainability, one unfolds one's true

[2] Both *BT* and Joan Stambaugh's translation of *Sein und Zeit* translates *man* as *they*. I find the English word "One" to better emphasize the inclusiveness of the German "man" (cf. Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*, transl. Joan Stambaugh, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996).

> dictatorship [entfaltet das Man seine eigentliche Diktatur]. (*SZ* 126, *BT* 164, translation modified)

The "we" that is a plurality of singular beings collapses into the undifferentiated mass of *one*. In dictating the "true" construal of the state of the world, this mode of being-together excludes possibilities of acting and thinking against the grain of that order of things *one* sustains as the timely and the acceptable order. In this *exclusion of possibility* lies both the potential for existential alleviation – that is, the unburdening necessary in everyday, practical life of not having to ponder every minute matter encountered during one's waking hours – but equally the danger, that not only minute everyday matters, but also the most decisive political matters are enacted not through the concerted praxis of a plurality of responsible singular beings, but rather effectuated through a pseudo-action *en masse*.

With her notion of the *banality of evil*, Hannah Arendt historically qualifies the radically anti-political impact of the at once alleviating and 'dictatorial' *one*. Taking the case of Eichmann as a prism for the contemplation of the general political climate that spawned the horrific events of the holocaust, Arendt suggests that the primary "cause" of these evils should not be sought in the perverse ideology of Nazism, nor among the relatively few who were earnestly committed to this ideology, but rather in the politico-pathological superficiality of a large majority, who by their minute actions in everyday life, in small steps and probably largely unnoticed contributed to the systematic, coordinated realization of the Leviathan of Nazism. For this reason Arendt speaks not of *radical* evil, i.e. of an evil that is somehow rooted (Lat. *radix*, root), but of the *banality* of an evil that from a politico-ontological perspective is defined exactly by rootlessness (see *EJ* notably Ch. 2, 8, and 15, and further TMC 159-161).

The Ontico-Political Person and the Ontological Enaction of Humanity Proper

With Heidegger's *one* and Arendt's *banality* we have now attained in its rough outlines a notion of the concerted praxis of being human in its pathological configuration. However, in Arendt's work we also find a positive account of praxis as it takes place *between* irreducibly singular beings. As we shall see, action in this sense of the term can serve as an effective, yet fragile, defense against the hegemony of rootlessness and against the expropriation of power to the illusive *nobody* who reigns there.

Arendt writes that "[t]he greatest evil perpetrated, is evil committed by nobodies, that is, by human beings who refuse to be persons." (QMP 111-2) What Eichmann and millions of ordinary people under Nazi rule first and foremost were guilty of was that they refused to be themselves as the *singular, political* beings they were. To be a *nobody* does not only mean that one stands in a deficient relation to oneself, but that such a person is also "unfit for intercourse with others", as Arendt puts it (QMP 111-2). Conversely, the perpetual communitary *exercise* of this inter-human fitness is what effectively saves us from degenerating into *nobodies*.

On the condition of a concerted, *energeiac* being-together, human beings are able appear before each other as *these singular persons* and by virtue of such an *energeiac* praxis of appearance that open space is maintained in which alone human beings are free to appear qua *political beings* (*HC* 178-79). Hence, this *space of appearances* does not only allow human beings to show themselves as concrete (ontic) persons, it is the ontological *conditio sine qua non* of their taking place *as properly human*. As long as we are able to maintain such spaces of appearances in which the praxis of our being human retains a character of plurality that does not collapse *en masse*, the power to ward off the political pathologies of rootlessness is at the same time mobilized (cf. *HC* 176). However, such spaces are fragile phenomena that despite institutional reifications of their framework (laws, walls, constitutions, governments, etc.) can only be *sustained by the continued praxis* of a politically vibrant community. If this concerted praxis withers away, the framework will remain as the structural ruins of a political community no longer in existence. However, as a feature complementary to that of fragility, Arendt stresses the ever-present subversive potential of action: due to the same ontological traits that make it impossible to allocate and ultimately secure action by way of institutional structures, it is equally impossible to ultimately restrain and fixate action by way of reified political structures. Crystalized in Pericles's words; "Wherever you go, you will be a polis" (*HC* 198), Arendt finds a topological excess of action: the concerted praxis of being human ontologically implies the perpetual *possibility of transcending* any worldly, institutional, legal, ideological reification of "the political".

The End and the Beginning of Praxis

Like Heidegger's *being* and Arendt's *action*, the notion of the concerted praxis of being human developed here is characterized by what Aristotle called *entelechy*. Praxis intrinsically bears its own *telos*, its own end and comes to completion (teleion) in its enactment (*HC* 206; cf. Aristotle *NE* I.7). Since the humanity proper of human beings is something that takes place in and through *energeiac* praxis, and praxis unfolds *between* singular beings in communitary plurality, it follows that *concerted praxis* is an end in itself for human beings *qua* human beings. While political action can very well have other more concrete ends – e.g. administering the state – such external ends of action are ultimately (however easily the urgency of the matters of everyday living might obscure this ontological relation) subordinated to the final end of acting together for the sake of acting-together. But not only is the *final end* of importance to the proper understanding of the concerted praxis of being human; of utmost importance is also the *ultimate beginning* (*archē*) of praxis.

We are born to begin, Arendt writes. The event of the birth of a new human being is ontologically speaking the event of a beginning that itself possesses the ability to begin, to give birth to *the new* (*HC* 177). However, this subsequent beginning, the second birth of the born beginner, is not given like the *factum brutum* of the first beginning. The second beginning takes place in and through the *free praxis* of the beginner. The relation between the first and the second beginning is thus not just a philosophical question, but immediately an *existential problem* that encroaches experientially with an abyssal pathos of freedom on "men of action" when they face the question of how to begin anew (cf. *LMW* 207-216). As Arendt puts it in the closing passage of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*:

> Beginning, before it becomes a historical event, is the supreme capacity of man; politically, it is identical with man's freedom… This beginning is guaranteed by each new birth; it is indeed every man." (*OT*: 479)

Hence, any kind of second beginning – its minuteness or world historic magnitude notwithstanding – is rooted ontologically in this *natal* character of human existence (cf. also *LMW* 212-217, *OR* 34). At this point it is important to note that despite the undeniable fact that each singular human being has come into the world by way of a birth we call and

celebrate as our *own* birth, the natal character of existence – unlike its temporal counterpoint in mortality – ontologically implies *being-together* both in terms of physiological origin and in terms of birth being an event that takes place *between* singular human beings (mothers, fathers, midwifes, etc.) who both witness and begin telling the story of the new beginning (*HC* 176-7, cf. also O'Byrne 2010: 103-5, Birmingham 2006: 23-6). In a complementary fashion, the second birth instigated by a born beginner is an event that demands the *participation* of those others with whom we share the world. However, this is not to be understood as necessarily – or even predominantly – the demand of a harmonious acting-together, but rather as a demand of the existence of a *responsive* community to whom this birth of the new can actually *appear* as such.

In order to reach a fuller understanding this demand for an *already constituted* responsive space in which the insertion of the new can appear, we need to couple Arendt's emphasis on the initiative of action in *The Human Condition* with her exploration of the political importance of the mental faculty of Judgment in her later thinking. In the context of her appropriation of Kant's notion of judgment, Arendt writes of the ontological relationship between acting and judging (in this case judging objects as beautiful), that

> [t]he condition *sine qua non* for the existence of beautiful objects is communicability; the judgment of the spectator creates *space* without which no such objects could *appear* at all. The *public realm* is constituted by the critics and spectators, not by the 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… (*LKPP* 63, emphasis added)

Hence, all practical initiative needs a space in which to appear, and although action is unconditioned as regards its impulse to begin, which "springs from the beginning which came into the world when we were born and to which we respond by beginning something new on our own initiative" (*HC* 177), practical initiative cannot of itself *create* this space. Despite its radical capacity to begin anew, praxis is conditioned ontologically by the preexistence of a vibrant *plurality* of spectators, who possess the ability to radically *experience* the initiative.
This raises the question of how, in situations of extreme political pathology, where such responsive communities are being strategically destroyed by totalitarian or authoritarian

apparatuses of power or simply wither away in the indifference of modern political life, human beings can once again *begin* enacting properly the concerted praxis of being human.

Section II: The Concerted Praxis of Being Human in Situations of Extreme Political Pathology

One way of considering the problem of the beginning of action is to look for traces in situations of extreme political pathology of what might be types of *liminal praxis* that bear the potential for re-activating action. In Arendt's work we do find, as it were, a variety of descriptions of such extreme situations and some considerations of the possible scope of action in them — but, as we shall see in what follows, the kind of activity she considers belongs to a whole other existential register than the phenomenon of political action of which she is otherwise a strong advocate.

On the matter of personal responsibility under dictatorship, Arendt writes that there are

> extreme situations in which responsibility for the world … cannot be assumed because political responsibility always presupposes at least a minimum of political power. Impotence or complete powerlessness is … a valid excuse. (PRD 45)

Hence, where there is no space *between* singular human beings in which the power to properly act can be mobilized, the powerless cannot be held responsible for the crimes committed by the regimes under which they are rendered powerless; however, this excuse extends only so far as to those who have not *actively participated* in these crimes. This means one cannot excuse oneself from responsibility by appealing to the so called cog-theory that understands a political system "in terms of cogs and wheels that keep the administration running" and the people who operate the machinery of power as "expendable without changing the system." (PRD 29) On this account of political activity one is not *acting in person*, but is merely an agent through which the system acts. Once the primary responsibility for the political state of affairs and, hence, also for the evils it might contain, has been thusly allocated to the system, the perverse logic of the cog-theory potentially turns all normal moral standards on their head; active participation in the crimes of the regime – *qua cog* in the

system – rather than the refusal to participate suddenly appears as *the morally responsible* choice. As Arendt relates the standard argument of those who on such an account "took responsibility" by participating in the Nazi regime:

> We who appear guilty today are in fact those who stayed on the job in order to prevent worse things from happening; only those who remained inside had a change to mitigate things and to help at least some people… whereas those who did nothing shirked all responsibilities and thought only of themselves… (PRD 34)

However, what the cog-theory fails to recognize is that it buys into a false alternative between a greater and a lesser evil. It readily adopts a *fundamental construal* of the world that is instituted by certain governmental techniques that smuggle into the political realm an instance of necessity in the face of which political action appears utterly powerless. Once the alternative between a lesser and a greater evil has been accepted as unavoidable, the acceptance of evil is equally unavoidable. Yet, what too quickly loses its *experiential* salience for people under the sway of such ideological or (crypto-)totalitarian construals, according to Arendt, is that choosing the lesser evil is still *choosing evil* (PRD 36). As she goes on to lament,

> it seems to be much easier to condition human behavior and to make people conduct themselves in the most unexpected and outrageous manner, than it is to persuade anybody to learn from *experience* … that is, to start *thinking* and *judging* instead of applying categories and formulas which are deeply ingrained in our mind, but whose basis in experience has long been *forgotten*… (PRD 37, emphasis added)

Hence, what is decisive in such situations of extreme political pathology is not first of all the *pragmatic* question of figuring out what to do, but rather the *experiential* question of fundamentally comprehending the extremity of the situation in which one finds oneself. This is no easy matter, since none of us are neutral spectators of the worlds in which we dwell. As Aristotle notes in his discussion of the related problem of assessing fittingly the moment of action and "choosing" the feeling and action exactly appropriate to it, even the most virtuous mode of comportment appears to be excessive or deficient to those for whom the viciousness of the extreme has become the moral ordinary (cf. Aristotle *NE* II.8). Not unrelated to Aristotle's considerations on this topic and especially his notion of *phronēsis*, but also not

merely and directly adopting this Aristotelian approach,[3] Arendt states that the matter of assessing the situation of action is a matter of "learning from experience"; something which is immediately specified as being a matter of "thinking and judging" independently instead of relying "blindly" on readily available, commonly accepted, but also potentially treacherous standards, which on closer inspection might prove to hide in the shadows of the oblivion of everyday life traits that are hostile to the very *humanity* of the human being.

The Paralysis of Action and a Last Remnant of Power

In order to gain a deeper understanding of what experience might teach in politically pathological situations and how this pertains to the question of the reinvigoration of action, I shall foreground some aspects in the phenomenon of thinking, which under special circumstances seem to bear important *practico-political* implications.

On Arendt's account, thinking is "an activity contrary to the human condition" (*LMT* 78). That is, it is contrary to the condition of *acting-together*:

> Thinking as such … is, as Heidegger once observed, *'out of order'* … It interrupts any doing, any ordinary activities, no matter what they happen to be. All thinking demands a *stop*-and-think… And since whatever prevents thinking belongs to the world of appearances and to those common-sense experiences I have in company with my fellow-men… it is indeed as though thinking paralyzed me… (*LMT* 78-9)

Thinking is thus a non-practical activity. To think is to retreat from the realm of human plurality and turn instead to the solitary company of oneself. By virtue of such a retreat, thinking is an activity that phenomenally is characterized by a certain inherent *displacedness* from that order of everyday "public" commerce one ordinarily navigates. If we take this

[3] It is puzzling, that Arendt, who relies so heavily in her fundamental philosophical anthropology on an Aristotelian understanding of praxis, turns to Kant's third *Critique* for a discussion of the faculty of judgment, instead of appropriating the Aristotelian notion of *phronēsis*. It is puzzling not only because *phronēsis* is a key component in enacting well (euprattein) the praxis of being human, but much more because the individualism and apriorism fundamental to Kant's account of judgment and his concept of sensus communis seems so out of tune with Arendt's focus on plurality and experience. Whether Arendt mistakes Kant's purely formal, transcendental notion of sensus communis for an empirical (almost phronetic, as it were) deliberation of the actual range of possible views of a plurality of singular others is beyond the scope of this essay (cf. KU A155/B157, *LKPP*: 70-2, see also Beiner 1992: 131-144, Zerilli 2005: 159-161).

existential bifurcation effectuated by the activity of thinking between a place of action and a displaced place of thinking as the vantage from which to explore the relationship between these two spheres of activity, it seems important to treat of this displacement *in* the thinking experience not only as it is experienced from "inside" the thinking activity, but also – and to really appreciate this side of things we shall have to think through and beyond Arendt's work on the phenomenon of thinking – as the thinking activity is experienced by that plurality of actors and spectators who are "left behind" in the realm of action; i.e. those, for whom this non-practical activity – on occasion, somehow – *appears* amidst the hustle and bustle of practical life.

Jonathan Lear lands us right in the *crux* of this existential bifurcation with his interpretation of the well-known scene from Plato's *Symposium*, where Socrates is reported to have stood still, consumed by thought for an entire day and night. Plato lets Alcibiades tell the story of this *spectacle* of thinking:

> One day, at dawn, he [Socrates] started thinking about some problem or other; he just stood outside trying to figure it out. He couldn't resolve it, but he wouldn't give up. He simply stood there, glued to the same spot. By midday, many soldiers had seen him and, quite mystified, they told everyone that Socrates had been standing there all day, thinking about something… He only left next morning, when the sun came out, and he made his prayers to the new day. (*Symposium* 220c-d, cf. Lear 2011: 33-4)

On Lear's reading of this passage, Alcibiades misconstrues what the activity of (Socratic) thinking entails existentially, when the latter assumes that it is the inward toil of thinking that keeps Socrates from moving about in the outside, practical world. Against this interpretation Lear contends that "Socrates is standing still not because he is too busy thinking, but because he *cannot walk*, not knowing what his next step should be." (Lear 2011: 34) Hence, the activity of thinking has a capacity to paralyze action not because it is practically impossible to be active in both the mental and politico-practical registers of existence simultaneously, but because thinking, when taken to its radical consequence, leaves the thinker *nowhere to go*. So not only is thinking *out-of-order*; thinking has the capacity to question so fundamentally the world that the very possibility of *stepping back into the order* of the shared world is called into question.

Having pointed to this paralyzing capacity, it is important for Lear to stress that the thinking experience does not collapse into nihilism. As Lear notes, Socrates *is* in fact called back into the shared world, not because his thinking finally reaches an end result that can be translated into some act now definitively sanctioned by reason, but because "[h]e is uprooted … by the conventional religious demands of a new day" (Lear 2011: 34). However, for our purposes the primary concern is not to circumvent the existential threat of nihilism, but rather to exposing at more depth the *political implications* of the thinking experience of *nowhere-to-go*.

One logical response to this question of *where to go* seems to present itself: If there truly is nowhere to go politico-practically without succumbing to the extremity of the political and moral ordinary, then the thinking experience still presents the thinker with one last, outermost practical *possibility* – namely, to *go nowhere*. Now, rather than seeing this outermost possibility as a Sartrean, existentialist notion of the unconditioned freedom to choose how one suffers one's fate, which hinges on a notion of an irreducibly individual, and hence, apolitical choice,[4] I would instead like to ask what it means as a *political posture* to go nowhere. This at the same time brings us to the second aspect mentioned above of how the otherwise non-practical, non-appearing activity of thinking might (occasionally) be experienced within the space of appearances.

Arendt touches briefly upon this matter, I believe, when she in a – to any reader of Arendt's work – highly curious formulation writes that

> It seems to require a certain moral quality … to recognize powerlessness… Moreover, it is precisely in this admission of one's own *impotence* that a last remnant of strength and *even power* can still be preserved even under desperate conditions. (PRD 45, emphasis added)

By writing that that admission of one's own impotence that leads to a withdrawal from the realm of action potentially bears a last remnant of not merely strength, but indeed of *power*,

[4] For a critique of Sartre's notion of freedom and its insensitivity to the broad range of existential registers on which freedom takes place in the world, see Dyring 2014.

Arendt seems to find in this kind of *solitary* activity a phenomenal trait that she elsewhere is very clear in allocating exclusively to the foundational ontological structures of acting-together. As she writes of the differences between strength and power in *The Human Condition*, "strength is the natural quality of an individual seen in isolation", whereas

> power springs up between men when they act together and vanishes the moment they disperse. (…) And whoever, for whatever reasons, isolates himself and does not partake in such being together, forfeits power and becomes impotent, no matter how great his strength and how valid his reasons. (*HC* 200-1)

Hence, by pointing to an intimate ontological coalescence between the political sphere of plurality and the solitary sphere of the singular human being, Arendt seems to hint at a kind of liminal praxis that somehow springs from *beyond* the realm of plurality. I believe that we can make out two structural moments in such a *liminal praxis*: first, the moment in which a person finds him- or herself powerless in the face of the ruling powers, and secondly, the moment in which the solitary appropriation of powerlessness comes to *appearance* in a *potentiated* guise in the face of which the otherwise ruling powers are powerless. Another passage in which Arendt mentions *en passant* what seems to be such type of *liminal praxis* might help to clarify the phenomenon. In situations of extreme political pathology, Arendt writes

> thinking ceases to be a marginal affair in political matters. When everybody is swept away unthinkingly by what everybody else does or believes in, those who think are drawn out of hiding, because their refusal to join is *conspicuous* and thereby becomes *a kind of action*. (TMC 188, emphasis added)

What transposes the thinking activity onto the ground of the political and hence, what makes it *appear* as a political matter, is not the content of what is thought, but the *conspicuousness* of what is entailed existentially in the experience of it, namely its inherent *out-of-orderness*, its *nowhere-to-go*. That conspicuousness of which Arendt here writes thus consists in the fact that the liminal praxis introduces *into* the political space of appearances the untimely *nowhere-to-go* that otherwise arose in the solitary thinking experience. Hereby the liminal praxis *appears* in the political space of appearances as a *hindrance* to the continued concerted praxis analogous to the hindrance – the paralyzation – that the thinking experience posed to

the continued action of the thinker. However, by embodying this hindrance, this *limit,* the existential posture of liminal praxis does not merely paralyze ordinary political action. As itself a "kind of action", the liminal praxis tears open a new place for the concerted praxis of being human to happen, and whence the possibility for alternative courses of action than those sanctioned by the otherwise ruling powers of the moral and political ordinary, might spring.

In the final section of this essay I shall further pursue this liminal phenomenon of the concerted praxis of being human through the prism of what I shall call *provocative action*.

Section III: A Short Phenomenology of Provocative Action

On December 17, 2010, a young Tunisian fruit vendor – the now-famed Mohamed Bouazizi - who in socio-economic terms came from nowhere, who politically had nowhere to go, *went nowhere.* To get a feel for the events that took place on that fateful December day, let me quote at length from Kareem Fahim's *New York Times* article from January 21, 2011:

> Mohamed Bouazizi spent his whole life on a dusty, narrow street here, in a tiny, three-room house with a concrete patio where his mother hung the laundry and the red chilis to dry. By the time Mr. Bouazizi was 26, his work as a fruit vendor had earned him just enough money to feed his mother, uncle and five brothers and sisters at home. He dreamed about owning a van.
>
> Faida Hamdy, a 45-year-old municipal inspector in Sidi Bouzid, a police officer's daughter, was single, had a "strong personality" and an unblemished record, her supervisor said…
>
> On the morning of Dec. 17, when other vendors say Ms. Hamdy tried to confiscate Mr. Bouazizi's fruit, and then slapped him in the face for trying to yank back his apples, he became the hero… and she became the villain in a remarkable swirl of events in which Tunisians have risen up to topple a 23-year dictatorship…
>
> In a series of interviews, the other fruit vendors, officials and family members described the seemingly routine confrontation that had set off a revolution. They said that Mr. Bouazizi, embarrassed and angry, had wrestled with Ms. Hamdy and was beaten by two of her colleagues, who also took his electronic scale. He walked a few blocks to the municipal building, demanded his property and was beaten again, they said. Then he walked to the governor's office, demanded an audience and was refused.

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> "She humiliated him," said his sister, Samia Bouazizi. "Everyone was watching."
>
> Sometime around noon, in the two-lane street in front of the governor's high gate, the vendor drenched himself in paint thinner then lit himself on fire… By the time he died on Jan. 4, protests that started over Mr. Bouazizi's treatment in Sidi Bouzid had spread to cities throughout the country.[5]

Bouazizi's act of desperation has since been accredited as the act that sparked not only one revolution, the Tunisian, but indeed a whole series of revolutions throughout the Arab world. The mythologization of Bouazizi and the correlative hypostatization of his act are worth a critical study, but shall not as such concern us here. Let it suffice to briefly indicate how sociological, historical and anthropological perspectives on the event in question can quickly shake that aura of uniqueness that the mass media has readily celebrated and that the protesting movements have readily utilized to strengthen their continued protest.

From a sociological perspective, Bouazizi's act was a mere *occasion* that quite arbitrarily unleashed the socio-political tensions that had been building during decades of mal-governance, not a *cause* as such of the revolutions. This approach hence finds all it needs in terms of explanatory force in an analysis of the supra-individual social structures. From the perspective of a world history of political protest, Bouazizi's act of self-immolation is *not unique*. In the latter half of the 20th century alone, acts of self-immolation by fire have been recorded in as diverse regions of the world as Prague, Tibet, India, Turkey, China and Vietnam.[6] Furthermore, numerous instances of self-immolation have been registered in recent Tunisian history. Only two years prior to Bouazizi's protest in Sidi Bouzid, acts of self-immolation by fire were reported during a great uprising among dissatisfied miners in Gafsa (a neighboring governorate) near the towns of Métlaoui, Redaïef, and Oum Laarayes — like Bouazizi's hometown, "nowherevilles" in the "areas of darkness"[7] that make out the

[5] Quoted from Kareem Fahim's "Slap to a Man's Pride Set Off Tumult in Tunisia", *The New York Times*, January 21, 2011.
[6] For a short insightful look at the phenomenon of self-immolation see Robert F. Worth, "How a Single Match Can Ignite a Revolution", *The New York Times*, January 21, 2011
[7] The term "nowhereville" I am borrowing from Roger Cohen's "Facebook and Arab Dignity", *The New York Times*, Published: January 24, 2011. As regards the phrase "areas of darkness", Saidani writes that "the ten western governorates, from Jendouba in the far north to Ben Guerdene in the South… [are] known in the official

politically neglected, socio-economically underdeveloped Tunisian central plateau. Also, this image of burning oneself as a response to a dire political situation has seeped into everyday language. In the words of the young Tunisian academic, Mounir Saidani; "for some time now, among the young who consider emigrating illegally to Europe, it is said in all the various Maghrebian dialects that one wishes to *yahreg*, meaning 'to burn' one's self [in the act of burning one's identity papers – Transl.]." (Saidani 2012: 45, translator's parenthesis in original)

Hence, a socio-cultural anthropological approach that typically stresses the cultural contextuality and continuity of human agency would also be able to subsume Bouazizi's act under complexes of culturally shared values (*in casu*, values of being-against the authority of the central government) and socially mediated practices of protest.[8]

While the philosophico-anthropological perspective of this essay agrees that Bouazizi's act was a mere occasion, not *the* cause, of the subsequent revolutionary action, and that it inscribed itself into a historical and cultural context, this perspective nonetheless insists on the *ontological primacy* of the *existential singularity of the act and its actor(s)*, and that only with an appreciation of this singularity can the investigation of what it means to *be* human find a proper footing. Hence, the question arises: what is it that takes place *in and through* this act – this act that as regards Bouazizi was *irredeemably* singular – that originarily opens the *possibility* of this act serving as an *occasion* for the reinvigoration of the concerted praxis of being human in a situation otherwise marked by extreme political pathology?

First Structural Moment: Pro-vocative Action Calls Forth a Shared Space of Common Experience

Let me suggest that we proceed by considering this notion of *burning one's self* that, as stated above, resonates both with recent history and with some general linguistic traits in the Tunisian central plateau. What unites the physical self-immolation and the metaphorical

state sociopolitical language as 'the remote sub-Saharan governorates of the interior,' and accordingly collectively labeled 'areas of darkness'." (Saidani 2012: 46)

[8] For recent anthropological work that stress the cultural continuity and immanence of ethical agency, cf. Laidlaw 2002, Lambek 2010, Robbins 2007

burning of one identity on this schema of protest is – paradoxical, as it may seem – the strategy of *disappearance* as a measure against political *invisibility*, against being reduced to inhabitants of *areas of (political) darkness*. Those who emigrate disappear; first as legal persons by burning their identity papers and then in their physical presence by leaving the country. Those who burn themselves quite literally, however, disappear into the darkness of death. But unlike those who emigrate illegally, disappearance in the case of self-immolation by fire is disappearance in its most *visible* modality; *self-immolation by fire can hence be described as the subversive cultural practice of the politically invisible making a spectacle of disappearing*. Now, this practice of making a spectacle of disappearing presents us with an *ontic concretion of that liminal kind of praxis*, the ontological structure of which I outlined above (cf. section II). Admitting the utter powerlessness of belonging to the areas of darkness, of being socio-politically invisible, the person who does not merely remain in this space of *dis*-appearance, but makes a *spectacle* of disappearing presents, as we saw Arendt put it, "a last remnant of strength and even power" (PRD 45).

The following characterization by Saidini brings us a first step of the way toward a philosophico-anthropological appreciation of Bouazizi's act of self-immolation and the significance of its existential singularity:

> By doing it [burning himself] outside the office of the regional governor, who was the ruling party's representative, Mr. Bouazizi gave new meaning to the act of self-immolation by fire. In this way he forced the authorities to accept full political and moral responsibility for his act. (Saidini 2012: 45, parenthesis added)

Hence, according to Saidani, what makes Bouazizi's act *phenomenally* different from earlier instances of self-immolation in Tunisia is that Bouazizi, unlike, for example, the protesters in Gafsa, who burned themselves amidst the spectacle of the riots, *broke* the calm of politico-pathological ordinary, when he set himself ablaze that December day. While agreeing so far, I would contest Saidani's point that Bouazizi's act forced the authorities to "accept full political and moral responsibility." To be sure, something to this effect did eventually come about through the pressure of the revolutionary process in general, but if we focus strictly in on what Bouazizi's act in its singularity occasioned, nothing so particular and clearly defined

seemed to emanate from the act. Nothing *definite* was forced upon anybody — nothing, but a *relentless demand of having to respond somehow* to his act.

What Bouazizi accomplished with his act was to make a spectacle of disappearing that was impossible not to *see*; a spectacle that, no matter what one did, one could not *not respond* to. This act could not simply be ignored by the authorities, since any indifferent posture assumed in this *new* space of appearances, this space of the spectacle that the act opened, would immediately be an undisguised and undisguisable (resentful, in this case) response. Bouazizi's act, hence, forces anybody in the relative, experiential vicinity into a political mode of being responsive, of hearing and seeing, *of emphatically experiencing the same thing alongside each other in the same, shared space*. In short, the spectacle of Bouazizi's act is the thing that sets up a space around itself within which it, in an originary, generative manner, *calls forth* and *gathers spectators*.

Recalling again Arendt's phrase about *a last remnant of strength and even power* presented in appropriated powerlessness, I believe that we so far in the analysis of Bouazizi's act have encountered only traits characteristic of *strength*, namely traits belonging to the singular human being *in solitude*: Bouazizi, by way of the necessarily singularizing act of *self*-sacrifice mobilizes a last remnant of strength, that liberates him from the grasp of the authorities – at least on this outermost existential limit, where his life borders on his death – and leaves him some degree of liberty in the remainder of his existence on this earth. At first sight, then, there is something in this way of facing death that resembles that existential posture Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit* calls being-toward-death:

> Death is Dasein's ownmost possibility [*eigenste* Möglichkeit] … The ownmost possibility is *non-relational* [*unbezügliche*]… Death does not just 'belong' to one's own Dasein in an undifferentiated way; death *lays claim* to it as a *singular* Dasein [*beansprucht* diese *als einzelnes*]. The non-relational character of death… singularizes Dasein down to itself. (*SZ* 263, *BT* 307-8, Translation modified)

Due to this non-relational character of death, the experience of *being* mortal, of *having to die* one's own death, lay claims to each single human being *qua singular* and hence calls forth singular human beings from out of their fallenness into the indifferent mass of das *Man*, the *one*. The highly contested importance and even tenability of the existentialist *ethics of*

Eigentlichkeit that is so readily equated with notion of being-toward-death is not at issue here; what is at issue, however, is the *singularizing force* that arises in the assumption of an existential posture that relates intimately to the *limit* of existence, and that is capable of disclosing otherwise *hidden registers of possibility*.

Foucault, in a not dissimilar fashion, touches upon the singularizing force of death when he writes that "death is power's limit, the moment that escapes it; death becomes the most secret aspect of existence, the most 'private.'" (Foucault 1998: 139) A decisive difference between Heidegger's and Foucault's perspectives on the phenomenon of death is that Heidegger's being-toward-death is a certain futural mode of *living* toward the outermost *possibility* of death, while in the passage quoted from Foucault the emblematic phenomenon of death as "power's limit" is suicide, i.e. the act that *actualizes* this outermost possibility of existence. However, in the case of Bouazizi's act of self-immolation these two perspectives seem to coincide. Yet, the posture of being-toward-death assumed by Bouazizi, while being obviously singular (Bouazizi undeniably faced exactly his *own* death), showcases a singularizing force that is neither *private (privative/privatizing)*, nor a matter of *authenticity*. On the *strength* of this force, Bouazizi's act of self-immolation was able to transpose this "power's limit" into the newly opened space shared by the newly called-forth spectators. Hence, by embodying in the bright, burning light of his spectacular act this "power's limit", Bouazizi not only called forth a plurality of singular spectators, he also brought each of them in *touch* with the *limit* of that authoritarian power that had otherwise seemed despairingly limitless during the past 23 years.

Above I quoted Arendt writing that it is "easier to condition human behavior… than it is to persuade anybody to learn from experience" (PRD 37, cf. section II above). And as noted in this regard, emphatically experiencing the situation in which one finds oneself without reference to standards that may not only be distorting, but also treacherously hidden in the oblivion of everyday living, is a difficult matter due to the existential impossibility of a neutral point of vantage. With the phenomenon of provocative action, as we find it in Bouazizi's act, I believe that we have encountered a *liminal kind of praxis* that calls forth, that pro-vokes, a *learning experience* that has the potential to force those on whom this

experience strikes – the spectators – beyond an otherwise preconditioned mode of experiencing and behaving in the world. I do not thereby mean to say that the spectators of Bouazizi's act acquire new knowledge of their socio-political reality. *What the experience of the provocative act teaches is a lesson in possibility*. When Bouazizi made a spectacle of disappearing, he manifested in a public manner the *nowhere-to-go*, the *out-of-orderness*, also encountered in the thinking experience, albeit in a very different existential modality than we saw in the case of Socrates. This difference in existential modality notwithstanding, when Bouazizi *went nowhere* that day in December, he transposed that *nowhere-to-go* into the common experience of the spectators and with it those same phenomenal traits we saw Lear find in the thinking experience; namely, that it becomes impossible to go further, when it from the vantage of this *nowhere-to-go* suddenly is no longer *given* what the next step should be. From the place opened in and through Bouazizi's act the world suddenly appeared shot through with the *possibility* that things could *actually* be otherwise, although the act did nothing in the way of directing its spectators toward concrete possibilit*ies* of change.

Second Structural Moment: Pro-vocative Action Calls Forth Actors Capable of Action

I have now unfolded this first structural moment in what amounts to four aspects equiprimordially at play in Bouazizi's provocative act. By making a spectacle of disappearing, the act of self-immolation (i) called forth a new space of appearances within which it at the same time (ii) called forth new spectators. To the common experience of these spectators, the act presented (iii) the limit of that authoritarian power that had otherwise appeared limitless, and (iv) it called forth in plain view the liberating experience of possibility beyond the limits of the ruling power. The task of this last section is now to outline how Bouazizi's act did not only mobilize the *strength* to call forth "spectators", but how it at the same time called forth in this liminal space of the spectacle the reinvigorated possibility of *concerted praxis*, of mobilizing collectively that "last remnant of *power"* of which Arendt writes.

Let me start by discussing some aspects of the following short description offered by the Tunisian social scientist, Mouldi Guessoumi. The quoted passage deals with "the transition from acts of self-immolation to revolutionary processes" and hence points to the – for an anthropology of the *concerted* praxis of being human – crucial connection between

Bouazizi's solitary act and those processes of revolutionary acting-together that ensued in the wake of this act. Guessoumi writes:

> The public outrage prompted by his gesture [Bouazizi's self-immolation] on December 17 turned into an uprising primarily because the demonstrators shared Bouazizi's motives – the prohibitive rise in the cost of living; frustration over rampant unemployment, particularly among college graduates; contempt for the authorities, and the brutality of the police… (Guessoumi 2012: 29, parenthesis added)

A first thing to note is that this transition from solitary act to social movement is explained in terms of an *identity in motives*: Bouazizi acted in a certain direction which was given by his motives, and his movement in this direction occasioned the movement of a lot of others, who was also inclined to move in this direction. And these shared motives are by no means personal psychological or existential matters; they are the individually embodied sentiments of the grand scale socio-political tensions on which sociological analysis focusses. Interestingly, however, another probable, but less noble motive than those listed by Guessoumi above is mentioned in several interviews given shortly after Bouazizi's death by people close to him. While the experience of being humiliated when in contact with the authorities undeniably is a widely shared trait, there seems also to be a strong subtext of disrespect for women in that experience of humiliation Bouazizi had in the encounter with the female inspector, Ms. Hamdy. As noted by a family member shortly after the incident: "To be slapped by a woman, in the middle of the street, it can burn you up inside. With us, the Hamama [tribe], that is intolerable."[9] I find this worth mentioning, not in order to engage in a long discussion of motives and to what degree they were shared, but to indicate the danger of reducing the significance of the act – indeed of human action as such – to its motives, and hence, of reducing the transition from the act of one to the action of many to a mere quantitative matter of more or less realized, motivational force.

[9] Quoted from International Crisis Group: "Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (IV): Tunisia's Way", Middle East/North Africa Report N°106 – 28 April 2011, p. 3, note 12. Accessed online September 2014. http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/tunisia/106-popular-protests-in-north-africa-and-the-middle-east-iv-tunisias-way.aspx.

What Bouazizi's actual motives were or were not is of no interest to a phenomenological account of his act, because the act as it broke into our common world was devoid of any manifest motivations, and much less of programmatic or ideological declarations. It did not indicate any directions for the movement of subsequent processes of revolutionary action, the only directive the act gave its spectators was "*behold this spectacle of going-nowhere!*" the meaning of which directive we unfolded above. The question, then, is not how, in a causally linear way, the acted-out motives of one man becomes an occasion for the many to act upon their identical motives, but rather how this untimely spectacle of going-nowhere, without giving directions, was able open the possibility of positively going *new* political ways altogether.

We get a first indication of an answer to this question by considering the notion of "shared motives" as Guessoumi uses the terms. When Guessoumi writes that Bouazizi and the protesters who "followed" him shared such motives as "the prohibitive rise in the cost of living; frustration over rampant unemployment… contempt for the authorities, and the brutality of the police" more accurately, I would say, he is describing the socio-political *state* of affairs and the *experiences of discontent* with it. In order for such *states* to be *proper motives* for taking action (i.e., something that is the basis for movement), it must coalesce with an *experience of the possibility* of actually moving anything, of political maneuvering. As worked out above, such a liberating experience of the limit of the authoritarian power and the possibility of things actually being otherwise was primordially called forth by Bouazizi's provocative act. According to an existential analysis, then, the motives that the subsequent protesters supposedly shared with Bouazizi *were transformed* into motives only in *response* to Bouazizi's act. When viewed in terms of *possibility* instead of in terms of the causal play of societal forces, it appears that a qualitative leap takes place in the transition from Bouazizi's act to the revolutionary action of those who witnessed it — a qualitative leap that more accurately is the leap from *grievances* to *motives* for action, that is generated by the infusion an experience of possibility. Fahim, in the already quoted *New York Times*-article, relates what seems to testify to such experiences of the existential leap of the possibility of the new, when he writes that "[p]eople in Sidi Bouzid use the words "impossible" or

"miracle" to describe the events of the last month."[10] Arendt would agree, "[t]he new always appears in the guise of a miracle." (*HC* 178)

Lastly, let me consider a second and connected aspect of Guessoumi's notion of "shared motives". As argued above; in the perspective of an existential analysis the motives supposedly shared across the transition from solitary act to revolutionary action are rendered proper motives only in the potentiating light of Bouazizi's provocative act. But what is more, the possibility of the motives being *shared* qua motives is similarly generated only in that space of appearances opened by the provocative act. This space of appearances grants the sympathizers of Bouazizi's act *a new gathering place* (an agora, if you will) in which to *actively* and *practically* share their motives; that is, a place to share the experience of for the first time *actually being able* to take concerted action and radically change things.

On January 13, 2011, in a last desperate attempt to hold on to the power, Ben Ali announced that he would not be running for re-election in 2014, that he had ordered the police to stop attacking the protesters, and that he would guarantee freedom of the press, open internet access and provide a decrease in food prices. However, already at this point the *revolutionary pathos*; that sense of the *power* of the concerted praxis to create a new political state of affairs and that rush of *freedom*, that goes with this experience, had grown so strong that Ben Ali's promises of *liberation from oppression* had no impact (Guessoumi 2012: 30-1, cf. also *OR* 34). The next day he fled the country. As a young Tunisian man related his experience of seeing Ben Ali speak: "He hadn't understood a thing… This was about dignity, not bread"[11].

As *spectators* of Bouazizi's act the Tunisian people experienced the possibility of a limit to the ruling power, i.e. a possibility for liberation. As *actors* in the shared space called forth by Bouazizi's act, the Tunisian people experienced the rush of freedom inherent to the concerted praxis of being human and strove for the dignity[12] of being human sensed in this experience.

[10] Fahim, Kareem, "Slap to a Man's Pride Set Off Tumult in Tunisia", *The New York Times*, January 21, 2011
[11] Cohen, Roger, "Facebook and Arab Dignity", *The New York Times*, January 24, 2011
[12] For an interesting discussion of the notion of dignity as an operative term in the current political and moral landscape, see Zigon 2014. Zigon shows how many "struggles for dignity" are not questions of the dignity of the autonomous subject of Enlightenment, but rather political struggles over how to *dwell* meaningfully in the world. In our context, when the Tunisians see their non-ideological, collective struggles as a "Revolution of

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Closing Remarks

Having determined the being of the human being as the concerted praxis of responding to the predicaments of existence, and having outlined this kind of praxis in both a pathological guise and an empowering, positive guide, I considered the question of the possibility of action in situations of extreme political pathology. On this matter I pointed to an ontological impasse: while the actor is capable of beginning on his or her own initiative, the proper enaction of action needs others to see and judge it. Action needs a space of appearances in which to unfold, and this space it cannot create of its own initiative. And since the extreme situations of political pathology are characterized by the lack of exactly such a plurality of spectators, action seems forever paralyzed.

However, in the phenomenon of provocative action as it has been unfolded in the analysis of Bouazizi's act of self-immolation, we found a liminal kind of praxis that has shown itself capable of opening a new ground upon which the praxis of being human can once again unfold. By making a spectacle of disappearing that one could not not see, the provocative act called forth a new space of appearances and a plurality of spectators. It furthermore presented to these spectators the limits of that authoritarian power that had kept them in the state of political pathology, and hence presented in this space of appearances an experience of possibility that things could be otherwise. This possibility immediately brought with it a qualitative leap in the experience of the socio-political state-of-affairs: from having a manifold of grievances the spectators of Bouazizi's act suddenly saw the possibility for movement toward change; i.e. their discontent with the state of affairs became *motives*. And finally, this experience of being able to move things was emplaced in the shared space of appearances opened by Bouazizi's act and thereby became the *common* experience of the freedom and power inherent to the concerted praxis of being human.

Dignity", they seem much closer to understanding dignity in Zigon's sense of dwelling, than that of individual autonomy.

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HC *The Human Condition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958

LKPP *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, edited with an interpretive essay by Ronald Beiner, Paperback edition, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992

LMT *Life of the Mind, Vol. I, Thinking*, One volume edition, New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1978

LMW *Life of the Mind, Vol. II, Willing*, One volume edition, New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1978

PRD "Personal Responsibility under Dictatorship", in *Responsibility and Judgment*, Edited and with an introduction by Jerome Kohn, New York: Schocken Books, 2003, pp. 17-48

OR *On Revolution*, New York: Penguin Books, 1963

OT *Origins of Totalitarianism*, new edition with added prefaces, New York: Harcourt, Inc. 1976

QMP "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy", in *Responsibility and Judgment*, Edited and with an introduction by Jerome Kohn, New York: Schocken Books, 2003, pp. 49-146

TMC "Thinking and Moral Considerations", in *Responsibility and Judgment*, Edited and with an introduction by Jerome Kohn, New York: Schocken Books, 2003, pp. 159-192

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NE *Nicomachean Ethics*, Transl. H. Rackham, revised edition, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934

Pol *Politics*, Transl. H. Rackham, reprinted with corrections, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1944

Abbreviated Works by Martin Heidegger:

SZ *Sein und Zeit*, neunzehnte Auflage, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2006

BT *Being and Time*, Transl. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Oxford: Basil Blackwell publisher Ltd., 1962

GA18 *Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie*, Gesamtausgabe Band 18, Frankfurt a. M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 2002. *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, transl. Robert D. Metcalf and Mark B. Tanzer, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009

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KU *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft, erste Auflage, Frankfurt a, M: Insel Verlag, 1974

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