Conversation | Razgovor

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The Welcoming Gesture of Hermeneutics In Conversation with Andrzej Wierciński's *Existentia Hermeneutica*

Existentia Hermeneutica. Understanding as the Mode of Being in the World (2019) is an unrivalled piece of literature by a distinguished and internationally acclaimed scholar in philosophical hermeneutics, theologian, and poet. This outstanding *tour-de-force* breaks new ground in philosophical and theological studies, showing that by thinking-the-difference hermeneutics displays its prodigious welcoming gesture toward the exploration of the heterogeneous nature of thinking. This gesture has far-reaching consequences. The book's recognition of the empowerment of thinking that ensues from *Differenzdenken* (Wierciński 2008, 162–204) is an undisputable rejuvenation of philosophical hermeneutics' contribution to the humanities. Investigating the obvious, but often neglected, or undervalued connections between philosophy and theology, the author divulges the multitudinous ways, in which the two disciplines reveal the pervasiveness of the hermeneutic character of human existence.

The book's two clearly defined parts are expressive of the thoughtful discernment of the most prominent aspects of contemporary hermeneutic thinking. Part one, "Hermeneutic Discovery of a Theological Insight: Toward a Hermeneutic Philosophy of Religion," draws extensively from the authors representing the seemingly divergent fields of philosophical hermeneutics

and theology, and manifests their interweaving character. Readers are thus introduced to the important interactions between the philosophical and theological horizons of hermeneutic thinking. Part two, "Poetic Disclosures: Language as the Medium of the Hermeneutic Experience," probes deeply into the nature of language while demonstrating its belonging together with Being. The concluding section, "Hermeneutic Challenge: The Future of Hermeneutics," is a one-of-a-kind reflection on the challenges philosophical hermeneutics faces in the third millennium with its portentous interest in analytical philosophy to the detriment of hermeneutic investigation.

Spanning a considerable range of philosophical and theological themes, from the issue of transcendence, understanding, and self-understanding, through metaphysics, forgetfulness of Being, Trinity, atheology, and the pivotal Incarnation as the empowerment of thinking-the- difference, part one gives full value to the matters at hand. As a result, we are invited to partake effusively in critical engagements with a whole panoply of thinkers tackling the above-mentioned themes: Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur (the icons of contemporary philosophical hermeneutics), as well as the less known figures of two German philosophers: Gustav Siewerth and Bernhard Welte. On the theological pole, Wierciński involves us in a thrilling dialogue with the medieval figures of Ignatius of Antioch, Thomas Aquinas, Augustine, and Richard of St. Victor, as well as the renowned contemporary theologians: Hans Urs von Balthasar, Karl Barth, Karl Rahner, and the somewhat less glaring Walter Kasper.

The first part's fecundity is a real challenge. Its four distinct sections render topics perceptibly knit into a captivating fabric of the intersections between philosophical hermeneutics and theological investigation. Deploying hermeneutics to reinvigorate the central areas of Christian theology, part one introduces the reader to the main precepts of the hermeneutic philosophy of religion. Its first subsection, "The Hermeneutic Retrieval of a Theological Insight: *Verbum Interius*," is an astute elucidation of Gadamer's language-oriented hermeneutics, whose universal aspect can be encapsulated as the *verbum interius:* "not the word that is the subject of philosophy of language or linguistics, but the inner word, the core of Augustine's teaching on the Trinity" (60). Musing on the indivisibility of thinking and language, Wierciński

ascertains, after Gadamer, that "to be means to exist in language" (60; cf. Gadamer 2000, 468). Speaking, thus, is not viewed here in terms of speech acts and their singularity, in accordance with the guidelines of general linguistics and represented by F. de Saussure, Sapir-Whorf, J. L. Austin, R. Jacobson, and others (not disregarding their staple contribution to the development of an understanding of human speech), but much more openly as "dwelling in the totality of meaning" (62). Following Gadamer, Wierciński contends that: "Every lingual expression is grounded in that totality, which encompasses all individual expressions and overcomes them. The statement '*Being that can be understood is language*' might be interpreted as participation in that totality of meaning, and not as lingual idealism." (62)

Existing in language, a human being is continuously confronted with language's essential powerlessness and incompleteness. This acute sense of inexpressibility is closely connected with human finitude. The lack of the possibility to express everything we want and the way we want to does not mean that we are incapable as human subjects, but makes us aware that "Being does not allow itself to be definitively articulated. We are always on the way to Being and, therefore, on the way to language." (72–73; cf. Heidegger 1959, 242, 262; see also Gerald L. Bruns 1989) The limitedness of language is evocative of the limits of our being-in-the-world. As Wierciński explains, it is exactly the pain of not being able to express everything that "brings us to hermeneutics". And thus, the human pursuit of expression is at the same time the quest for Being: "This never-ending search for language is finite in its nature. The hermeneutic experience mediates infinite and finite being, and as such, is a lingual enactment of Dasein's being-in-the-world." (63)

To find the fitting word, to mediate between what is finite and what is infinite is hermeneutics' first-ever task. Wierciński picks up on language's insufficiency, as well as its propensity to partake in the incessant quest for the right way to express itself, and, via the recourse to the universality of the hermeneutic enterprise, advances his original approach to what language consists in. His input into the study of language is not yet another theory of language, but a contribution to our understanding of the essence of language—its nature—in relation to Being. The ontological footing of his reflection awakens us to see beyond the purely linguistic investigation. In an understanding of the lingual

character of Being, we experience language as both "bridge and barrier" on our way to Being (61), and, in consequence, we can better grasp the very texture of human existence as hermeneutically immersed in language.

This most challenging part of the book, which dexterously reinvigorates the discussion of speaking, thinking, and Being as belonging together, helps us appreciate the role of *the unsaid* in the presence and the formation of *the said*. Reminding us of Gadamer's weighty words in this respect: "What is stated is not everything. The unsaid is what first makes what is stated into a word that can reach us" (Gadamer 2000, 504), the author boosts our interest in the intricate nature of language. His account of the essence of language is not, however, an avowal of the places of indeterminacy, intentional silences, or the inescapable incongruities in speech performance and communication, which might be taken as the prominent examples of *the unsaid*. Rather, following Gadamer's and Heidegger's contentions, the author aids us on the way to reach out for the unveiling to ourselves of the inextricable liaison of language and Being, wherein the recognition of the primordial interplay of *the said* and *the unsaid* is of central importance. He makes the message of his text resonate powerfully with Heidegger's high-ranking words: "*Das Gesagte ist das Dürftige, das Ungesagte erfüllt mit Reichtum*" (Heidegger 1991, 249), and inspires us to explore thoroughly the role of *the unsaid* alongside *the said* in disclosing Being, the thinking of Being.

Wierciński argues that by reinstating the import of the theological insight into the universality of hermeneutics, through his reflection on *verbum interius*, Gadamer ("without being a theologian") initiates a creative engagement with the nature of language as placed in the onto-theological perspective. Gadamer's pioneering move testifies to theology's and philosophy's intrinsic connection (recuperated in contemporary philosophy), and prepares the ground for the beckoning of subsequent, lavish avowals of the disclosures of Being. Wierciński's ample argumentation not only demonstrates the unique path of thinking about language offered by Gadamer, but hinges on the author's own insight into the interconnection between the Triune God, the Holy Spirit, and the nature of language, encouraging us to interrogate the question of language even more extensively. The author highlights that associating (and thereby leaning) the hermeneutic priority of language to the medieval theology of the Trinity,

Gadamer uncovers that: "The inner mental word is just as consubstantial with thought as is God the Son with God the Father." (Gadamer 2000, 418; see also Plieger 2000, 187–192) The consubstantiality of thought with the inner word, as reflecting the consubstantiality of God the Father and God the Son—the Word, is of no small significance. It heralds a complete shift of the formerly existent paradigm of thinking about thought and speech. Crucially, Gadamer's unearthing of the trinitarian theology as figuring the interrelation between speech and thought (73) underwrites hermeneutics' claim to universality, as it stresses the ubiquitous nature of language. The analogy between *Verbum Dei* and *verbum interius* opens up an original perspective which acknowledges language as situated where it has always been—in the co-belongingness of speaking, thinking, and Being. This angle of vision is a first-rate instance of hermeneutics' recognizing of that which has been there already, approving of its inquiry into what *is*, rather than merely devising or speculating on what *can be*.

Tracing Gadamer's unprecedented philosophical take on language back to St. Augustine, Wierciński sensitizes us to the uniqueness of a hermeneutically afforded insight. He reasons that Gadamer's hermeneutic view of language, founded on Augustine's *verbum interius* developed in *De Trinitate* revolutionizes our understanding of the nature of language. While doing so, the author takes us on an important, enlightening tour of exploration through Augustine's thinking. He expounds that Augustine conceptualizes the relationship between the sign (*signum*) and the word (*verbum*) via drawing on the Stoic distinction of inner (λόγος ενδιάθετος) and outer word (λόγος προφορικός), and applies this differentiation in a new Trinitarian context (cf. Müll 1962, 7–56). Most significantly, as it is emphasized, we owe to Augustine's investigation of language not only an illumination of theological truths, but the very backdrop to the hermeneutic inquiry into the co-belongingness of thinking, speaking, and understanding. Elaborating the relevant citations from Augustine in Latin, Wierciński explains the gist of this belonging-together thus: "Thinking proceeds via an inner word, a spontaneously generated act of understanding. When we speak, we give voice to the word of the heart." (81)

Augustine's distinction between the inner word and the word we speak is interconnected with a recognition of the processual and temporal nature of knowledge. The temporal character of human knowledge and existence, as

different from the divine, entails the human word's powerlessness. The clash between the powerlessness of the human word and the power of *Verbum Dei* is the space for a hermeneutic reconnaissance. Very rightly, Wierciński names Augustine's contemplation of the relationship between the three Persons of the Holy Trinity (and its impact on human understanding) the hermeneutics of love. In a radical manner, he convinces us that it is the divine charity that enables us to interpret and to understand:

> With knowledge of things (*rerum notitia*) and knowledge of languages (*linguarum notitia*) we can better interpret scriptural signs, both literal (*signa propria*) and figurative (*signa translata*). The interpretation of Scripture is made possible by the divine charity. Augustine's hermeneutics is the hermeneutics of love. The gap between the human and the divine, the eternal and the temporal, the word and the thing is bridged by the charity. (81)

The reflection on Augustine's hermeneutic interrogation of language is taken even further by an eloquent reference to his involving triads: "Augustine sees an image of the divine Trinity in human cognition, the triad of memory (understanding), intellect (knowledge), and will (love); lover, beloved, and love; object, vision, and attention, etc." (84) The aforementioned quotation is one more instance of the author's unflagging quest for an ever deeper understanding of the interconnectivity between philosophical hermeneutics, theology, and phenomenology.

Wierciński's deliberation on language is a compelling inquiry into the dialogical nature of understanding. "The conversation that we are" (Gadamer 2000, 378; cf. Hölderlin 1946) happens diagonally: arching over the past and the present, language is both the medium of our search for Being and the possibility for Being's disclosure. And horizontally, language as "the *Vollzug* of the self-disclosure of Being" (89) enables the self to reach over to the Other, also oneself as the other. Bringing Gadamer, Heidegger, Augustine, Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Lonergan, and other thinkers into a conversation over the nature of language, the author also enhances our acknowledgement of the interconnection between language and Tradition.

The search for Being is not disenfranchised from the dialogues of the past, just on the contrary, we are immersed in Tradition's interplay of past and present, and our understanding involves and is guarded by the manifold and versatile voices of Tradition. The interrogation of the intimate relationship between language and Tradition leads to an expanded understanding of the inextricability of philosophical and theological insights—one of the book's major concerns, and one of its most inspiring accomplishments. As a matter of fact, it is the unity of language and Tradition that leaves no doubt about the import of viewing the fields of philosophy and theology as profoundly intersecting and abundantly cross-fertilizing. Here is one of the monograph's most illuminating passages that make the truth about the two disciplines' mutual permeability conspicuous:

> Hermeneutics is not only between the human and the divine, it is also between philosophy and theology. Hermeneutic philosophy must engage theology which grounds and permeates the Western Tradition. Conversely, the theological Tradition is incomprehensible without philosophy. This is not just a historical consideration: The subject-matter of hermeneutics, *die Sache selbst*, is theological. Hermeneutics is not theology, but it must be open to theology if it is to be receptive to the voices that constitute the Tradition that we are. (88–89)

Through this involving reflection on the nature of language and philosophy-theology reciprocity, Wierciński directs us to his central thesis of hermeneutics' universal character. The gist of the author's extended interrogation of *verbum interius* as the foundation for hermeneutics' universality can be best encapsulated in his own, enlightening words:

> The *verbum interius* is the ground and *modus experiendi* of Being. The nature of language needs to be rethought in the light of the uncovering of the verbum interius as the ground of the universality of hermeneutics. The "inner" of *verbum interius* is not a spatial "inner." The procession from the *verbum interius* to the *verbum exterius* is not a movement through space, but a procession in time, an ecstatic self-transcendence. (89)

Thanks to Wierciński's exceptionally meticulous scrutinization of the thinking-understanding-speaking interconnection, the (to the uninitiated) at-first-sight impervious concepts of *verbum interius* and language as the self-disclosure of Being are aptly straightened out. The inner word proceeds to its externalization not in terms of space, but is happening in time in the form of an "ecstatic self-transcendence." The ek-*stasis* of *verbum interius* is what we grasp as its articulation in speech. The occurrence of its self-transcendence is concomitant with understanding. Understanding cannot be taken as an act which is exterior to language, just on the contrary, it happens *in* and *through* language. Therefore, we can state that being the "binder" between *verbum interius* and *verbum exterius*, understanding does not have an extraneous character, its oneness with thinking and speaking is unambiguous.

Wierciński's discussion of *verbum interius* also entails an explication of the hermeneutic input in postmodern thinking. With real zest, the author introduces us to his cutting-edge concept of bridging the traditional and the current thinking, to the effect of reinstating our thinking about God's transcendental otherness:

> In its confrontation with post-metaphysical thinking, thinking the difference has special significance for the hermeneutic conception of tradition, thus acting as a bridge builder between the varied current philosophical positions. The theological confrontation with classical thinking-the-difference and the recently-modern and contemporary-postmodern thinking-the-difference can be understood as an answer to the challenge of opening up to 'thinking' openness to God's transcendental otherness—and thus to the traces of the transcendent—and not just to its becoming a disinterested functionary of God. (108)

Revitalizing, after Gadamer, the view of language as fundamentally ontological and based on its interconnection with the mystery of the Trinity, the book leads us out of the narrowness of the thinking of language as a mere communicative tool, and inspires us to see the lingual character of Being:

> Similarly to the Word as the second person of the Trinity, who as the Son proceeds from the Father and becomes the incarnated Word, thus allowing us to access the mystery of the Trinity, the human word makes it possible to see the true Being of things (*das Sein des Seienden*) in their linguistic appearance. (180)

Section two, "Thinking Hermeneutically: Opening toward Transcendence as the Imperative of Self-Understanding," of the first part contains an engrossing reflection on Balthasar's theology, Gadamer's hermeneutics of art, and Celan's poetry. It opens with "The Hermeneutics of the Gift: Mutual Interaction Between Philosophy and Theology in Hans Urs von Balthasar." Exploring Balthasar's hermeneutic theology of the gift, Wierciński reminds us that Balthasar was not only greatly influenced by Aquinas, but also by the philosophy of Ferdinand Ulrich, G. W. Friedrich Hegel, and Gustav Siewerth. The author places special accent on the fruitful Balthasar-Siewerth collaboration and friendship. Exemplifying the mutuality of the relationship between philosophy and theology through this remarkable intellectual exchange, he deepens our awareness of the richness of the cross-influences which have marked the two disciplines ever since their inception. Espousing the seminal import of the Swiss theologian for our understanding of theology/philosophy co-inspiration, Wierciński underlines Balthasar's role in rediscovering and furthering the theological/philosophical liaison as rooted in Thomas Aquinas. Unquestioningly, it is through Aquinas that we can acknowledge the two fields as "expressing one in two distinct ways" (cf. Hoping 1997), deploying their own methods, but also "ordered toward one another" (148; cf. John Paul II 1998, §§ 43–44). The hermeneutic reiterating of the medieval tradition constitutes a significant part of the study of the proximity of theology and philosophy. The section's main text and its exceptionally rich footnotes demonstrate this closeness via a discussion of the whole range of personal interactions between Balthasar, Siewerth, Ulrich, and Erich Przywara, as well as Balthasar's momentous disputes with Hegel, Jean-Luc Marion, Martin Heidegger, and Karl Barth.

The Balthasar-Marion debate, as presented by the author, deserves a closer look. Wierciński maintains that the thesis of theology's deployment of

philosophical thinking needs no special argumentation, and asserts that Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenology, which attempts to keep the two disciplines completely separate, has been criticized as doing crypto-theology (cf. 162; see also: Janicaud 1991; Derrida 1987, 1991). He writes:

> Marion's critique of ontotheology and his call to think God outside the question of Being are based on a wrong understanding of Being and the essence of God as *causa sui*. For that reason, the assumption that God should be conceived without Being or outside of Being—which inevitably leads to a rejection of ontotheology—needs to be questioned again too. (161)

Wierciński stresses that Balthasar's theology offers a convincing counterpoint to Marion's philosophical reservations, stating that for the former "interpretation of the *analogia entis*, God is not outside Being. The self-transcendence of God (*ekstasis*) belongs intrinsically to Being. The fact that metaphysics underlies theology does not contradict the autonomy of the faith. Faith must be rational." (161) Endorsing Balthasar's standpoint and pinpointing the deficiency of Marion's phenomenological approach to the question of transcendence, the author explains that phenomenological analysis does not warrant consistency in a methodological severance of theology and philosophy "without renouncing the phenomenological range of the phenomenon that is to be thought" (162).

It is impossible to do justice to the unusual richness of all the themes tackled in the second subsection of part one, "Thinking Hermeneutically: Opening Toward Transcendence as the Imperative of Self-understanding." Undeniably, the reflection on Gadamer's hermeneutics of art is a piece of hermeneutic artistry in its own right. We should like to proceed to the subtlety and powerfulness of Wierciński's interpretation of poetry, which is the most thought-provoking passage of this part. Placing his reflection on Celan's poem "Tenebrae" (187–202) here is the author's bold and well-grounded move. Opening us toward transcendence, theology cannot limit itself to the facile aspects of the human being's religiosity, or his/her basic awareness of eschatological matters, rather, it aims to embrace the whole of a human being's

experiencing of his/her existence in the face of the Absolute. The horrors of the Holocaust—the inconsolable, ever-bleeding wounds—call for a reconfiguring of the relationship between God-and-a-human-being. Celan's seemingly blasphemous reversal of the prayer's subject/object: "Pray, Lord, pray to us […]" requires a novel insight into the inexpressibility of a human being's drama and theo-drama. Hermeneutics allows us to acknowledge the most astounding configurations of God's and human being's intimacy, as well as the most abysmal, acute, or even subversive de-liaisons between Deity and humanity. The hermeneutic discernment of the theological issues is capable of deepening our understanding, as Wierciński accentuates, of "our matter with God," and, at the same time, helps us avoid any oversimplifications or banalizations of the most fragile texture of being *homo religiosus*. The author's interpretation of Celan's poem is most influential. Not only does it meaningfully contribute to his extensive explication of the hermeneutic, perspicacious look into theology, but it also, by touching on language's inappropriateness, insufficiency, and limitedness in the face of a dehumanized world, anticipates a hermeneutic interrogation into the nature of language as revealed in poetic disclosures, as well as of the theme of the lingual character of understanding, as developed in part two of the book.

Section three of part one is an extremely condensed presentation of the dispute over Heidegger's hermeneutics of existence by Welte and Siewerth. It begins with the question of God. Heidegger's two disciples see the import of the question of God in Heidegger's moving backwards through the idea of Being to metaphysics' basic premise. Siewerth's ceaseless endeavor (his "theologically empowered metaphysics") to reconcile Heidegger's ontological hermeneutics with classical metaphysics via a systematic engaging of Heidegger with Thomas Aquinas, is contrasted with Welte's hermeneutic-phenomenological theology and his seeing of Heidegger's posing the question of God "as the most delicate attempt to express the unsayable, without hurting it by doing so" (Welte 1975, 276). In time, as Wierciński notices, the two thinkers' responses to Heidegger become increasingly polemical, diverse, and non-univocal. The author leads us through those complexities to the point where he places Welte's and Siewerth's differing interpretations of Heidegger next to the issue of the forgetfulness of Being.

Such thorough investigation of Siewerth's and Welte's dialoguing with Heidegger's ontological hermeneutics is undeniably the author's original contribution to the ongoing "Heidegger's matter," especially bearing in mind that the English-speaking readership is less acquainted with the literature of, and on, the two philosophers (mostly in German), and of their productive conversations with Heidegger. Accentuating Welte's and Siewerth's concern with the uncovering of the traces of transcendence and their insistence on the human being's self-fulfillment as taking place within this horizon, Wierciński develops fully this section's central problematic—the hermeneutic thinking's openness toward the transcendent dimension of human existence—, and, at the same time, provides one of essential features of *existentia hermeneutica*.

The ensuing elucidation of Siewerth's "metaphysics as the empowerment of thinking" is an impressive presentation of the German philosopher's recondite path. The author stresses that for Siewerth "the thinking about Being under the aspect of the difference of Being is the culmination of metaphysical speculative thinking" (292). To give a synopsis of the nooks and crannies of Wierciński's inspirational and detailed account of Siewerth's metaphysics in a few lines would definitely not do justice to the depth of both the "forgotten" thinker's hermeneutics and the equally captivating commentary. Nevertheless, the affinities and contrasts between Heidegger and Thomas Aquinas that Siewerth, and Wierciński after him, pinpoint, leave no doubt about the salient nature of Siewerth's input in the development of the critical thinking about Being and the forgetfulness of Being. Let the following quotation of this frontline analysis speak for itself:

> As a theologically illumined metaphysics, it takes "the word of Revelation" as the word that "announces itself in the historical human space that is already illuminated in its understanding of Being." In this theologically empowered metaphysics, Siewerth tries to think the Being of beings, the *actus essendi*, as the mediating center between Being and God, between contingency and necessity. (306; cf. Siewerth 2003, 82)

The comprehensive examination of Siewerth's engagement with Heidegger and his forming of an ingenious path as an answer to the question of Being is the author's powerful manifesto to the exigency of "cultivating the piety of

thinking in our questioning" (310). This stance is magnified by the section's concluding sentence: "The historicity of thinking and the forgetfulness of Being indicate the perspective in which the relation between Being and truth must be thematized and re-addressed always anew" (310), which necessitates us to choose a dedicated re-thinking and re-articulating of the forgetfulness of Being as a genuine response to the call of thinking which is *existentia hermeneutica*'s essence and its ultimate responsibility.

The fourth subsection of part one, "Understanding as the Happening of Truth," scrutinizes the question of the primordiality of understanding, which is hermeneutics' true locus. Addressing the radicality of questioning and the problematic of Tradition, Wierciński makes us sensitive to the interlocking character of understanding and Tradition, explaining the latter's indispensable role in forming and transforming understanding:

> What matters in philosophy, is the radicality with which human beings question their own Life (*Lebensverständnis der eigenen Gegenwart*). It is precisely this "existential understanding of one's present life," which needs to be brought back to life. Therefore, what becomes essential is not the further elaboration of ontology, but the understanding of understanding as intimately involved and integrated into Tradition (*Überlieferung*). (314)

To understand means to understand in relation to Tradition. In this light, hermeneutics and philosophy shine forth as pursuing the same goal: philosophy's fundamental task and hermeneutics' central preoccupation coalesce in their exigency of reaching out for understanding as immersed in Tradition and acknowledging its irresistible impact. The commonality of philosophical and hermeneutic pursuit urges the author to remind us of philosophy's first and foremost challenge:

> The ethos of a philosopher is to rescue the True. Understanding ἀ-λήθεια as unconcealedness, places it in the dialectic horizon of concealment (*Verbergung*) and unconcealment (*Entbergung*), and opens

> up a world in which things are made intelligible for human beings in the first place. (314)

Elucidating hermeneutics' intermediary position in relation to understanding, Wierciński, after Gadamer, accentuates that "hermeneutics is not interested in the procedure of understanding, but in the clarification of the conditions in which understanding takes place" (Gadamer 2000, 295). Vitally, hermeneutics' non-prescriptive approach to understanding avows its temporal character. The temporality of understanding makes us aware of the limitedness of our cognition. If human understanding happens in the basic structure of cognition's limitedness, we also need to grasp that understanding is always conditioned by its pre-suppositional nature. Each time we endeavor to understand, our understanding rests on its fore-structure (fore-having, fore-sight, fore-conception), and thus, we cannot speak of understanding in terms of an isolated, atemporal singularity, and/or homogeneity.

The undeniable axis of *Existentia Hermeneutica* is the interrelatedness of language and human understanding. Language does not exist outside of Being and Being embraces the lingual dimension of one's being a human being. As Wierciński puts it soundly: "Human Dasein resides within language: 'Language is the house of Being.' [cf. Heidegger 1977b, 217] Therefore, language is a constitutive aspect of the human being. We are not in a position of stepping outside of language. It is not we that speak, but 'language that speaks,' (*die Sprache spricht*)." (317; cf. Heidegger 1959, 32) In this place of the book, the author resumes the discussion of Gadamer's assertion of the import of *verbum interius*, dealt with in the earlier sections, and electrifies us with one of his momentous statements. This time not only reinvigorating our comprehension of Gadamer's disclosure of the linguality of human understanding, but also problematizing Heidegger's theo- and a-theo-logical position:

> However, the Gadamerian retrieval of *verbum interius* renews the young Heidegger's project of a phenomenological and hermeneutic rehabilitation of medieval theology. Hermeneutics must never forget that the remembering of language was effected through the retrieval of a theological insight. Heidegger's contention that a theist cannot think

> Being is thrown into question by his own legacy. (317; cf. Heidegger 1983, 8–9)

Bringing in proximity Gadamer's recourse to the theological notion of *verbum interius* (in the context of his not being a theologian), and the Heideggerian a-theist stance, as arising, but also diverting from his Christian theological roots within a reconfiguration, broadens the scope of the reader's apprehension of the convergences and dissimilarities of the two thinkers' ontological hermeneutics, as well as the idiosyncrasies of their philosophical paths. It is one of the ways, in which the author expands our hermeneutic sensibility and guides us appealingly through that which pertains to hermeneutic existence.

Wierciński claims that *verbum interius*, as the *modus experiendi* of Being, allows us to dwell in the truth about Being's self-disclosive nature, as enacted in language. It is indispensable at this point to mention the author's insights, stemming from the employment of Heidegger's hermeneutics of existence and the German thinker's rejuvenation of the ancient Greek notion of *aletheia*. To see Being and language through the prism of Heidegger's ontological hermeneutics illuminates the two further, as indissoluble, and invites us not only to comprehend Being's self-disclosure as happening in language, but also to acknowledge its limitedness. The author explains:

> Fusing horizons, we go beyond something that is already familiar to us. In the interplay of that which is understood (*das Entborgene*) and that which is veiled and in need of being disclosed (*das Verborgene*) we realize that our access to that which wants to be disclosed is *in* and *through* language. (321)

Not everything is accessible, but that, which is, is disclosed *in* and *through* language. The limitedness of our access to Being lies in the powerlessness of language. As human beings, we are confronted with the lack of the ultimacy of understanding, as it is stranded between the human (thus contingent, provisional, and finite) mode of being and the unlimitedness of the divine. We find ourselves in the position of having less power to express "what is" than

we would like to possess. Language mediates between that which is veiled and that which is unveiled; however, it is not being done to the fullest. The author spells it out thus: "We discover that language itself lives in the in-between of concealment and unconcealment, *im Zueinandergehören von Verbergung und Entbergung*." (321)

Language's living in the in-between of concealment and unconcealment directs us to *existentia hermeneutica*'s other important in-betweenness. Spanning the distance between the self and the Other, language partakes in distinct modes of Being: familiarity and strangeness. It is through hospitality, including linguistic hospitality, that we cross the barrier between us. Abolishing the divider that happens in conversation becomes the genuine space for con-*version*, as a result of which we do not remain the same we were before. Conversation's welcoming gesture is at the same time hermeneutics' welcoming gesture. It is *in* and *through* conversation that we experience our lives as *existentia hermeneutica*. Conversation is the true texture of hermeneutic existence.

What is most significant is that in conversation we become "bound to one another in a new community" (326). The phenomenality of the encounter in conversation is not about "putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view but being transformed into a communion" (326). The communion, the attunement to and the following of the *Sache selbst*, that happens in conversation, inspires us to appreciate fully the otherness of the Other without needing to subjugate or dominate him/her: "Hospitality and responsibility describe the basic characteristic of a human being dwelling in-between familiarity and strangeness in the mode of διά-λέγειν, of welcoming the difference and the richness of the relationship with the Other." (325) To cover the initial distance between the mineness and otherness requires the appropriating of original meaning. The encounter with the unknown—the human being or the text (as the author highlights)—is a reminder that the path to understanding leads via the confrontation with otherness. Quoting Gadamer's reminiscences of his last conversation with Heidegger, Wierciński makes us feel the extent of the drama when conversation comes to an end, and, in this way, he takes us to the very heart of the assertion about the lingual nature of understanding. When we con-*verse*, we can hope that, led by conversation, we can reach out for an ever-growing understanding:

> There is something terribly distressing when the conversation is over. It is a defeat of hermeneutics; a defeat of hope and optimism that we can come to an understanding. As long as we allow ourselves to be led by a conversation, we can maintain a positive trajectory of being on the way to understanding. (326)

What is most crucial, is our continuous being on the way to understanding, in our incessant and intimate conversation with the world, the Other, and oneself as the other. The non-finality of understanding shows that the extension of the way on which we are is, at the same time, the expansion of who we are. In the true Gadamerian spirit, we can talk of the consequential and meaningful increase in Being (*Zuwachs an Sein*; cf. Gadamer 2000, 135–136). The question of understanding situates us in the very center of Gadamer's hermeneutics of conversation. Writing about Gadamer's radicalization of Heidegger's hermeneutics of existence, Wierciński makes us aware of the import of Gadamer's getting near the question of Being to the challenge of understanding. This enables us to see the essence of Gadamer's hermeneutic enterprise as a practical philosophy of interpretation and understanding.

The author's shaping influence on both the hermeneutically sensitive and the hermeneutically aloof reader can be fully discerned when he quotes Gadamer's lines on understanding as an adventure. Understanding is dangerous, but it also affords unique opportunities. One cannot but follow the glamorous truth of Gadamer's view of understanding as action which "always remains a risk" (332). The challenge, adventure, and risk that are involved in understanding, and which Gadamer endorses, inspire us to acquaint ourselves further with his practical philosophy.

The horizon of understanding encompasses lived human experience. Gadamer in the first place locates understanding in the practical dimension of our lives. Concerned with rejuvenating the importance of *phronesis* for hermeneutics (cf. Gadamer 1994, 332), Gadamer considers practical wisdom as the very one which gets us near to understanding *par excellence*, and calls it "the condition of any theoretical knowledge" (339). Undeniably, Gadamer's hermeneutics, as oriented toward factical historical life, promotes *phronesis* as hermeneutic virtue (cf. Gadamer 1998). One of the vital achievements

of this section of the book is the accentuation of the Heideggerian legacy in Gadamer's formulation of his hermeneutics of practical wisdom. The author explains that, following Heidegger's hermeneutics of facticity with an emphasis of the momentarily concrete, Gadamer sees hermeneutic understanding as an application of that which needs to be understood in the interpreter's factic life (cf. Gadamer 2000, 310–321; 1991, 1986).

Bearing in mind the above and other gripping passages which explicate the significance of *phronesis* in our experiencing of understanding, we could venture a thesis that for Gadamer understanding and practical wisdom (excellence rather than art) are isomorphic. Following Gadamer, Wierciński contends: "Existential situatedness, which takes seriously one's own life and one's particular hermeneutic situation is the condition *sine qua non* of any understanding." (341) The author elucidates the applicability and effectiveness of hermeneutic interpretation as grounded, each time, in the concreteness of our existential situation, and emphasizes that mediating "between universal and particular, φρόνησις is a hermeneutic virtue, which capacitates the interpretation and reasoning" (342). It must be accentuated that we owe to the author an unprecedently exhaustive elaboration of Gadamer's deployment of *phronesis* in his hermeneutic philosophy. The inclusion of dialogue as the locus of understanding makes Gadamer's approach far more embracing, and, in fact, bespeaks the core of the human way of understanding. The reciprocity (which dialogue occasions) is a precious experience of partaking in reasoning. Thus, it is not only the dialectics of the general and the particular (the virtue-oriented attitude), which illuminatively prompts understanding, but the hermeneutic conversation with its unique possibility of exposing and confronting differing opinions to the effect of a better understanding of the issue at hand.

Gadamer's dialogical model of understanding makes us aware that, while coming to an understanding "here and now," we participate in meaning rather than create it. This is of vital significance, since hermeneutics, as Gadamer stresses, is not about devising a method, but about "describing what is the case" (349). Discovering and describing "what is," or "what the case is," transforms the way we think about interpretation and understanding. One of the stirring, though perhaps less noticeable aspects of Gadamer's illumination of understanding (as mentioned by the author), is the philosopher's distinction

between experience and insight. Quoting Gadamer's enthralling lines, Wierciński animates our imagination to see the transformative power of insight which "always involves an escape from something that had deceived us and held us captive. Thus, insight always involves an element of self-knowledge and constitutes a necessary side of what we call experience in the proper sense. Insight is something to which we come." (Gadamer 2000, 350)

By contrast to this less prominent facet of Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy of understanding, the issue of finitude, pronounced in mighty and varied ways, draws our attention unwaveringly, if not disquietingly. Gadamer, Heidegger, and Ricoeur (whose philosophical path is chosen to instantiate the dilemmas of philosophy/theology interconnectivity in the subsequent section) insist on the out-and-out importance of finitude for human understanding. Heidegger's ontological hermeneutics of facticity, Gadamer's hermeneutics of conversation, and Ricoeur's textual hermeneutics are connected by the very thread of meditating on human finitude. Following in the author's footsteps, we may pause and think of the three thinkers' contribution, through their hermeneutics of finitude, to our awareness of how we understand what happens to us when we understand and, crucially, how our understanding is determined by our finite being, and thus, we can be closer to the central precept of an understanding of our existence as *existentia hermeneutica*.

Section four of part one, "The Heterogeneity of Thinking: Paul Ricoeur, the Believing Philosopher, and the Philosophizing Believer," offers a riveting re-opening of the vexing quandary around the philosophy and theology connection/disconnection. Wierciński makes two important claims about Ricoeur in this respect. Firstly, he compares Ricoeur's position to Kant's. The author poses an open-ended question, leading us to the possible answer by stating the following: "For Kant, whatever truth may occur in theology, it is subordinated to the criterion of philosophical rationality. One may legitimately ask whether a similar subordination covertly determines Paul Ricoeur's work in the philosophy of religion." (355) Secondly, he suggests that the danger of transgressing the barriers between the two disciplines in Ricoeur seems to be overcome in his oscillating "around a creative coexistence of the two disciplines by keeping to a rigorous methodological division" (356). Wierciński comes at this point to a more general formula, which could guide us in the matter of

avoiding the situation of one of these disciplines having to subsume to the other:

> On the one hand, a philosopher can continuously deepen his sensitivity to philosophical problems as he engages the Scriptures. On the other, a theologian implementing the methodological apparatus of philosophy can reach a more profound understanding of theology and his own personal religious conviction. (356)

The stance framed in this way wins us over to the author's decidedly clear and convincing way of thinking about the uneasy relationship between philosophy and theology. Engaging the Scriptures enables a philosopher to deepen his sensitivity to philosophical problems. And this applies not only to moral matters—the issues of guilt, responsibility, justice, and love, which the author mentions while discussing Ricoeur's philosophically and theologically underwritten reflection. Becoming more sensitive works to the effect of a far more extensive attitude, which involves standing up against all compartmentalization in thinking as such, while embracing the discomfiting topics that need to be reflected upon. Satiated with aporias and paradoxes, embodying disquieting and highly tangled hi-*stories*, the Scriptures invite the reader to delve deeper into the more subtle meanings of human reality, and to a continuous effort to think and to re-think the possible and the impossible, the sacred and the profane, the acceptable and the unacceptable. This is what Wierciński very aptly names "thinking appropriated by the possibilities contained in the biblical texts" (373). To forsake such possibilities would be unwise for a thinker, and would disavow the adventure of thinking *per se*. By the same token, when a theologian deploys philosophical methodology, he/she can benefit from a re-thinking of the theological issues against the *doxa* of the so-far existing thinking. In this anti-schematic approach, all points of contention, tackled with the aid of philosophical methodology, can be illuminated to the effect of a novel rendering of the already savored, thus building a culture of reflective, mature, and open Christianity.

Therefore, right from its beginning, the section on Ricoeur's concomitant paths of a believing philosopher and philosophizing believer, is

both an excellent instance of the possibility of a non-subsuming relationship between philosophy and theology as well as an incentive to develop our thinking about this recurring problematic. Without a shadow of a doubt, Wierciński's voice attests to the topicality of the philosophy/theology (dis) engagement. Being one of its prevalent ideas, this issue (alongside many others) bespeaks the book's relevance in the overall framework of today's philosophical discourse (cf. Wierciński 2010). Suffice it to mention the controversial issue of crypto-theology in Jean-Luc Marion's philosophy—his open admission to the Catholic provenance, while defending the position of a believing philosopher.

The heterogeneity of thinking, represented by the philosophers discussed in the book and unmistakably by the author himself, brings us anew, in the later sections of part one, to the phronetic dimension of the philosophical enterprise. The varied ways of realizing the philosophical ethos bespeak the phenomenality of thinking. Phronetic sensibility presupposes an openness to, and an acknowledgement of the unfamiliar, the contradictory (Ricoeur's seminal deliberation on the conflict of interpretations), or even the hostile, as well as the conducive employment of that which is at variance with our thinking (Gadamer's famous insight into conversation's interlocutors: "This means, however, constantly recognizing in advance the possibility that your partner is right, even recognizing the possible superiority of your partner. Is this too little?"; Gadamer, 1997, 36).

It is only through thus defined openness that we can experience the abundance and unending nature of interpretation and understanding. A prudent approach to thinking puts us in the position of an unflattering research of all that might enrich, cultivate, or refine it without setting out limits, without instant rejection of other thinking on the grounds of ideological, religious, or other differences. The undulating interconnection/disconnection between philosophy and theology throughout the history of the two disciplines resonates with the lesser or greater appreciation of the positive fruits of thinking-the-difference. The diverse ways of the realization of thinking-the-difference by key hermeneuticians who figure in the book encourage us to embark on a never-ending journey to uncover what thinking consists in. Ricoeur's capability of thinking-the-difference was the begetter of either overtly philosophical or outwardly theological texts. Heidegger's contesting of his religious roots,

while recycling and re-appropriating his theological thinking, resulted in the possibility of a new beginning—the a-theological thinking. Gadamer's rehabilitation of medieval thought (taking over where Heidegger had set it aside), and his ingenious probing into the nature of language through the Augustinian notion of *verbum interius*, entailed not only a novel approach to language but proved the philosopher's thought to be a witness to thinking-the-difference. The inseparability of thinking the theological from the philosophical pole occasioned a milestone insight into the lingual nature of Being, as well as contributed greatly to linguistic thinking.

Wierciński's prescient claim about the permeability and inseparability of philosophical and theological thinking intones many themes. While the exceptional diversity and profundity of the issues of Christian theology that he elaborates can be viewed as a *vade-me-cum* of the thinking faith—a wellspring of knowledge in its own right—, *in* and *through* those themes the author sensitizes us incessantly to the concomitancy of the rootedness of the hermeneutic investigation in Tradition and its unending, meaning-laden openness to new interpretations. It is the movement backward to the roots of philosophical/theological thinking and the movement forward toward a recognition of new interpretive possibilities that propel hermeneutic interrogation. Negotiating between past and present, engaging various thinking traditions, mediating between the already known and the new, hermeneutics creates a space for advancing human thinking in its primordial need to understand "what needs to be understood." It is only by respecting and employing the multitudinous traditions and currents of thinking, also divergent and contradictory, that we are enabled to unearth what otherwise would have been inaccessible to us. Through an enticing examination of the interweaving paths of philosophy and theology, Wierciński leads us on our way to understand ourselves, our-being-in-the-world, fostering, thus, our drawing-near to an understanding of Being.

"The courage to ask and the humility to listen," which the author puts forward as the program for thinkers—philosophers and theologians alike—, encompasses not just the blossoming of thinking in the interactions between philosophy and theology, but also the more attentive, more nuanced attitude to the problematics within the two disciplines. Wierciński's skillful alerting us to the value of hospitable dialoguing with different traditions, and culturally

pre-determined viewpoints through the example of Ricoeur's propounding of Christian plurivocity cannot go unnoticed. It is only through our humility in listening to many existing voices, no matter how perturbing and regardless of their provenance, that we can grow in thinking and grow as thinking beings. The idea of being humble in the confrontation with thinking that is different from ours, even if likely to cause resistance at the initial stage, is the only pathway to the more profound insight into what thinking and understanding are. The courage to ask is the philosophers' daily bread. One would not be a philosopher, if one did not dare to pose questions. Asking questions, however, should not amount to a self-complacent dwelling in the charm of one's intellectual prowess, but should be oriented toward a genuine investigation of *die Sache selbst*, in the confrontational/collaborative way with Others who possibly can always think differently.

The humility to listen encompasses the bitter realization that one can err. It involves a possibility for and exigency of transformation. We need to be humble enough to understand fully that the other name for humbleness is an unlimited *effata*. And thus, our minds are elevated to grasp the truths which would otherwise remain unattended, or even inaccessible. The unending circle of question and answer, into which we should allow ourselves to be drawn, according to Heidegger, is also the very space of realizing that we cannot have the last word.

> The way Gadamer understands the word goes beyond the signifying function of the word and toward the word as a realization of thinking. As such, it is never the last word, because thinking is always thinking further, there is always something more to think of and to say. (144)

The last subsection of part one, "The Courage to Ask and the Humility to Listen," cogently titled "Thinking Imprisoned: a Captive Mind Tortured by the Demands of the Technological Age," is an outstandingly lucid precis of what hermeneutic endeavor consists in. Thanks to its nuanced and evocative manner, this involving resume casts a spell on the reader to consider and reconsider hermeneutics in the full variety of its characteristic traits. The titled "captive mind" resonates both with Milosz's non-fiction work of the same title, and "the

invincible mind" from his poem "Incantation," the interpretation of which we encounter in the later part of this book. That is of no small importance, as in this way, Wierciński highlights anew the contrast between the unlimited, one could even say, untamed capacity for thinking with the human predicament in the post-metaphysical age, marked by an acute loss of contemplative thinking. Locating in poetry the chance for the restoration of the non-calculative thinking, the author reveals to us his concern thus: "Our age is profoundly affected, nay dominated, by calculative thinking, and we have thus lost our aptitude for an authentic way of awaiting the παρουσία." (393; cf. Heidegger 1977a, 91)

This section is also a powerful witness to the primacy of *phronesis* in philosophical hermeneutics. When the author speaks of hermeneutics' distinctly personal character, he stresses that interpretation does not happen outside of the human existential situation but is entrenched in it and is tested by it. What is most vital, is interpretation's transformative aspect, the import of which the author ascertains in the following way: "It is not an expression of the thirst for power and profit but a search for a deeper understanding of the need for personal change in our life." (388) The unlimited, dignifying, non-calculative, and non-violent approach to interpretation that hermeneutics incites, and Wierciński forefronts, takes us to the heart of hearts of the hermeneutic enterprise. Entertaining the limitless possibilities of interpretation, hermeneutics holds human thinking in the highest respect, it values the courage to re-address, re-think, and re-interpret the already interpreted. Hermeneutics' boundaryless horizon, as the author accentuates, bespeaks the human need to include the excluded, and "places itself in the service of those voices that are suppressed and denied expression" (388). Open to the opposing, disquieting, but also excluded and suppressed voices, hermeneutics does not cease to display its welcoming gesture to embrace ambiguity, insecurity, and incompleteness. In this way, it is able to avoid the fossilized, methodological assertions, and situate interpretation and understanding where it truly belongs—in life.

The author's reflection on the humility to listen provides an interesting connection between both parts of the book. Poetry is undeniably the locus of the many and confusing voices. Instead of standing outside of language and human experience, the poet stands in the very center of what happens and what needs to be put into words. The multiple voices that reach him/her partake

in the continuous procession of meanings: the unexpected, the unadjusted, the impenetrable, etc. We may guess that the smaller size of part two, "Poetic Disclosures: Language as the Medium of the Hermeneutic Experience," is dictated by the author's fidelity to the requirements of the two parts' differing content. Doing justice to the enormity of the issues dealt with in the first part, the author allocates respectively a due number of sections and subsections constitutive of this part's subject matter. This capacious approach mirrors the breadth of the issues that need to be expressed under the heading of "The Hermeneutic Discovery of a Theological Insight." Being a true treasure-trove, this part generously shares with us the theological intuitions in hermeneutic thinking.

By comparison, the shorter part two does not have its own impact diminished. Rather, its strength lies in the issuing of an invitation to indulge in the beauty of the unexpected (that is poetry's crucial role), but above all, in the beauty of language as the medium of the hermeneutic experience. Whereas part one explicates what hermeneutic existence is, part two displays the power and powerlessness of language in conveying the essence of *existentia hermeneutica*. The fragility of *conditio humana* and the assumed finesse of poetic language are shown respectively by these two parts as Being's meaningful disclosures.

The second part sets the scene for an understanding of poetry's capacity to encapsulate the nature of language. It is through its full acknowledgement of language's metaphoricity that poetry lets us approach the crux of an understanding of the phenomenon of language. The author acquaints us here with three important observations. The *energeia* that is released in the interplay of concealment and unconcealment becomes the true fodder for poetic artistry. Furthermore, what originates poetic activity, is a poet's staying in continuous awe with "what is." And finally, as the author affirms, poetry plays a unique role by accompanying us in our search for personal identity while we are listening to the confusing voices that we are.

Without a shadow of a doubt, Wierciński's reflection on poetry is not only a beautiful, meditative chant of Being, beauty, and love, reflected in his interpretations of the many pieces of poetry that appear here. Far more importantly, his unprecedented take on poetry is an impressing meditation on the hermeneutic condition of being a poet. This novel approach eschews

seeking another theory for poetic discourse. The author does not devise a new methodology of interpretation, but reaches out for what poetry's nature consists in. In his hermeneutic phenomenology of poetic artistry, pondering on the question of what poetry is, the author visibly etches its many and surprising dimensions. Far from being a facile and sentimental poetry enthusiast, he takes us to where we do not expect to be taken. The idea of a poet's witnessing to poetry—the undeniable axis of part two—is at the same time one of the instances and summits of the author's thinking-the-difference. Wierciński asserts that a poet is not merely a skillful craftsman/craftswoman, generating enticing strings of words. Rather, he/she speaks from the Reality which is beyond him/her, and takes from what is not his/hers, but from the reservoir of poetry. Pursuing beauty and truth, a poet is incessantly tormented, and is never left to feel at ease with what presents itself as poetry's texture: "The life of a poet is a struggle for the shaping of his/her poetic existence. It is a life of constant tension between loyalty and betrayal." (441)

Poetry is a witness to the exterior reality, but also, or even in the first place, to the reality of the inner self. The author contends that

> […] poetry can be described as a specific kind of 'doing anthropology,' a kind of access to all possible knowledge about man as such. The connection between poetry and anthropology manifests itself most openly in those poetic descriptions which have the exploration of the nature of man as their primary object, thus coinciding with the object of anthropology. (443)

Poetry indefatigably poses this topical query: what does it mean to be a human being? Over and over again, it attempts to resolve the questions of our humanity: our uncertainties, dilemmas, any sudden and dramatic changes of fate. But also, it is a mirror to our conscience, it guards us and protects that which we deem most precious as human beings. The author states firmly: "Poetry is, therefore, a school for one's humanity. It reminds us that it is retained in everydayness. It speaks to a human being's conscience so that it would not betray itself." (435) He impresses us with his discernment and appreciation of poetry's grandiose role: "Poetry is a zealous search for a 'magic formula' in

which the whole truth about our existence could be accommodated and shine out brightly." (441)

Musing on the "intangible phenomenon" of being a poet, Wierciński emphasizes that the phenomenality of being a poet cannot be easily explained. Intangibility does not refer to the seemingly ephemeral world of the poetic creation as if disengaged from the troublesome reality outside. On the contrary, one can say that a poet is closer to reality than an average human being. The author ascertains:

> We can understand poetry as being an awakening to reality. Poetry, as opposed to versification as such, is a testimony to a specific kind of perception of reality that is, to a life that hovers between being lived ascetically and just taking sensual pleasure in reality. This perception puts the world, as experienced by the poet, into words. The language of poetry is the house in which the poet has made his/her home; there is no better way of referring to the poet's perception of reality. (439; cf. Heidegger 1990, 26 ff.)

It is not only that poetry absorbs and evokes human sorrow, pain, joy, bliss, and ecstasy, but it "can stir up the woundedness of man, in order to awaken him/her to being attentive in his/her existence" (444; cf. Heidegger 1963, 35). Poetry testifies profoundly to the hermeneutic understanding of a human being as a historical and lingual being. *Existentia hermeneutica* is a poetic existence since in poetry the linguality and historicity of Being come in a condensed, satiated, and excessive form. The author reminds us of Heidegger's illuminating words: "Language is the house of Being," and accordingly, we may say: poetry is the home to Being. It nurtures Being, makes it blossom and flourish, it invites Being to dwell in Itself:

> Poetry brings important intuitions which enrich an understanding of our capabilities and ourselves, clarifying the understanding of a human being as a fundamentally historical and lingual existence in time. It is in the journey toward the future that the human person discovers the richness of his/her existence and tries, in a continual interpretative effort, to reach self-understanding. (432)

Poetry invites us to continue unwaveringly the interpretative enterprise of our being-in-the-world.

Being a poet means being summoned to be a witness to poetry. And therefore, we can also speak of a poet as the one who experiences a spiritual call. The spiritual vocation comes from above, from the beyond of what is accessible. In this sense, begetting poetry is a hermeneutically understood access to the divine and to Being:

> The hermeneutics of poetic statements illuminates the phenomenon of being a poet, yet without mastering the mystery that surrounds the poetic state. The hermeneutics moves near the authentic core of being a poet by understanding that the poetic existence is intimately in touch with its personal foundations in Being—by way of being a unity that springs from metaphysical thinking. Being at home in the dimensions of what is wrapped in mystery is in fact what frees us to think about being a poet, by alerting us to the limits of language as well as the poet's own *conditio humana*. (442)

Appropriating the message of one of the numerous poems cited by the author—Milosz's "On Prayer"—, we can say that a poet is the "velvet bridge" (434) between the divine and the human. In the recognition of what is, only he/she can be the bridge, or cross the bridge. And this cannot happen on its own accord. Wierciński speaks of Milosz in terms of an instrument and his recognizing himself to be an instrument as such. Various voices come, find their habitat in a poet, and go. He/she is continuously and ultimately open to both the good and the disquieting voices. They perturb him, intervene, compel the poet to be put into words. Milosz gives a sigh; he wishes for the good voices, and not the evil ones. But the poet does not choose for himself/herself, he/she is chosen. The insight afforded by hermeneutics allows us to see the theological perspective of poetic creativity. To be a poet is to be chosen, like the Bible's prophets who had their will "bent" to God's.

Wierciński convinces us that: "Being a poet takes hold of a man or woman and challenges them; it requires him/her to approach themselves critically, hence also, to be critical in their appraisal of whether they are, or are not,

poets." (443) This "taking hold of" means to be a captive. Captivated by poetry's power, the poet yields to it, responds to it. Poetry challenges a poet to partake in its reality. The many voices a poet recognizes to be him/her cannot be quenched, as all of them are him/her: "The purpose of poetry is to remind us how difficult it is to remain just one person, for our house is open, there are no keys in the doors, and invisible guests come in and out at will." (406)

Each time anew, and also in astonishing ways, the poet enters a hermeneutic conversation with him/herself, the Other, and the world. The author reminds us of the indispensability of human experience in uncovering the hermeneutic truth of our existence. This is a process of hope, of embracement of what we are, of shunning any form of despair:

> Poetry accompanies these most intimate encounters, saving the unique experience of being in a concrete human being, protecting it from the oblivion that encroaches upon it by means of generalization. Hence the poet is "the enemy of despair, a friend of hope," together with all the shades of the struggle as long as he/she is on the way. (438)

In lieu of concluding remarks, one cannot but express an amazement at *Existentia Hermeneutica*'s stupendous breadth of themes, which makes us, at the same time, continually marvel at the unlimited possibilities of a human life to be lived to the fullest. Bringing philosophy, theology, and poetry into conversation, the author pays tribute to the grandeur of human thinking, expressed in its versatile and astounding ways. If a poet's "vocation is to contemplate Being," as Milosz says, and Wierciński emphasizes, we may say: and so, it is prodigiously the call of philosophy and theology. Thanks to this most comprehensive inquiry into human existence, we can fully appreciate the truth of the human mind as invincible. Our human need of intellectual expressiveness takes diverse and unforeseeable forms. Thinking with Wierciński, which is a delightful experience of contemplative thinking (*existentia hermeneutica*'s wellspring and intent), we can enjoy the fruits of an embracement of the interweaving paths of philosophy and theology, and appreciate poetry as their valuable partner. Philosophy, theology, and poetry

alike aim to investigate what is within our experience of being-in-the world (*In-der-Welt-sein*) and our being-with (*Mitsein*).

Human existence as *existentia hermeneutica* is at the same time and profoundly *existentia interpretativa*. As human beings, thus finite beings, we are always experiencing insatiability and insufficiency, while continuously attempting to describe and interpret the reality we live in: "The call to interpret is ontological, ethical, and transcendental for it points to our roots in other worlds: It demands a personal response not only to being-there but to being-grateful to Being." (493) All the dimensions of interpretation mentioned herein find their culmination in the realization of being as being-grateful to Being. Gratitude is the only adequate response. *Existentia hermeneutica* teaches us to be thankful, and even more vitally and all-embracingly to view gratitude as our mode of being-in-the-world. And thus, we cannot but acknowledge our indebtedness to the author for revisiting the roots of thinking in its co-belongingness with understanding and speaking. We are thankful for an invitation to scrutinize the riveting sides of thinking-the-difference: the philosophical and the theological poles, since in thinking-the-difference we can experience the empowerment of thinking, to which *Existentia Hermeneutica* splendidly testifies.

Following Wierciński's response to the question of the future of hermeneutics, we can firmly state that in the technological age which luxuriates in various communication media, we are challenged by an increasing emptiness and ineffectiveness in communicating our true being to the Other. Hermeneutics as the art of conversation issues a constant call to make us participate in "an engaging con-*versation* that turns one's face toward the face of the other" (485). Conversation influences profoundly the way we live in the world and the way we live with others. By living our lives as a conversation, we continuously confront ourselves and others in the truth of our being-in-the-world. Recognizing the ubiquitous nature of conversation, Wierciński's reflection on the poetic disclosures of Being is, at the same time, an avowal of poetry's capacity for conversation. Addressing us, poetry frees our participation in what is being disclosed. To remain immune is impossible. And thus, the author's meditation on poetic disclosures shines forth as the book's crowning achievement, instantiating what is happening while Being discloses itself to us.

Through its emphasis on the exigency of dialogue in our lives (inter-personal, inter-cultural, inter-religious), hermeneutics speaks to our lived experience and awakens us to take up a conversation as the last chance to protect ourselves against the self-inflicted destructiveness of the technological age (cf. Gadamer 2002). Through the praxis of dialogue, hermeneutics predisposes us to a constructive tolerance and openness to otherness. Therefore, as the author powerfully puts it, living each time anew in an ongoing dialogue, we experience hope as our *modus existendi*. In this way, undeniably, hermeneutics is the philosophy of hope and the philosophy of future. In its orientation toward the future, hermeneutics can be said to display a particular kind of *visione anticipatrice*, a capability of a constant openness to unexpectedness, while endorsing its ability to listen to, respect, and learn from the voices of the past.

Wierciński's hermeneutic inquiry into the import of the various voices as participating in the disclosure of Being engages a reflection on language which does not rest on our controlling it as a means of communication, or on our mastering of it, but on language as disclosing Being. In the polyphonic nature of Being, what poetry witnesses to, theology contemplates, and philosophy conceives, is orchestrated in the magnificent symphony of an understanding of our being-in-the-world, of our "encounter with the truth of Being" (*pulchre, bene, recte*), to which *Existentia Hermeneutica* is a perceptive and incomparable witness.

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