

**Andrzej Wierciński, *Existential Hermeneutics: Understanding as the Mode of Being in the World* and *Hermeneutics of Education: Exploring and Experiencing the Unpredictability of Education* (Zürich: LIT Verlag, 2019).**

*Existential Hermeneutics: Understanding as the Mode of Being in the World* is an unrivaled work of scholarship, exploring the multifarious ways in which philosophy, theology, and poetry meaningfully interweave. Wierciński's exhilarating meditation on our being-in-the-world ingeniously captures the ubiquity of the hermeneutic character of human existence. The book reveals that by *thinking-the-difference*, hermeneutics make displays its unique welcoming gesture toward the investigation of the heterogeneous nature of human thinking. Recognizing the empowerment of thinking that arises from *Differenzdenken*, *Existential Hermeneutics* powerfully rejuvenates philosophical hermeneutics' inimitable contribution to the Humanities.

Addressing a vast range of themes, the belonging-together of language and understanding, forgetfulness of Being, self-understanding, metaphysics, Trinity, a-theology, and the pivotal Incarnation as the empowerment of *thinking-the-difference*, Wierciński draws on insights from an impressively dexterous readings of the whole host of thinkers: Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, Ignatius of Antioch, Thomas Aquinas, Augustine, and Richard of St. Victor, Hans Urs von Balthasar, as well as the less known Gustav Siewerth and Bernhard Welte. Orchestrating diverse voices, Wierciński places his prescient reflection on the lingual character of understanding at the heart of the book. Following Heidegger, he cogently asserts that language and human understanding belong together: "Human *Dasein* resides within language: 'Language is the house of Being.'" Wierciński's captivating explication of the relationship between language and understanding comes to its climax in a superb gloss on Gadamer's revalidation of Augustine's *verbum interius*. Arguing that Gadamer commences an original engagement with the nature of language as situated in the onto-theological perspective, Wierciński, makes a new foray into our apprehension of language, providing an ample stimulus for contemporary hermeneutics to rediscover and rearticulate the deep-seated connections between philosophical and theological discourses.

Acknowledging the importance of Gadamer's appropriation of Augustine, the book sensitizes us, at the same time, to hermeneutics' vital concern of reaching out for understanding as both rooted in and transcending Tradition. Dwelling in the hermeneutic *in-between* of the past and the present, experiencing our being as finite, contingent, and provisional, continually facing the challenges of understanding, we partake in Being's disclosing itself to us in the back-and-forth movement of the concealed (*das Verborgene*) and the unconcealed (*das Entborgene*), enacted *in* and *through* language. Wierciński affirms that the imperative to understand and interpret, which is embedded in our embracement and dynamic responding to the dialectic of familiarity and strangeness, indicates the unfolding of human existence as *existential hermeneutics*, i.e., *existential interpretativa*.

In the overwhelming struggle to make sense of our being-in-the-world, we incessantly attempt to describe, re-describe, and interpret reality as profoundly stranded between finitude and infinity. The task of interpretation encompasses lived experience, and thus the possible risk of misinterpretation and misunderstanding. Locating understanding in the practical dimension of life, in our situatedness, Wierciński potently revives the significance of *phronesis* for hermeneutics, sensitizing us to the intimate connections between the unique unrepeatability of the self, his/her existential situation, and radical responsibility (*re-spondeo*).

Pondering hermeneutics' endeavor to position us in the horizon of thinking about what happens *to* us and *in* us when we understand, Wierciński makes an enticing recourse to poetry which he deems "a zealous search for a 'magic formula' in which the whole truth about our existence could be accommodated and shine out brightly." His splendid interpretations of poetry by Hölderlin, Celan, Rilke, and Miłosz that both intersperse and are an integral part of his philosophical-theological discourse aptly show that the poetic word is the portentous locus of the disclosures of Being. Integrating the miscellaneous insights afforded by a stunningly meticulous interrogation of the pregnant but often overlooked and underrated intersections of philosophy, theology, and poetry, *Existential Hermeneutics* is a superb achievement that remains attuned to its momentous, interdisciplinary, and far-reaching character.

Wierciński's *Hermeneutics of Education: Exploring and Experiencing the Unpredictability of Education* is a supremely powerful and thought-provoking hermeneutic response to our being-in-the-world in the dynamics of its formation and transformation. Instead of offering one more examination of some voguish teaching methodologies or treating us to a purely theoretical stance, Wierciński places hermeneutic hospitality and the prodigy of our being a gift to one another in the very center of educational endeavor, sensitizing us thus to its dialogical, reciprocal, and phronetic dimension.

Advocating for the relevance of the hermeneutic triad of understanding, explaining, and applying (*subtilitas intelligendi, explicandi et applicandi*) for the educational enterprise, Wierciński focuses on application (*An-wendung*, turning toward something) that results from a dialogic encounter in the teaching environment, in its fundamental and compelling openness to the inexorable *μετάνοια*. In the fusion of the horizons of the teacher and the student (*Horizontverschmelzung*), education *happens* a hermeneutic conversation, and opens a unique possibility to discover the otherwise unfeasible. As Wierciński evocatively underlines, education in its conversational character allows us to unravel those areas of meaning and unknot those problems that we would not be able to solve on our own. Therefore, hermeneutic education is the time of a momentous unveiling (*revelatio*), in which a given phenomenon speaks to us *differently* each time we undertake the invaluable task of understanding in the true spirit of Gadamer's oft-quoted dictum of *immer-anders-verstehen*. In its nourishing and strengthening of our need to understand and to interpret, education cannot be narrowed down to an instrumental multiplication of the possible and versatile answers to a given question or to a facile accumulation of data. Hermeneutic education shifts the accent from a mere quest for knowledge to a persistent but also life-affirming and life-changing cultivation of a willingness to understand, which calls for welcoming unpredictability and risk. Instead of eliminating and suffocating different and complicated voices, hermeneutic education stimulates and fosters patient encounter with what needs to be understood without any shortcuts and cutoffs.

Fostering Heidegger's crucial distinction between calculative and contemplative modes of thinking (*berechnendes* and *besinnliches Denken*), Wierciński encourages us to follow the path of *vita contemplativa*. He flashes out its unquestionable positivity by excellently combining the medieval care

of the soul, encapsulated in St Bonaventura's plea to expand on our contemplative work by sharing the fruits of contemplation (*contemplata tradere*) with the hermeneutic call to implement that which has been learnt (*Hermeneutik im Vollzug*). Wierciński magnifies his most precious invitation to cultivate meditative thinking by sensitizing us to the beauty of the poetic word. His penetrating and erudite interpretations of Miłosz, Herbert, T.S. Eliot, Hölderlin, Szymborska, and Rilke enhance our imaginative response to Being disclosing itself to us, as well as help preclude our falling prey to the narcissistic and complacent apprehension of the self.

With a hand of a virtuoso, Wierciński brings into conversation the insights of contemporary hermeneutic anthropology, philosophical hermeneutics, phenomenology, and psychoanalysis, and bridges them with the theological traditions of St [Augustine](#) and St Aquinas, inspiring us to see the indispensability of the hermeneutic dialogue of the past and the present and to recognize the power of the pedagogical enterprise as both embedded in the wisdom of the past and as happening in the now (*hic et nunc*). Enthusing us to apprehend the profundity of the *event* (*Ereignis*) of education as the genuine *locus educativus* of our intellectual and spiritual growth, Wierciński rejuvenates in us the important and exhilarating truth that when we understand, we always self-understand (*Verstehen ist Sichverstehen*), and that education is always self-education (*Erziehung ist Sich-Erziehen*). Facing and honoring the reality of our vulnerability and fragility, *l'homme capable, agissant et souffrant* is a being capable of a more astute and compassionate response to the Other (*répondre à la vulnérabilité*) in situations which call for phronetic wisdom. In its intensely sensitive and consequential attunement to the possibilities inhering in the *eventing* of education, Wierciński's remarkable *tour de force* of education encourages us to rejoice in the inexhaustibility of understanding and the beauty of the unpredictability of what happens *to* us and *in* us when we learn and understand.