

ISSN 1918-7351

Volume 15.2 (2023)

Voulez-vous danser avec moi
**Or An Invitation to Think:
In Conversation with the Life and Work
of Andrzej Wierciński**

Barbara Weber

University of British Columbia

ORCID: 0000-0002-2113-6797

*Einen Denker achten wir nur, indem wir denken. Dies verlangt, alles
Wesentliche zu denken, was in seinem Gedanken gedacht ist.¹
—Martin Heidegger, Nietzsches Wort “Gott ist tot”*

The trinitarian mutual pervasion (perichoresis) is the most fundamental and highest
archetype of the life as a community, where unity and plurality emerge
completely and simultaneously.²
—Gisbert Greshake

¹ Martin Heidegger, “Nietzsches Wort ‘Gott ist tot,’” in idem, *Holzwege*, 1935-46, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, *Martin Heidegger Gesamtausgabe*, GA5, (Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977), 254. English: *Off the Beaten Track*, ed. and trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

² Gisbert Greshake, *Der dreieine Gott: Eine trinitarische Theologie* (Freiburg i.Br.: Herder, 2001), 189. See also Oliver D. Crisp, “Problems with Perichoresis,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 56, no. 1 (2005): 119-140. Im Original: “Die trinitarische gegenseitige Durchdringung (perichoresis) ist der grundlegende und höchste Archetyp des Lebens als Gemeinschaft, wo Einheit und Unterschiedlichkeit völlig und gleichzeitig zum Ausdruck kommen.“

June of 2006, at the International Association for Philosophy and Literature (IAPL) in Freiburg, I first had the honor of meeting Prof. Andrzej Wierciński. I listened with enthusiasm to his original and poetic introduction to the panel on “Gadamer’s Understanding of Language as Conversation.” I was fascinated by his scholarly depth, charm, wit, and thoughtfulness as he facilitated a complex interdisciplinary discussion after the presentation of papers. It was by far the best panel at the conference. I felt as if I had just witnessed something very rare: A master communicator who travels with ease and grace between ways of thinking, knowing, and speaking. After the panel, we engaged in a most memorable and genuine dialogue on hermeneutics and education: I was still a junior scholar, yet he listened with intensity, openness, and care. Following our meeting, we continued to collaborate, and I became a member of the International Institute of Hermeneutics the same year. Ever since, his aesthetic sensitivity, ethical sincerity, and commitment to true academic thinking and dialogue have served as an inner vertical on my meanderings through the academic labyrinths. In his conversations with me and others, he switches effortlessly from Polish to English to German, aiming for understanding through movement and language. He thereby creates a shared horizon within which and with which we think and dance together. Stage and performance, enactment and conversing, allow the Other to emerge and be seen, heard, and loved as the Other. To me, Wierciński is an adventurer of the mind(s). Someone who travels toward the Other – always engaged, probing, and inviting to think further. It is, therefore, a great honor to have been invited to offer this *Laudatio* for my dear friend and most esteemed colleague.

1. The Art of Thinking Together: “Since we are a conversation ...”³

A *Laudatio* is an expression of praise and admiration. And while there is so much to “praise” in Wierciński’s work, a cold overview or monolithic description would be antithetical to anything his oeuvre stands for. Instead, the following paragraphs arise from the ongoing conversations I have enjoyed engaging in. The arguments find themselves as they evolve, allowing for the intertwining of ideas as I follow his invitation to think together. This approach could also be described as a *περιχώρησις* (*perichoresis*), i.e., dancing together through thinking. Wierciński writes: “περιχώρησις (*perichoresis*)—*circumincessio*—mutual interpenetration from *περι*—around and

³ In the original: „Seit ein Gespräch wir sind ...”. Friedrich Hölderlin, *Friedensfeier*, in idem, *Gedichte bis 1800*, ed. Friedrich Beißner, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 1, Stuttgarter Hölderlin-Ausgabe (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1946).

χορεύω—to dance - the unity between Christ’s two natures.”⁴ In such an encounter, we “understand one another” through con-versatio (*con-vertere* = “to turn, to move together”). This resembles a dance because each partner turns to where the Other just stood, picking a movement that now glides into his own body and inspires the next step. Of course, we cannot “perform” any dance *for* the Other. However, an idea, a step, a gesture may flow into us, linger and invite us to respond. And so, we turn and veer around one another – we “under-stand” one another in the most literal sense, even though this understanding is never complete and never final. This back and forth of ideas forms the core of a genuine conversation, which – and using German poet Rainer Maria Rilke – can also be described as a game of ball:

Catch only what you’ve thrown yourself, all is
 mere skill and little gain;
 but when you’re suddenly the catcher of a ball
 thrown by an eternal partner
 with accurate and measured swing
 towards you, to your center, in an arch
 from the great bridgebuilding of God:
 why catching then becomes a power--
 not yours, a world’s.⁵

Rainer Maria Rilke

The notion of throwing and catching can also be found in German philosopher Martin Heidegger’s untranslated book, *Über den Anfang*. He tries to set apart “*anfangen*” (to catch on) from “*beginnen*” (to begin). While *Beginn* is a predictable and measured point in chronological time, *An-fang* starts with the “catching” of something that continues, like the end of a rope (as opposed to catching a self-contained object). In this sense, *anfangen* stands in correspondence with Heidegger’s other term, “thrownness” (*Geworfenheit*). We are thrown into this world, into this

⁴ Cf. Andrzej Wierciński, “Trinity and Understanding: Hermeneutic Insights,” in Giulio Maspero and Robert Wozniak, ed., *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology: Disputed Questions and Contemporary Issues in Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Continuum, 2012).

⁵ In the original: "Solang du Selbstgeworfenes fängst, ist alles/Geschicklichkeit und läßlicher Gewinn-;/Erst wenn du plötzlich Fänger wirst des Balles,/den eine ewige Mitspielerin/dir zuwarf, deiner Mitte, in genau/gekonntem Schwung, in einem jener Bögen/aus Gottes großem Brückenbau:/erst dann ist Fangen-Können ein Vermögen,-/Nicht deiner, einer Welt."

appearance, into this situation, into this conversation etc., and it is now on us to continuously “*fangen*” (to catch) the beginning of the beginning; a beginning that has always already begun in symbiosis and the embrace of concealment (*Geborgenheit*) of the mother. This is interesting, as for Wierciński, beginning is likewise tied to being “incarnated,” i.e., to be born as flesh and blood, to be vulnerable, and thereby to be open to being encountered, embraced, and touched. And while we all begin in the concealment of the mother, this “beginning” or “birth” can happen more than once in life, for example, in our conversation with God. Wierciński writes: “Incarnation is a genuinely new beginning. The newness of this beginning reminds us of the event of creation. [...] As a pivotal point in history, the Incarnation is a permanent invitation to conversion and communion with God. In this respect, it marks a new beginning and transforms the meaning of newness. Each time a human being meets God, it is a new beginning since it expresses the human answer to God’s continual invitation to live with him.”⁶

This element of play or dance returns again when Heidegger writes: “Throwing and catching/The throwing toward ‘of’ being/The rejection ‘of’ being/The thrownness of Dasein/The projection of beings⁷/The throw and the more initial beginning./The throw and the *physis* (nature)./The throw and the event.”⁸ Thus, thrownness, catching, beginning, and projection are intimately intertwined. The throw as thrownness into Dasein is derived from the throw of Being itself as an event.⁹ And the very possibility of Dasein comes from being thrown into Being as well as the ability to catch one’s own beginning. Of course, we can always re-ject: Such a rejection introduces a difference and allows us to project this difference into the future of a new beginning. Therefore, *Anfang* is the unique historical presencing of the beginning in its irreplaceability. The beginning that Heidegger is pondering about is neither a rule nor a law; it is neither a predictable nor an identifiable point in time. Instead, “*Anfängnis*” (incipience) is the event as its fissuring as well as a singularity of fundamental difference. And while Heidegger lingers on the possibility of rejecting the incipience, Wierciński emphasizes the importance of being hospitable and open: “This new beginning of our love with God is the deepest desire of the human heart, which does

⁶ Andrzej Wierciński, A New Beginning: On Power and Powerlessness (Macht und Ohnmacht) of Thinking and Believing, December 24, 2022, *IIH webpage*, 1.

⁷ See in Latin: *iacere* = throw.

⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Über den Anfang. Gesamtausgabe. Band 70* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2005), 106. In the original: “Der Zuwürfe »des« Seins/Die Verwerfung »des« Seins/Die Geworfenheit des Daseins/Der Entwurf des Seienden./Der Wurf und der anfänglichere Anfang./Der Wurf und die [*physis*]./Der Wurf und das Ereignis.”

⁹ See Heidegger *Über den Anfang*, 108.

not calculate and decide what serves specific purposes. To begin afresh means to work out many new and always different possibilities to develop as a human being every time in this unique relationship.”¹⁰

In the following, I will begin with key ideas that are woven into Wierciński’s style of conversing, thinking, and writing, namely hospitality and suspicion, exegesis and eisegesis, departure and beginning. I will then explore some of Wierciński’s biographical influences and describe why for him, the urgency to interpret goes far beyond the field of philosophy.

2. Hospitality and Suspicion

The notion of hospitability becomes most notable in Wierciński’s style of conversation, i.e., a continuous invitation to think further. As such, however, it is not a simple affirming action but rather arises at the intersection of familiarity and strangeness, sympathy and suspicion. And while it can be disturbing to be met with suspicion, behind it lays a rare gift: Only if we remain suspicious, we allow for the Other to remain Other and resist the temptation to trap him in the past. Thus, hospitality is a two-edged sword, as genuine hospitality arises from a place of discomfort.

Wierciński himself states in an interview with Boyd Blundell: “I love meeting people at the table. Life starts with hospitality, with making room for the Other, with welcoming the stranger, who challenges us to accept him (*acceptum* from *accipere*—to receive, to accept). In Greek, ξένιος denotes a stranger, a guest, who enters into our life. Similarly, Latin *hospes* describes both a guest and a host, and *hostis* can refer to guest or enemy. In everyday life, it is not always easy to make a distinction between hostile and hospitable strangers. But everybody who is coming into our life calls for hospitality, care, and compassion. Therefore, I understand the main task of human life as the hermeneutics of hospitality.”¹¹

This unrestricted hospitality we can also find in the New Testament, where we are encouraged to invite the stranger. This is not always easy, as we do not know how the person will act: We might get hurt or constrain the Other by assimilating his ways to our own ideas and habits. Wierciński writes: “Incarnation renews (*re-novo*) the world and us in the world and with the world. It empowers understanding ourselves anew in

¹⁰ Wierciński, *A New Beginning*, 3.

¹¹ Andrzej Wierciński, “We Must Interpret: The Hermeneutic Retrieval of the Philosophical Tradition. Andrzej Wierciński in Conversation with Boyd Blundell,” *Analecta Hermeneutica*, vol. 3 (2011): 3.

this new world. The encounter with God always happens in the uniqueness of the conversation. Coming together within diversity means an art of listening to the Other, having a new ear, and an open heart for the needs of the Other. It challenges us to let the Other say something to us (*Sagenlassen*).¹² This is an invocation to be attentive to the moment while remaining suspicious, thereby preventing us from imposing our own prejudice onto the situation.

And while one might interpret this sort of hospitality as a salvation just for the Other, this would miss the point. In the New Testament, we read: “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” (Hebrews 13:2) [τῆς φιλοξενίας μὴ ἐπιλανθάνεσθε· διὰ ταύτης γὰρ ἔλαθόν τινες ξενισαντες ἄγγέλους.] And indeed, it is the hospitality toward strangers which allows for the most sacred moment to enter our world: We remember, as Joseph and Maria went from door to door during a chilly night, pleading for hospitality. Most people in Bethlehem, however, had no idea that it was the son of God who was at their doorsteps, offering a new beginning. We may ask if a conversation with the stranger symbolizes this very possibility for a new beginning – as *per definitionem* we do not know the stranger and might be unaware that we are indeed entertaining angels or God himself. “Since *Verbum Dei* discloses the conversational nature of God, our task is to learn the conversation with ourselves, with each other, and with God.”¹³ Engaging with Wierciński’s work through his writing and dialogues, there is always a feeling that one has been invited to such a conversation.

3. Exegesis and Eisegesis: The Hermeneutic Ear

There has been much debate regarding the hermeneutic ear and what it takes to understand.¹⁴ A text in itself is silent, has no voice, no resonance. As we open a book, turn the page, and start reading aloud, something almost magical happens: The voice and words enter the shared space. Some texts are close to us, both emotionally and historically, while others seem far away and strange. As we listen with the hermeneutic ear, we feel into the text with all our sympathy, yet also bring distance between us and the written word. It takes all of our imagination to take notice of something that differs from our own experience. In fact, it is quite surprising, a miracle even, *that* something

¹² Wierciński, *A New Beginning*, 6.

¹³ Wierciński, *A New Beginning*, 6.

¹⁴ Cf. Andrzej Wierciński’s “Cultivating the Hermeneutic Eye and Ear: Education as the Care for the Self” in idem, *Hermeneutics of Education*, 135-232.

absolutely Other *can* enter our horizon. This interlacing of sympathy and suspicion does not only happen when we read a text but also in everyday life: For example, while it can be helpful to try to read someone's face, our sympathy might stand in the way of us recognizing the Otherness of the Other. This distance between us, the text, or a person, Gadamer calls the "hermeneutic distance" (*hermeneutischer Abstand*). He writes: "Here, too, there is a tension. It is in the play between the traditional text's strangeness and familiarity to us, between being a historically intended, distanced object and belonging to a tradition. The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between."¹⁵ And while Wierciński follows most of these elements of understanding, in the last instance, he goes beyond Gadamer. More specifically, and by not taking anything for granted, he is dedicated to continuously bringing Being into the open. This endeavor is not for the simple entertainment of newness nor aiming for quantitative growth. Instead, through the continuous increase of Being (*Zuwachs an Sein*), one allows for something truly new to begin: "To lay open" means to transform Being and keep it in this evolving, responsive movement of presencing. Wiercinski writes: "By implementing the ontological difference between the Creator God and his creature, creation can be interpreted as a participation in the role of the Son as an image and expression of the Father within the Trinity. Creation can be seen as God's own gift to himself: Coming out of Non-Being (*ex nihilo-Nichts*) and yet empowered to Being by God. What is striking here is the fact that God remains not unaffected by his own decision (*Entschluss*). The transformation in God is substantiated by his own inner-Trinitarian event of love. This transformation we can interpret in the sense of an increase in Being."¹⁶ To truly understand, therefore, entails sensitivity, attentive listening, and the grace to allow the Other into one's innermost Being. As such, this can be a religious experience. Here, Wierciński builds on the German philosopher Gustav Siewerth's reading of Aquinas and suggests that God is neither Being nor equal to being of the Being, but is the continuous arrival (advent) or becoming.¹⁷ With this,

¹⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London/New York: Continuum, 2006; translated by J. Weinsheimer and D. G. Marshall), 295. In German: „Die Stellung zwischen Fremdheit und Vertrautheit, die die Überlieferung für uns hat, ist das Zwischen zwischen der historisch gemeinten, abständigen Gegenständlichkeit und der Zugehörigkeit zu einer Tradition. In diesem Zwischen ist der wahre Ort der Hermeneutik.“ (Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: Mohr Verlag, 1990), 300).

¹⁶ Wierciński, *Existential Hermeneutics*, 181-182.

¹⁷ "Aquinas calls it the 'actualitas omnium actuum,' 'the actuality of all acts,' the 'perfectio omnium perfectionum,' 'the perfection of all perfections.'" Andrzej Wierciński, *Philosophizing with Gustav Siewerth: A New German Edition with Facing Translation of "Das Sein als Gleichnis Gottes" / "Being as Likeness of God," And A Study, "From Metaphor and Indication to Icon: The Centrality of the Notion of Verbum in Hans-Georg*

he also refers to Heidegger, for whom (and quite different from Aristotle) potentiality is more important than actuality. In *Hermeneutics of Education*, Wierciński writes: “Heidegger in *Being and Time* stresses the importance of understanding phenomenology as a philosophical direction (*Richtung*) and interprets this direction not with regard to the actuality of phenomenology, but rather and decisively referring to its potential of opening up new ways to address the question of Being. ‘Higher than actuality stands a possibility. We can understand phenomenology only by seizing upon it as a possibility.’ Dasein, in turn, is an ability-to-be (*Seinkönnen*) and as such an always unfinished project. Dasein stands in the “event of unconcealment,” and understands accordingly. This ‘event’ (*Ereignis*) is the actual *locus hermeneuticus*, the realm where the understanding happens (*Verstehen vollzieht sich im sprachlichen Geschehen*).”¹⁸ In that sense, God creates Being, but this Being created by God is not the same as the Being of beings. And while, of course Being and the Being of beings are co-dependent, if one were to see God as the Creator, it does not necessarily mean that he created each piece in the world. Instead, God created creation, and this creation brings forth beings. This is to say that in and through God, there is *perihoresis*: An eternal dance of becoming. This is why movement does not “add” anything on a quantitative level, and there will not be an increase in “God,” but rather, we are invited into this continuous conversation within God. As such, Incarnation could also be translated as “bringing into the open” – self-manifestation or self-revelation. On this exodus into the adventure of Being, we are not alone but travel with God¹⁹.

4. Exodus: Departure and Beginning

In Exodus 13: 4, we read: “Today you are leaving.” There is an intense urgency in these words, as they are both, a command and an invitation. And yet, is this not the very possibility of every moment in our life? We depart from what is familiar into an advent(ure) that we undertake with God, meaning that we depart both with him as well as away from him. In his book on the *Hermeneutics of Education*, Wierciński writes: “Facing life means living our life with all the challenges, obstacles, and problems that come up every day. This is the permanent call of hermeneutics: The call to interpretation and understanding is always a call to transition, to uncovering the

Gadamer, Bernard Lonergan, and Gustav Siewerth” (Konstanz: Verlag Gustav Siewerth Gesellschaft, 2005), 77

¹⁸ Wierciński, *Hermeneutics of Education*, 88.

¹⁹ P.c. Wierciński February, 2023.

primordial tension in human life between concealment and disclosure, to draw our attention to the need of exposing ourselves to ourselves and others in the welcoming spirit of hermeneutic hospitality. Facing life means that we realize that, very often, there is no way to undo the story of our life when we cannot identify with it. Facing life calls for the recognition of all our experiences without sticking to the negative consequences of our actions and inactions. By letting go of our deepest regrets, we can patiently learn to make peace with ourselves. Being at peace with oneself is not about a passive acceptance of the past but a conscious recognition of the human condition. It is an expression of the greatness of the wounded self, who does not only welcome and acknowledge the other wounded self but develops and treasures a relationship with the self by cultivating friendship with the self and the Other, thus allowing for personal change, growth, and healing. At the heart of hermeneutic hospitality is the unconditional welcoming of oneself and another while withholding judgment.”²⁰ And in one of his poems from the anthology *Muted Horizon*, he writes:

Unchanging Desires

I cherish solitude in the kitchen
 After the festive dinner
 Voices still ringing
 Piles of plates pots leftovers smells

Washing up I think of friendship
 Pain of unfulfillment in every letter
 Delight in silence. *Proton philon*
 The glasses must shine perfectly²¹

Thus, departure and becoming, farewell and beginning, are interlaced. And it is the vocation of the human being to depart from what was and thereby open up for what is to come, giving rise to a future that is undetermined, and continues to arrive (*l'avenir*) rather than be predicted and controlled. Thus, homecoming, homelessness, farewell, and beginning are the destiny of the human in God.

The idea of the exodus as departure and becoming has affected many aspects of Wierciński's thinking and writing. For example, in his reflection on the poet

²⁰ Wierciński, *Hermeneutics of Education*, 145.

²¹ Andrzej Wierciński, *Muted Horizon* (Lublin: Norbertinum, 2000), p. 44.

Czesław Miłosz,²² he describes how the poet concretizes his relationship with Being. And through this rootedness, Being is continuously revealed in and through the world. Poetry, in its closeness to Being, (dis)closes its (re)veiling character as we respond to what comes toward us in our advent(ure) into the future. In education, this becomes a life-long quest: To become aware of those inner dynamics that are happening when we are called into the transformative aspects of Dasein, which happens at the ontological level. Education is a way of being in the world as humans, who form and transform and, in return, are being formed and transformed. In this continuous transformation, education is an adventure where we become a question to ourselves. In his book, *Existential Hermeneutics*, Wierciński writes: “The main paradox of the hermeneutics of facticity lies in the twofold structure of facticity itself. On the one hand, it designates everydayness, which is paradoxically already known insofar as it is unknown. On the other hand, it indicates that which potentially resists comprehension. Thus, the hermeneutics of facticity highlights the tension between the understanding of factic life and the fundamental questionability of life and its manifestations. In fact, the conflict of interpretations appears to us as a positive characteristic of factic life. Philosophy must remain in this questionability. It calls for attentiveness to Being, which will allow for questioning a human Dasein in one’s own Being to the point of becoming a question to oneself: ‘*mibi quaestio factus sum.*’ This Augustinian struggle for understanding oneself was instrumental for the way Heidegger read Aristotle and admired his primordially of questioning. What Heidegger discovered in Aristotle was, on the one hand, his faithfulness to the Parmenidean notion of the oneness and unity of Being, and, on the other hand, the twofoldness of Being, which has been often overlooked in the traditional substance-oriented readings of Aristotle.”²³ Starting with the exodus from the womb into the world to our last departure as we leave our mortal body behind, farewell and beginning are the two faces of human existence.

And we, spectators always, everywhere,
looking at, never out of, everything!

²² Andrzej Wierciński, *Der Dichter in seinem Dichtersein: Versuch einer philosophisch-theologischen Deutung des Dichterseins am Beispiel von Czesław Miłosz* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 1997). See also his, - “Confusion of Voices: The Crucial Dilemmas of Being a Human Being, Czesław Miłosz’s Poetry, and the Search for Personal Identity,” in Barbara Weber, Karlfriedrich Herb, Petra Schweitzer, Eva Marsal, and Takara Dobashi, eds., *Cultural Politics and Identity: The Public Space of Recognition* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2011), 147-174.

²³ Wierciński, *Existential Hermeneutics*, 313.

It fills us. We arrange it. It collapses.
We re-arrange it and collapse ourselves.

Who's turned us round like this, so that we always,
do what we may, retain the attitude
of someone who's departing? Just as he,
on the last hill, that shows him all his valley
for the last time, will turn and stop and linger,
we live our lives, for ever taking leave.

Rainer Maria Rilke, 8th Elegy

In what follows, I will share a broader overview of Wierciński's work, interlaced with dialogues, allowing for spaces to think further together and begin afresh.

5. Biographical Pathways

A philosopher is not only one who intends to befriend wisdom but also understands that only friends can embark into this adventure toward wisdom (*sophia*). And thus, it should not be surprising that Wierciński was born into a situation of thinking together. In an Interview with Blundell, he recalls: "As a teenager, I would sit with my mother through the long nights, helping her however I could when she was finishing her thesis in pedagogy. We worked together on many different academic projects. I was mesmerized by the variety of educational concepts, which I gradually began to understand. I was so fascinated by the task, which was quite overwhelming for a teenager, but it was so much more interesting than the standard education I was getting at school. When I read the history of education—it seemed to me then that it was a huge volume—I was convinced that there is nothing more fascinating in life than studying. At first, it was at night because that was the only time we could do it together; it was only later that I discovered that there is something truly magical in working long nights. This magic of deciphering meaning, particularly at night, does still inspire me tremendously, and as you well know, I often admire the glimmering of dawn showing up just above the horizon before going to bed."²⁴ The intense one-on-one

²⁴ Wierciński, *We Must Interpret*, 4.

conversations around a question at stake remained at the core of what was to come and profoundly formed his insights on the hermeneutics of education.

His mother ran the school, where he lived with his father and a younger sister. And while his mother could return to the apartment during breaks, it was his ‘sweet responsibility’ to safeguard his sister. He describes his father as a “car guy” and great family handyman. However, he could never fascinate him with cars or any do-it-yourself house improvements as a goal in itself. Instead, his innermost passions laid in the realms of thinking and the arts, even though he never became detached from everyday living. For Wierciński, “There is no simple hermeneutics which calls for dissociating life and work or for conflating biography and philosophy. There is neither an absolute autonomy of work nor an absolute autonomy of personal life. Every work is embedded in a factic life, and conversely, life experience is not just informative but instrumental and transformative for one’s thinking. Without drawing an overly hasty conclusion, a hermeneutic sensitivity can be defined as a mode of reading philosophy within the context of life and of reading life within the realm of thinking, allowing for resoluteness without overcoming ambiguity.”²⁵ Thus, his artistic and intellectual endeavors were never disconnected from what was required in the everydayness of life.

Wierciński received his first post-secondary education at the Catholic University of Lublin, where he recalls having been introduced to the “art of thinking.” He learned to be both faithful and progressive: “In Greek, this tension is expressed by two verbs, προάγω, which means leading forward, and μένω, meaning remaining, abiding. Education is a process of going forth from a place in which our view of the world remains somewhat hidden. But it would be naïve to think that what is hidden does not belong to the whole. When we go toward the sun, we cannot look straight at its brightness. Getting blinded by the sun gives us a chance to look at the surface of things and discover the beauty of what we often fail to see at eye level. This is what Heidegger means by ἀλήθεια as disclosure, which always also entails closure. Hence, education happens in the tension between unconcealment (*Entbergung*) and concealment (*Verbergung*).”²⁶ Wierciński builds on Heidegger, who finds a broader notion of “thinking” in the Greek fragment by Parmenides: here νοεῖν (*noein*) has the connotation of *scenting*.²⁷ This ‘animalistic’ trait obscures the separation of *human* beings

²⁵ Andrzej Wierciński, *Hermeneutics between Philosophy and Theology: The Imperative to Think the Incommensurable* (Zürich: LIT Verlag, 2010), 87.

²⁶ Wierciński, *We Must Interpret*, 4.

²⁷ Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* (New York/London: Harper & Row Publishers, [1954]1968), 207.

from other beings. But more so, it highlights an underlying capacity of connecting with the beings in the world by being *through* the world. And he finally translates it as “taking-to-heart.” Λέγειν (légein) is also translated as to gather, arrange or collect, and its Latin connotation of *legere* or reading, becomes “letting-lie-before-us.” Thus, and instead of seeing a text, gathering the letters, and making it ours, it now becomes a more fragile process. Heidegger suggests replacing the “is” with “present,” thereby challenging the question of what it *is*. “[T]he presence of that which is present”²⁸ is less static than something that *is*. Even more so, Heidegger explains that such ‘presence’ in Greek has the trait of “being present and abiding”²⁹ or coming closer (παρά or pará) and going away (ἄπό or apó). Consequently, there is a movement of *to and fro*. And as Heidegger poetically writes when describing the view of a mountain range, it “has risen from unconcealment.” It is always already there, as a geological entity, and so never concealed, but only when we give our attention to it does it come closer. Even though the coming closer and going away of unconcealment *in* unconcealment “remains concealed.” What is being concealed comes to us as presencing of un-forgetting or *a-letheia* (truth). As such, Heidegger asks: “But what if we take what was said and adopt it unceasingly as the guide for our thinking, and consider that this same is not even anything new, but the oldest of the old in Western thought: that ancient something which conceals itself in *a-letheia*? That which is said before all else by this first source of all the *leitmotifs* of thinking gives voice to a bond that binds all thinking, providing that thinking submits to the call of what must be thought.”³⁰ Being ‘provoked’ to think, then, means nothing else than being ‘called upon’ to live. Not any life, and certainly not the life of ‘*das Man*’ (the they). Rather, it is to be called to ‘present’ ourselves to the world in our uniqueness and irreplaceability – no one can live our life for us.

Wierciński’s intellectual journey evolves around this very attentiveness to what lies before us as well as the finitude of human thinking. However, he goes beyond Heidegger and moves closer to Gadamer, when he tries to get a deeper grasp “of the prejudices that condition our own way of understanding of that which needs to be understood. The hermeneutics of Dasein emphasizes the importance of the enactment sense of our life (*Vollzug des Lebens*).”³¹ And yet, Wierciński remains with Heidegger in his understanding of knowledge as an enactment of life. To him, enactment is what makes knowledge possible. For example, the future of higher education does not lie

²⁸ Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 236.

²⁹ Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 236.

³⁰ Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, [1969]1972), 24.

³¹ Wierciński, *We Must Interpret*, 5.

in the accumulation of information (any computer can do this much better than a human). Instead, we have to move away from the idea of accumulating risk-free information and become sensitive to education as it is *happening*, i.e., in the way we understand a subject matter and the unique way one responds to this event. As such, education can also be described as a performance.³²

Conversing with traditions and knowledge, there is both – understanding ourselves within the horizon of the past and through this understanding an opening up to what is to come: “There is a kind of progress, which is a sheer will to advance in terms of simple rupture and discontinuity of tradition. Adhering to tradition does not mean being enslaved by the past. Rather, real progress requires a conscientious being rooted, which, in turn, calls for a creative interpretation of belonging to a tradition and what it means to remain the same person in an ever-changing existential personal horizon.”³³ This insight that the “world is in need of interpretation,” led Wierciński to his wide-ranging and interdisciplinary contributions.

6. Universality of Hermeneutics

After leaving Poland, Wierciński continued at the Albert Ludwig University of Freiburg, and the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. He continued his intellectual journey through the USA (Boston College, the University of California at Berkeley, Arizona State University), Mexico (UNAM), Canada (University of Toronto, University of British Columbia). As a Research Professor of Hermeneutics at the University of Toronto and Professor of Philosophy of Religion at the Albert Ludwig University of Freiburg, he has emphasized the urgency of interdisciplinary thinking, spanning philosophy, theology, literature, rhetoric, education, law, medicine, and architecture. Journeying through the various disciplines, vocabularies, and methods, the universality of hermeneutics has become more and more apparent. “The world is in need of interpretation. If something shows itself to you, we have to be attentive.”³⁴ Not in an ethical sense - which can be taken out of the interpersonal responsibility – but rather in our humanness we give attention to what is and thereby bringing out what lies within (in a sense of *poiesis*). This realization provides the grounding for Wierciński’s radical transdisciplinarity. Since interpretation is the art of being in the world, hermeneutics largely overcomes the divisions between university departments,

³² P.C. Wierciński, February 2023.

³³ Wierciński, *We Must Interpret*, 3.

³⁴ P.C. Wierciński, February 2023.

disciplines, cultures, languages, and religious traditions. It promotes an interpretive approach to the diversity and complexity of human experience in the world. In the following, I will provide just a few examples of the many questions and disciplines Wierciński has engaged in.

Within the field of Hermeneutics and Psychoanalysis, Wierciński focuses on the limits of interpretation in order to learn about the meaning of the *conditio humana*. His work is controversial, deep, and questions with great rigor our common beliefs and practices. For him, what psychoanalysis shares with hermeneutics is the fundamental question of what it means to be human. For both, it is not just a search for a method about how to fix problems, but rather to question the meaning of life and, if needed, to see existential problems as the way of a human being to oneself. Or in yet other words: Wierciński's hermeneutic approach does not try to eliminate and fix problems but rather inquires into the *how* of human life. Furthermore, both hermeneutics and psychoanalysis deal with the limits of language to describe the pain and suffering of a person.

This idea influenced his project on the “Hermeneutics of Medicine,” where Wierciński reinterprets philosophical hermeneutics in the context of natural sciences, particularly medicine.³⁵ Hermeneutics can contribute to the reorientation of contemporary medicine, which often is focused on fixing a “malfunctioning of the body” - *re-paratio* in the sense of making something ready to function again (*paratio*). Instead, he suggests to insightfully readdress the question of the understanding of bioethics by grounding it in the relationship between theory and practice, i.e., the relationship between knowing and acting. Within that realm, medicine can become again more of an “art” of healing (*medeor/medicor* – to heal, to cure) than a science. Here Wierciński urges to work toward the stronger interdisciplinarity and greater sensitivity to the necessity of thinking socially, culturally, and intentionally in medicine.

Searching for the new proximity of philosophy and theology, Wierciński shows that the strict separation of philosophy and theology is not tenable. Hermeneutics is neither theology nor philosophy but must be open to both disciplines if it wants to remain faithful to the voices that create the tradition that we are. In his *Hermeneutics between Philosophy and Theology: The Imperative to Think the Incommensurable* (2010),

³⁵ Cf. Andrzej Wierciński, “Hermeneutics of Medicine: The Phronetic Dimension of Medical Ethics,” in Aleksander Bobko, ed., *Etyka wobec współczesnych wyzwań: Wybrane aspekty*, [Ethics facing Contemporary Challenges: Selected Aspects] (Rzeszów: Uniwersytet Rzeszowski, 2013), 19-28. See also his, - “Hans-Georg Gadamer,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Phenomenological Psychopathology*, ed., Giovanni Stanghellini, Andrea Raballo, Matthew Broome, Anthony Vincent Fernandez, Paolo Fusar-Poli, and René Rosfort (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

Wierciński understands theology not just as an academic discipline but rather as the way we are in the world.³⁶ With some restrictions, the same can be said about philosophy. From this context, two alternative ways of being human arise, which both challenge and threaten one another. Hermeneutics persists and lingers within this tension without hastening to an easy and manageable (re)solution. And he interprets this hermeneutic existence as a phronetic existence: “Cultivating practical wisdom (φρόνησις) comes from life, influences life, and transforms life.”³⁷ This experience of hermeneutics calls for a personal commitment and existential response. It allows the individual to participate in the communal life and respond to what is being presented; thereby bringing out what lies within his relationship with the community. It represents the fundamental dialogical structure of being human that resides at the heart of any conversation. Finally, language permeates human existence and discloses us as both polyphonic and dialogical beings.³⁸

Wierciński’s thinking on education is deeply inspired by this interpretive potential of being human. In his *Hermeneutics of Education: Exploring and Experiencing the Unpredictability of Education* (2019), Wierciński develops a hermeneutic philosophy of education as the hermeneutics of hospitality toward oneself and the Other, which is based on the permanent translation of each understanding into another sensitivity. This thinking *about* education is inseparable from the educational practice and, as such, is “hermeneutics in enactment” (*Hermeneutik im Vollzug*). It enables a person to take care and responsibility for their holistic, complex, and life-long development. Furthermore, the hermeneutic imperative of self-education emphasizes the understanding of education as an ongoing adventure into Being. Therefore, *existentia hermeneutica* is a finite, lingual, and historical existence, encompassing our experience of the world: we are in constant motion, heading toward self-understanding. In his poetic work, *Muted Horizon*, he writes:

Petite Messe Solennelle

When not dreaming I hear
Two voices

My own

³⁶ See: Andrzej Wierciński, *Hermeneutics between Philosophy and Theology: The Imperative to Think the Incommensurable?* (2010).

³⁷ See: Andrzej Wierciński, *Hermeneutik und Metaphysik* (2017); *Existentia Hermeneutica* (2019).

³⁸ See: Wierciński, *Hermeneutics between Philosophy and Theology*.

And another deep within

Were it not there

Could I reveal myself to anyone.³⁹

In the context of education, Wierciński draws on insights from Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Paul Ricoeur. He focuses on conversational reciprocity in the educative process (as opposed to the educative structures) and shows that the task of education is the conscientious endeavor of leading a student to life's wisdom, entailing a complex development of the whole person (*cura personalis*). The key issue is the formation of the individual while fostering the intersubjective understanding, which stands in opposition to the predominant contemporary tendency of overstressing the transfer of information and the growth of scientific knowledge. Wierciński reminds us that the plurivocity of understanding situates the human search of meaning in the horizon of incompleteness, allowing for spontaneity and rigor: always remembering that the most important aspect of education is to understand what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing when we understand. While stressing conversational reciprocity in the educative process, Wierciński discloses that absolute knowledge is impossible. Moreover, the conflict of interpretations is not only inescapable but also opens up the possibility of creative engagements with the partners in conversation. His extensive list of publications on the hermeneutics of education as the hermeneutics of the capable human being reveals the centrality of human capability as the cornerstone of philosophical anthropology. Wierciński skillfully accentuates that education is an encounter with a person in the horizon of the fundamental exigencies of being a human being. As the reawakening of the humanity of the human being, education is, for him, a meeting of persons in need. As such, it is a gift that comes to meet us. And this gift is not something, but another human being, who opens up in front of us a horizon of meaning. Thus, "Education as self-education [...] is a rather true expression of the hermeneutic gesture of hospitality and welcoming the other as the possible disclosure of that which is yet undisclosed to us."⁴⁰ In any educational undertaking, a human being is the proper *locus pedagogicus*. The answer to the task of education is not deposited inside a human being, but in a constant transgression of oneself, in going out of oneself toward the Other who comes to meet us.

³⁹ Andrzej Wierciński, *Muted Horizon* (Lublin: Norbertinum, 2000), p. 86.

⁴⁰ Wierciński, *Hermeneutics between Philosophy and Theology*, 38.

On Duration

To have the courage to think the necessary
 Come to like unsettled weather
 Patiently grind herbs

Taking delight in otherness⁴¹

7. Underway in Understanding and Thinking Further

It is now 2023, twenty-two years after Hans-Georg Gadamer's death, and we are still 'underway' in understanding, whether it is to understand the Other, who is right next to us or far away, familiar or strange, old or young. As we attempt to bring our own presumptions into suspense, we reach out, become hospitable, and allow for something unexpected to enter. This is the place of possibilities and promises that Wierciński has so generously created throughout his life. Through his writing, as the President of the International Institute for Hermeneutics, teacher, mentor, and friend, he offers a gathering place for those who desire to understand genuinely. Any understanding is preceded by solidarity. Gadamer writes: "What we need is a bit of good will in order to see what the Other, in his Otherness, is trying to express. Because he who treats his neighbor only according to the laws of logic and strives to avoid contradictions at all costs, radiates such a coldness that his neighbor will shiver in his presence. One must be a little warmer if one wants others to feel solidarity, to feel that one is speaking to them and that one is genuinely interested in them."⁴² This place of solidarity is also important because keeping oneself open to what the Other has to say is risky. Or as Gadamer writes: "Understanding succeeds when it becomes an inwardness that penetrates the mind as a new experience. Understanding is always an adventure and, like every adventure, it is dangerous."⁴³ Wierciński has created such a

⁴¹ Andrzej Wierciński, *Muted Horizon* (Lublin: Norbertinum, 2000), p. 64.

⁴² Hans-Georg Gadamer, „Über die Aktualität der Hermeneutik,“ in V. Caysa (ed.), *Philosophiegeschichte und Hermeneutik* (Leipzig: Universitätsverlag, 1996), 322.

⁴³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Hermeneutik als praktische Philosophie,“ in H.-M. Schönherr-Mann (ed.), *Hermeneutik als Ethik* (München: Fink, 2004), 51.

place of genuine dialogue and thereby is keeping the spirit and intention of hermeneutics alive. As he writes: “The power of conversation does not lie in an increase of knowledge, but instead in an increase of being human.”⁴⁴ On this festive occasion of this most deserved Blue Diamond Hermes Award for our friend and esteemed colleague Andrzej Wierciński, we all gather as friends: friends who might live in different parts of the world, accustomed to divergent worldviews even, and yet conjoint and devoted to the adventure of understanding. Thank you for the continued opportunities and invitations to think, dance, and converse together!

This cannot be taken from us

At sunrise
We went to sleep
Our mouth filled with heaven

Easing off took on shades
Of a muted horizon⁴⁵

⁴⁴ In German: “Die Wirkmacht eines Gesprächs kann nicht im Zuwachs an Wissen, sondern im Zuwachs an Menschsein gefunden werden.“ Andrzej Wierciński, *Wege des Verstehens: Das Miteinandersein im Gespräch*, Talk given in Vienna.

⁴⁵ Andrzej Wierciński, *Muted Horizon* (Lublin: Norbertinum, 2000), p. 125.