

# Andrzej Wierciński

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## Introduction

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# HEIDEGGER AND HERMENEUTICS PART II

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ANDRZEJ WIERCINSKI

## INTRODUCTION

The papers presented in this special issue offer further insight into Heidegger's influence on contemporary philosophy. In the previous issue of *Studia Philosophiae Christianae* 49(2013)4, the focal point of our debate was Heidegger's inspiration for the Arts. In this issue, we briefly address the uneasy relationship between his philosophy and Ethics and Religion, and thus offer a creative horizon for re-reading Heidegger. The revolutionary genius of the young philosopher from Freiburg was triumphantly celebrated by students everywhere and, as Hannah Arendt reports, "there was hardly more than a name, but the name travelled all over Germany like the rumor of the hidden king."

Heidegger himself greatly influenced the reception of his own philosophy. He claimed that *die Sache* of his thinking, the question of Being, was already present in his early teaching and writing. He also carefully supervised the compilation of his collected writings, *die Gesamtausgabe*, edited by Vittorio Klostermann. He insisted that those writings be presented as "ways not works," and that the dissemination of his ideas should follow the inner logic of his own development: to courageously employ new ways of thinking and willingly risk new experiments in thought.

Speaking of his thinking as "the way," Heidegger was most certainly fully aware of the biblical connotations. In John 14:6, Jesus calls

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himself “the way” and invites his disciples to follow him, to walk in his footsteps, since “no one comes to the Father except through him.” In the early Church, Christianity was called “the Way” (Acts 9:2). The Holy Spirit teaches the followers of Jesus the way and guides them along the different paths of life. Heidegger is not a definitive answer to philosophical problems, but rather a guide and an invitation to be mindful of the task of thinking. Confronting the way Heidegger thinks that which needs to be thought, reminds us that thinking is an event (*Ereignis*) that is renewed every time we think and continues to be renewed (*Wirkungsgeschichte*). Participating in this event makes us think and be thankful. It reminds us that thinking is thanking (*Denken ist Danken*). If thinking is thanking, this means that thinking *receives* (*empfängt*) its thoughts. Thinking fills us with deep gratitude. “What do we have that we did not receive?” (1 Cor 4:7). This solicits a response from us. Thinking is responding (*re-spondeo*), which puts us into the moral horizon of radical responsibility toward truth. If “questioning is the piety of thinking,” this piety is compliant with the covering and uncovering of truth. The more generous our response, the more thinking transforms us and we become witnesses to the task of thinking.

Heidegger reminds us that thoughtlessness is an uncanny visitor, who comes and goes everywhere in our globalized contemporary world. Overwhelmed by technological thinking, we know, all too well, how easy it is to take flight from thinking and become thought-poor and thought-less. And this flight from thinking happens everywhere in the world, including Academia. Universities close down departments, particularly in the humanities, because of the lack of funding. Those decisions are made entirely on financial grounds: The humanities, at least in most cases, do not generate money. And that which does not generate money is useless and commonly perceived, at best, as an extravagance of the intellectuals and an unjustified burden on the educational system of a democratic society. The univocal logic of success in an economy-driven academic setting supports calculative thinking, which proves its excellence in solving problems. Contemplative thinking, on the contrary, does not solve problems, but rather inspires us to

confront the world we live in with sensitivity and care (*Sorge*). In fact, it rather enables problems to be discerned and understood. The vulnerability of thinking calls for our persistence and courage to be contemplative beings, to remember that we are not only sensual (*sinnliche*), but meditative beings (*besinnliche Wesen*).

There are definitely significant differences regarding the understanding of the impact Heidegger's philosophy has on present day thinkers. However, learning to discover those differences, and furthermore, to welcome and enjoy them, might be the best way to honour Heidegger's work. He himself stated in *The Word of Nietzsche*: "We show respect for a thinker only when we think. This demands that we think everything essential that is thought in his thought." The authors participating in this project wish to acknowledge the importance of Heidegger's work by addressing the matter to be thought. And it happens, not because of Heidegger's indisputable fame, but because there is something in his thinking which captivates us and inspires us to re-think Heidegger's significance for philosophy today.