



**Andrzej Wierciński**

University of Warsaw, Poland

ORCID 0000-0001-9096-6535

## The dialectics of power and the irrevocability of time (*Unwiderruflichkeit der Zeit*)

**Abstract:** Power is not merely something external or imposed or a problem to be solved. Rather, power is a task calling for understanding as the mode of being in the world with Others. Power has creative and destructive, challenging and inspiring aspects. As finite human beings thrown into a seemingly overpowering world, we find ourselves in the midst of dynamics and dialectics of power. We have powerful experiences that empower us to respond, to take up the power of faith and the decision to think and be here and now. The hermeneutic experiences of the Gospel, prayer, poetry and art, conversations with ourselves and others, the lives of philosophers, and the power of language all reveal the need for radically responsible approaches to power in lived time. Rather than merely critiquing power, the hermeneutics of power calls for cultivating human attentiveness to power, recognizing the power in and of our lives, and transforming our experiences of power into meaningful events that empower our capacity for timely understanding.

**Keywords:** Power, Finitude, Hermeneutics, Conversation, Time, Poetry.

The hermeneutics of power not only draws in the traditional fields of inquiry explored by philosophers and scholars of power but also more broadly addresses the claims and exigencies of finitude itself. The dialectic of power can thus be deemed to include the myriad forms and dynamics of power and persuasion, ranging from sacrifice to institutional forms and structures, as well as, significantly, the aporias of time that constitute one of the most critical challenges in human life (*eine Lebensfrage*). An essential

aid in dealing with the aporetics of temporality is the poetics of narrativity<sup>1</sup>. To say what is—λέγει τὰ ἔοντα—means to tell a story in which the particularities of the said (*das Gesagte*) and the unsaid (*das Ungesagte*) lose their contingency and, in being translated into the language of the Other, acquire a different level of comprehensibility (Arendt, 2006, pp. 223-259). Sharpening the human ability to bring together the end (ἔσχατον, *Endzeit*) with the beginning (ἀρχή, *Anfang*) is one of the ultimate tasks and responsibilities of a human being.

The enigma of time, its essential inscrutability, and the exertion of power are not problems to be solved, but rather genuine tasks for thinking (*Denkauftrag*). The experience of time gives a human being a powerful impetus to be pensive and face life with the required thoughtfulness as a life worth living (Bremer, 2023). We read in Genesis 1:1-3:

יְרָאָה תֵּאֵן מִיַּמְשָׁה תֵּא מִיְהִלָּא אֲרָב תִּישְׂאָרָב:  
מִיָּמָה יִגְפַּלֵּעַ תְּפֻחְרָמְ מִיְהִלָּא סוּרָן מוֹהֶת יִגְפַּלֵּעַ וְהַבֵּן הֵהָת הַתִּיָּה יְרָאָהוּ:  
רוֹאֵי־יְהוָה רוֹאֵ יְהוָה מִיְהִלָּא רְמָאֵן:

ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν. ἡ δὲ γῆ ἦν ἀόρατος καὶ ἀκατασκεύαστος καὶ σκότος ἐπάνω τῆς ἀβύσσου καὶ πνεῦμα θεοῦ ἐπεφέρετο ἐπάνω τοῦ ὕδατος. καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεὸς γενηθήτω φῶς καὶ ἐγένετο φῶς.

*In principio creavit Deus caelum et terram. Terra autem erat inanis et vacua, et tenebrae erant super faciem abyssi: et spiritus Dei ferebatur super aquas. Dixitque Deus: Fiat lux. Et facta est lux.*

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Moreover, the earth was invisible; darkness covered the Abyss, and the Spirit of God hovered above the waters. God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. A puzzling adjective, ἀκατασκεύαστος, is used to express the state of the highest potentiality, the concentration of the invisible powers ready to explode, erupt, and come to full disclosure. The Greek καταστροφή comes from καταστρεφειν, κατα (down or against), and στρεφειν (to turn). For our contemporary mentality, this sounds like a true catastrophe. The self-

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<sup>1</sup> The emphasis on the importance of narrative identity is a great accomplishment of Paul Ricoeur. His elaboration on the aporias of time contributes essentially to the hermeneutics of our historical condition. See especially Ricoeur, 1988.

revelation of the Trinity is powerfully manifested in those three concise lines of the creation story. Verse one introduces God, the Creator. In verse two, the Spirit is hovering above the waters. And finally, in verse three, we are encountered by the voice of God (*Verbum Dei*). This is the God speaking, the divine λόγος that proclaims and brings into being: God said (יְהוָה), and there was (וַיְהיֶה) (word and event, *Wort und Ereignis*).

The invisibility and darkness covering the Abyss effectively depict the fundamental chaos. And from this elemental confusion of elements, God's Word establishes the unattainable world. It will be the infinite task of prophets and poets to break into the impenetrable mystery of creation in its *Wirkungsgeschichte*. In the compelling personal conviction of their unique vocation, they know that "the words of a dead man are modified in the guts of the living" (Auden, 1940). Because of the intrinsically impenetrable character of the mystery, approaching it remains an ongoing challenge for the human mind to engage the (pro)visions of the universe. The unfathomable mystery of the primordial coming into being and passing away (like in Aristotle's *On Coming To Be and Passing Away*, Περὶ γενέσεως καὶ φθορᾶς) remains the real challenge for the human being confronted with finitude and the facticity of being thrown into the world (*die ungefragte Geworfenheit des Daseins in die Welt und die Unausweichlichkeit des menschlichen Schicksals*). Finding ourselves in the world will always be the most demanding and revealing task of being a human being.

The catastrophic dimension of the life of the world and the human being in the world has accompanied the world throughout its history. The perspective of instant change terrifies and empowers human beings in facing the facticity of their being in the world. Thinking about the potential outcome of the primordial catastrophe stimulates the human mind to differentiate power's creative and destructive aspects. It also invites us to focus on the intrinsic relationship between power and violence and to critically address the human (dis)ability to question our own susceptibility to self-deception.

In Proverbs 3:5, we read: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding." In the Septuagint, "ἴσθι πεποιθῶς ἐν ὅλη καρδίᾳ ἐπὶ θεῷ, ἐπὶ δὲ σῆ σοφίᾳ μὴ ἐπαίρου," and in the Vulgate, "*habe fiduciam in Domino ex toto corde tuo et ne innitaris prudentiae tuae*." Here, the Greek πείθω indicates that the meaning of trust (*fiducia*) refers to the conviction of finding tranquility in God. It denotes becoming a fully dedicated friend of God. Following Kierkegaard, Paul Tillich (1964; 2000) stresses the determination of the decision of faith (*Entschlossenheit des Glaubens*), which is the existential drama of making the fundamental choice for God, *optio*

*fundamentalis* (Kuzmicki, 2015). The task of a human being is to recognize the eternal now as the gift (*Gabe*) and the challenge (*Aufgabe*) that comes along with being gifted. Thus, the true wisdom of life is the matter of opening our own understanding to Transcendence. This opening encompasses what we do, but it is predominantly what is happening to us and in us when we let ourselves be open (*sich Öffnenlassen*). Being filled with the Holy Spirit, we can speak in different languages. Different languages (εταίρες γλώσσες) are different ways of bearing witness to our being (with)in God. (Acts 2:4) The variety of languages expresses the plurality of the *Lebenswelten*, ways of life, and finding ourselves in life in its own thrownness (*Geworfenheit*). In the plurality of languages and through it, we testify to the search for the meaning of our existence in the world. This plurality discloses the blessing of the richness of individual languages. Speaking our own language (ὅτι ἤκουον εἷς ἕκαστος τῇ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ λαλούντων αὐτῶν, Acts 2:6) is much more than speaking our mother tongue. It is speaking the language that speaks (*die Sprache spricht*)<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, διάλεκτος here encompasses one's native language as well as a mode of conversation and discourse. Consequently, it is rather a matter of understanding language as the way of being in the world (*modus existendi*). Decisiveness (*Entschlossenheit*) in life and attunement to time so as to recognize καιρός calls upon a human being to bring together the end with the beginning in the here and now. This is the meaning of the opening of books: βιβλία ἠνοίχθησαν (Rev 20:12). Therefore, the vision of the time when the books will be open, and the deeds will be read from the book of life, βιβλίον τῆς ζωῆς, conveys the full significance of the capacity for decision-making and judgment in the present moment and interpreting what needs to be understood by bringing it into the Open (*in das Offene bringen*).

In the existentially challenging event of crucifixion, Jesus speaks to one of the convicts: "I tell you solemnly, today you will be with me in paradise": Ἀμήν σοι λέγω, σήμερον μετ' ἐμοῦ ἔσῃ ἐν τῷ Παραδείσῳ. (Lk 23:43) In this instance, today, σήμερον, means a favorable time for embracing salvation, which is graciously offered by Jesus's redemptive mission fulfilled on the cross. Jesus points out what is currently happening. Now is the moment of faith that brings a criminal, κακοῦργος, literally an evil worker, into the presence of God. It is his personal καιρός. Ἀμήν σοι λέγω expresses Jesus's intention that this should really happen: So let it be (*Geschehenlassen*). His

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<sup>2</sup> "Die Sprache allein ist es, die eigentlich spricht. Und sie spricht einsam... Der Mensch vermag nur zu sprechen, insofern er... auf sie hört. ... Das Wort verschafft dem Ding erst das Sein" (Heidegger, 1959, p. 259ff.).

word not only describes reality but also creates it: The crucified *κακοῦργος* enters the realm of God, where death loses its authority, *κυριεύω* (Rom 6:9). The moment of faith (*Augenblick des Glaubens*) opens up a vision (*Blick*) that allows seeing (*Sehenlassen*) the anticipated reality in that which shows itself as it seems fitting.

Thus, faith is neither knowledge nor feeling but a quest for the ultimate meaning of human existence in the dynamics of faith (Tillich, 2001). It demands a personal decisiveness (*Entschlossenheit*), a sudden realization, and a moment of clear vision. Something entirely new, unexpected, unknown, and startling breaks into life in an instant and ultimately challenges a person. This moment is not just a happening in a distant future but requires a decision here and now (*εδῶ και τῶρα*) to welcome radical transformation. In this opportune moment, existential uncertainty will not be overcome, but in the passion of faith (Kierkegaard, 1998; Lee, 2009; Westphal, 2011) will disclose the imperative of absolute dependence on God (Schleiermacher)<sup>3</sup>.

By transcending the infinite distance to God, a human being might discover the overwhelming power of God's calling (*Angesprochensein*) and answer with the ultimate submission to faith. The radical impossibility of disposing of time (*radikale Unverfügbarkeit der Zeit*) and determining its meaning reminds us, often very painfully, of what we cannot decide and resolve but only live in and experience here and now. It calls for an understanding of lived time (Wierciński, 2018). St. Augustine (1950), in his *Confessiones*, Book 11, Chapter 14, beautifully renders the enigma of time: *Neither Time Past nor Future, But the Present Only, Really Is:*

Those two times, therefore, past and future, how are they, when even the past now is not; and the future is not as yet? But should the present be always present, and should it not pass into time past, time truly it could not be, but eternity. If, then, time present — if it be time — only comes into existence because it passes into time past, how do we say that even this is, whose cause of being is that it shall not be — namely, so that we cannot truly say that time is, unless because it tends not to be?

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<sup>3</sup> It was Friedrich Schleiermacher who, speaking of God, coined the phrase “the feeling of absolute dependence” (Schleiermacher, 2016, p. 81).

Blaise Pascal, as a careful reader of Tradition, has a sharp feeling for the now, for the necessity of relentless reorientation toward the constantly fleeing away present. The *Augenblick* never is: When we want to catch it, it has either already passed or is not yet. The impossibility of capturing *now* motivates the thinker to dedicate himself to what escapes his conceptualization (Pascal, 2008, p. 9):

We never keep to the present. We recall the past; we anticipate the future as if we found it too slow in coming and were trying to hurry it up, or we recall the past as if to stay its too rapid flight. We are so unwise that we wander about in times that do not belong to us, and do not think of the only one that does; so vain that we dream of times that are not and blindly flee the only one that is. The fact is that the present usually hurts. We thrust it out of sight because it distresses us, and if we find it enjoyable, we are sorry to see it slip away. We try to give it the support of the future, and think how we are going to arrange things over which we have no control for a time we can never be sure of reaching. Let each of us examine his thoughts; he will find them wholly concerned with the past or the future. We almost never think of the present, and if we do think of it, it is only to see what light it throws on our plans for the future. The present is never our end. The past and the present are our means, the future alone our end. Thus, we never actually live but hope to live, and since we are always planning how to be happy, it is inevitable that we should never be so.

Pascal is as realistic and bitter as it would seem fitting to be for someone who faces the paradox of existence and dramatically experiences the confusion of voices without wanting to suffocate those that are challenging or clouding his vision (Wierciński, 2011). He reminds us that a philosopher asks fundamental questions that can(not) be answered. The task of human life is to live the life of a questioning being, *homo quaerens*. What is essential in the passion for questioning is to see questioning as the vocation of a human being to be a seeker of truth. In the desire to question what can be inquired into (*fragwürdig*), the pilgrim toward the future is called not to attach oneself to earthly matters and places but to see everything in the horizon of the eternal now. The time is now: “The time is fulfilled, and the reigning of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel” — Πεπλήρωται ὁ καιρὸς καὶ ἤγγικεν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ μετανοεῖτε καὶ πιστεύετε ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ (Mk 1:15). The good news is that God is, and not only will be, among us, and we can experience our time as καιρὸς. It is entirely up to us and our radical decision

for life to convert (μετανοεῖτε) and to believe in the Word that has the power to illuminate, form, and transform us. Understanding our time as καιρὸς, as this opportune now to respond to the Revelation of the dynamics of the reigning of God, discloses something absolutely essential about our perception of the world (*Wirklichkeitsverständnis*). The verb ἐγγίζω tells us that God is here. He came near. In Luke 17:21, Jesus says that his reigning is among us: ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐντὸς ὑμῶν ἐστιν. This “among us,” ἐντὸς ὑμῶν, is the real presence in extreme closeness. To understand this, we need to recognize the human and the divine as the unity that is, in itself, a dynamic unity (Eckhart, 1955, 2007; Schirpenbach, 2004; Beierwaltes, 1980, pp. 97-104), i.e., a unity in permanent movement rather than a reality in the sense of a measurable inventory of scientific inquiry. The task is to perceive understanding as the capacity of insight (*Einsicht*), of comprehending in a vision (*Blick*), and not disassembling, dismantling, and breaking down into individual elements. It is like any reading that brings us into the Open and does not remain at the level of deciphering and the pedantic clarification of details.

Apart from proclaiming the reigning of God among us, Jesus tells us that the time will come when there will be no more time. In explaining the parable of the tares, ζιζάνιον (Mt 13:37-43), he mentions the time of harvest (θερισμός), the time of the end, θερισμός συντέλεια αἰῶνος (v. 39). Here time is expressed as αἰών in the sense of αἰών μέλλων, the future age, which as ὁ αἰών ὁ ἐρχόμενος means the era after Jesus’s return in glory. Then, what has matured in our lives, what fruit has grown, what is truly from God, and what is not, will be seen. What comes from God “will shine like the sun,” ἐκλάμπουσιν ὡς ὁ ἥλιος (Mt 13: 43). The others will perish like the weeds consumed by the fire (Mt 13:40). It takes time to bear the fruit for which we were born. Discernment and patience are indispensable.

### **The pluriformity of expressions of reality: the power of poetry (*Macht der Dichtung*)**

Coping with the aporetic of time uncovers the pluriformity of expressions of reality. The Stoics were already aware of something in our thinking that is there, however, in a different way than the spoken word. They called this meditative utterance the immanent word, λόγος ἐνδιάθετος. It was clearly not a particular language. St Augustine coined it as the *verbum interius* (Wierciński, 2019, pp. 60-90). When we speak, we are searching for a word that can express what we wish to convey. This spoken word, λόγος προφορικός, is the word that we seek and cannot ever be fully satisfied with. Every time we say a word, we realize that there is so much more to be

expressed. The totality of what needs to be understood contains the said (das Gesagte) and the unsaid (das Ungesagte). Sharpening the hermeneutic ear makes the experience of searching for the right word more painful but also more meaningful (Wierciński, 2008; Risser, 2019). The ways of searching are very different and stretch over the whole of human life. It is a matter of experimenting, inventing, and, above all, listening to the world in its uninterrupted play of revealing and concealing<sup>4</sup>. The seeker of the right word is the eternal pilgrim, who knows that there is a perfectly fitting word, but it is unattainable for a finite being. The permanent (dis)satisfaction awakens the human spirit and brings the seeker to the poetic word. In the proximity of poetry, the pilgrim is nourished with the ever-changing constellations of meaning that disclose the inexhaustibility of understanding the world, which is our *Lebenswelt*.

The blessing of different languages is much more than just a lucky instance of speaking various languages. It is about the different ways of expressing the world and thus living poetically in the world (Heidegger, 2000). Paul Celan says:

Ein Dröhnen: es ist/ A rumble: it is  
die Wahrheit selbst/ truth itself  
unter die Menschen/ entered  
getreten, / among people  
mitten ins Metapherngestöber./ right into the flurry of metaphors.

The poet of the word and the image, Paul Celan, conveys the meaning of truth in a remarkably affecting way. It would take the life of a philosopher to say something about truth that has this penetrating and permanent effect of facing the truth. Celan's radical expression of the preoccupation with the

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<sup>4</sup> "Being eludes being noticed by unconcealing itself in a being. This holds true for its truth, in the same way. Keeping to that way is the earlier way of its unconcealment. The early way of keeping to that way is Aletheia. By bringing the un-concealment of a being, the early way actually makes the concealment of Being possible. Yet the concealment remains in the course of keeping itself to itself, by way of refusing to let go of itself. We can call this illumining of its keeping-to-itself in the truth about its nature the epoch of Being... The epoch of Being belongs to itself. It is thought out of experiencing the forgetfulness of Being. The epochal nature of its destiny, which comprises what can actually be called the history of the world, comes from the epoch of Being. Every time when Being holds on to its destiny, the 'world' suddenly and unexpectedly happens... However, the equivalent to the epochal character of Being, which we can experience in the first instance, is the ecstatic character of Da-sein (being-there). The epochal nature of Being makes the ecstatic nature of Da-sein happen." (Heidegger, 1963, pp. 333-334).



fate of a human being experiencing the bursting misery of humanity testifies to the poetic and prophetic capacity to transcend the tragedy of an individual and capture it in becoming a conversation, not with the specific reader but rather with “the Other.” In the poetic word, the poetic voice becomes a witness to/for the other (Gadamer, 1997).

Close to poetic sensitivity is the mystical vision. Poets and thinkers are privileged by Heidegger for their compelling engagement with what shows itself. It is this ability to hear the roaring sound of truth and dwell in its air that is necessary for Dasein in its being in the world. And precisely into this world entered the Son of God, who said of himself: I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: Ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ὁδὸς καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια καὶ ἡ ζωὴ (J 14:6). Jesus uses the self-revelatory formula “I am,” ἐγώ εἰμι, recalling the self-revelation of God to Moses in the burning bush. (Ex 3:14) He continues speaking to people, just as God addressed human beings and placed his creation in language (*in die Sprache stellen*) (Rosenzweig, 1988). Language (*Sprache*) is always an address (*Ansprache*). It is a conversation sui generis. Hence, Friedrich Hölderlin, in the bliss of poetic inspiration, can say, “We are a conversation, and we listen to each other”<sup>5</sup>. In partnership with God, the human being received the world as language (*Sprache*). The quest to hear the voice of God’s self-revelation and self-manifestation will remain the infinite task of interpreting the nearness of truth and our dwelling in this revealing and concealing nearness. “If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear” (Mk 7:16, KJV): εἴ τις ἔχει ὅρα ἀκούειν ἀκουέτω. The verb ἀκούω refers to the faculty of hearing, listening, and comprehending by hearing. Matthew, in his Gospel, quotes Jesus: “ὑμῶν δὲ μακάριοι οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ ὅτι βλέπουσιν, καὶ τὰ ὅρα ὑμῶν ὅτι ἀκούουσιν”: “Blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear” (Mt 13:16 KJV). This clearly means that having eyes and seeing and having ears and hearing are not necessarily the same. Without going into the rich Tradition of the Hebrew Bible, with a strong accent on listening to the voice of God versus Greek emphasis on ocularity, we can point out the importance of understanding that goes beyond the faculty of seeing and hearing.

A poem (*ein Gedicht*) is a particular case of conversation. Martin Buber, the philosopher of dialogue, understands a poem as that which is being spoken (*Gesprochenheit*) (Buber, 2003, pp. 125-138). The word stands on its own. The poetic word brings the holding of nearness into the experience. The fleeing of time is brought to standstill in the poem. In its essence, the poetic

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<sup>5</sup> “Seit ein Gespräch wir sind und hören voneinander” (Hölderlin, 1946; cf. Wierciński, 2011).

word is always a response. In the transience of time, the word survives and endures as the persisting nearness, which opens access to the Open. Poetry is not determined from the perspective of traditional poetics or as a style of literature. It is asserted from the side of thinking as a “saying in the way of a showing revealing” (*weisende Offenbarmachen*).

As such, poetry is concerned with ontology and truth, grasping the meaning of what it is to be a poet, what a poem is, and what makes up the enormous calling power of the poetic word (*Rufmacht des dichterischen Wortes*). The poet says what shows itself. In this sense, the poet brings it out of concealment into language. This does not mean that it will be brought into unconcealment. Rather, it is bringing into the Open. Therefore, and not despite of it, the claim of poetry is to say the truth. In that sense, the poetic word calls its listener into a relationship. Thus, being in a relationship is the happening (*das Ereignis*) of the word. Reading a poem is not objectifying, surveying, or classifying it, not distancing from the Other, but entering the relationship that is demanded by its imperative claim. A genuine conversation with a poem can only happen when there is no other means in sight apart from an encounter with the Other. Interpreting or reading poetry needs to keep the unique revelatory meaning of poetry undisturbed in its infinite call for understanding. The fundamental task is to understand a human being in their opening toward Transcendence and not in the negation of Transcendence in order to reduce the discovery to the explanation of the immanent world.

Interpretation (*Deutung*) is the art of pointing out in the Open (*Zeigen in das Offene*). To disclose something (*etwas deuten*) is not the same as to point at or toward something (*auf etwas deuten*). The poet is someone who, by pointing out into the Open, is a sign (*ein Zeichen*) of the reality that is the realm of poetry. Moreover, the poet is, *par excellence*, the interpreter of the happening of poetry, this powerful pointing out (*das Deuten deuten*). The interpretive pointing out (*ein deutendes Deuten*) of poetic reflection is inseparable from poetry. In contrast, literary and philosophical analysis presupposes the transition within σοφία from the wise man’s original role as a poet to a new role as a thinker. The poet as the wise man will no longer be called σοφός, but φιλόσοφος.

Understanding *what* is said in the poem and *how* it is said is in no way sufficient to find ourselves in the realm of poetry. Poems are not casual pieces of writing that require some scholarly deciphering and interpretation. Understanding a poem is not a matter of correctly deciphering all the words and parts of the poem. There may be a rapture in understanding (*Bruch im*

*Verstehen*) that requires corrective or explanatory action. However, reading poems demands a fundamental attitude toward poetry as the revelation of Being that discloses something to us that we cannot gain from any other sources. In that sense, poetry rules over us and calls us to be the life-bearer and witnesses of the power of poetry (Miłosz, 1983).

The power of poetry resides in exposing the historical being of human Dasein to that which exists (*das Seiende im Ganzen*)<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, the bigger the claim of poetry, the more resilient the reader's attitude to recognize its privileged mode of disclosing Being in its being Being. The task of understanding the power of poetry is to listen to its revelatory voice and not to work toward constructing an image of the world (*Weltbild*) and its representation. Heidegger encourages us to discover the metaphysical place of poetry (*metaphysischer Ort der Dichtung*) from and toward which poetry's power opens up and remains prevailing in its revelatory capacity. We gain insight into this metaphysical place of poetry from within the prevailing mood (*Grundstimmung*), which Heidegger summarizes as "the necessity, which is holy mourning, and yet clearly present (*die heilig trauernde, aber bereite Bedrängnis*)"<sup>7</sup>. In this fundamental mood in which Dasein is open to itself and its *Lebenswelt*, the opening of Being happens (*ereignet sich*), and the truth shines forth. The founding power of poetry (*stiftende Macht der Dichtung*) is precisely the capacity to create the prevailing mood, a mode of disposedness (*Befindlichkeit*) as the horizon of the revelation of the truth of Being. Poetry is primary discourse (*Gespräch*), and, as conversation, is the origin of language (*Sprache*). As lingual (*sprachliche*) beings, we are able to listen to what is said, and the discourse is primordial with saying.

Like poetic speech, encountering the work of art is an event (*Ereignis*) in which the work of art speaks to us, thus inviting us to a conversation. The

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<sup>6</sup> Heidegger often speaks of the power of poetry (*Macht der Dichtung*): "Der Anspruch und die Macht der Dichtung eröffnen sich immer befremdlicher. Aber — unsere Zweifel und unser Widerstand steigern sich ebenso. Denn: Mag auch in Wahrheit das Wesen der Dichtung darin beruhen, daß sie das geschichtliche Dasein des Menschen dem Seienden im Ganzen aussetzt, so bleibt doch fraglich, inwiefern gerade ein Sprachgebilde, ein bloßes Gespräch, dergleichen in so ursprünglicher Weise soll noch leisten können." (Heidegger, 1999, p. 59).

<sup>7</sup> "Wir wollen erst einmal in den Machtbereich dieser Dichtung Eingang finden, also nicht vielerlei von den Gedichten kennenlernen, um daraus ein Weltbild zusammenzubauen. Innerhalb des Machtbereichs der Dichtung müssen wir zuvor den Ort bestimmen, aus dem her und auf den zu die Macht der Dichtung sich eröffnet und mächtig bleibt. Dieser metaphysische Ort der Dichtung ist umgrenzt durch das, was wir als die Grundstimmung heraushoben: die heilig trauernde, aber bereite Bedrängnis." (Heidegger, 1999, p. 139).

work of art lives in the world we inhabit. It is our common *Lebenswelt*. In this shared belongingness to the world, we also belong to each other. Living with the work of art happens in the horizon of witness and testimony, in which the reciprocity occurs and is at work not only at the conscious level but far beyond our wanting and doing—hence, the enormous significance of the work of art in *Bildung* as formation.

### The dialectic of prayer

In our spiritual world of experience (*seelische Erfahrungswelt*), we encounter another mode of understanding the word that is spoken (*das Wort, das gesprochen wird*). It is the word that speaks to the Other (*anspricht*). Understanding of this word is exegesis, par excellence, ἐξήγησις, a reading from, an exercise of ἐξηγεῖσθαι, of leading out toward the disclosure of the possible meaning of the text. Similarly to the interpretation of poetry, biblical exegesis cannot aim at redescribing the original in order to simplify access to the intended or expected meaning. It is rather a meticulous attempt to grasp how the text can be experienced and understood by the Hearer of the Word (*Hörer des Wortes, Rahner*)<sup>8</sup>. Here, the German *vernehmen* can be literally translated as understood. However, we can render it with listening to (*gehört*), if we follow the old Hebraic tradition of the hermeneutic ear attuned to God's word in his self-revelation and manifestation. A particular instance of speaking to God in one's own being addressed by him (*Ansprechensein*) is prayer.

A beautiful narrative composed by Judith (Jdt 9:11) as a prayer uncovers the dialectics of power. At the time when “the incense of that evening was offered in Jerusalem in the house of the Lord, Judith cried with a loud voice” (v. 1). In a congenial rendering of the King James Bible, the simplicity and sweetness of her prayer receive an extremely powerful effect: “For thy power standeth not in multitude nor thy might in strong men: for thou art a God of the afflicted, a helper of the oppressed, an upholder of the weak, a protector of the forlorn, a savior of them that are without hope.” (v. 11) Judith's speaking of God compiles a stunning catalog of divine names: God of the afflicted (ταπεινῶν εἰ Θεός, *Gott der Schwachen*), helper of the oppressed (ἐλαττόνων εἰ βοηθός, *Helper der Geringen*), upholder of the weak (ἀντιλήπτωρ ἀσθενούντων, *Beistand der Armen*), protector of the forlorn

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<sup>8</sup> Rahner (1963, p. 88): “Der Mensch aber ist Geist (welche Bestimmung sein ganzes Menschsein trägt) und hat so ein offenes Ohr für jegliches Wort, das aus dem Munde des Ewigen kommen kann.”

(ἀπεγνωσμένων σκεπαστής, *Beschützer der Verachteten*), savior of them that are without hope (ἀπηλπισμένων σωτήρ, *Retter der Hoffnungslosen*). It took the wisdom of a gorgeous and bright widow not to be complacent with realizing that the poor will always be among us (Mt 26:11, Mk 14:7), but instead to openly proclaim the vision of the benevolent God, who is our Emmanuel, God with us. Judith knows very well that the power of God is not in multitude (οὐ γὰρ ἐν πλήθει τὸ κράτος σου), nor is the might of God in strong men (οὐδὲ ἡ δυναστεία σου ἐν ἰσχύουσιν), but (ἀλλὰ) he is the God of the dejected (ταπεινῶν εἰ Θεός), helper of the poor (ἐλαττόνων εἰ βοηθός), protector of the weak (ἀντιλήπτωρ ἀσθενούντων), shelter for the desperate (ἀπεγνωσμένων σκεπαστής), and the savior of those in despair (ἀπηλπισμένων σωτήρ).

With her striking litany of humility, dignity, and desire, Judith expresses her faith in God, whose strength is not in number and whose reign does not depend on the strong. Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ, which will become the foundational notion of Christianity, emphasizes the ruling activity of God over the physical meaning of God's kingdom. Even though Judith uses the word ἡ δυναστεία while speaking of God's governing over people and the created world, she is convinced that the way of God's protecting and taking care of creation does not depend on the power of the strong (ἡ δυναστεία σου ἐν ἰσχύουσιν). Judith's insightful prayer is an event, a καιρός, that interrupts in the midst of an already sacred time, piercing the tension between tradition and revelation in a fusion of hierophany and kratophany. Judith lets the power of the καιρός happen to her, move her, speak through her, and she shares it with others, letting them hear and see it in the moment of its happening. God's reign does not depend on the power of the strong, but rather is disclosed through the address and the beholding of the validity of the lived experience.

The dialectic of power discloses the divine logic that is based on the relationship with the Creator. The depth of this logic lies in recognition of the futility of merely human endeavors, like in the enchanting beginning of Psalm 127, again in King James's translation: "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep."

What is so inspiring and remarkable in the careful reading of this Psalm is that it discloses the belonging together (*das Zusammengehören*) of building, dwelling, and thinking in its impenetrable relationship to the beginning (ἀρχή) and its eschatological fulfillment (ἔσχατα). From the very

beginning (ἀπ ἀρχῆς, Mt 19: 4), from the foundation of the world (ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου, Mt 25:34), means here the actual beginning and also the vantage point from which the purpose of creation will be seen in its complexity and fullness. Creation and consummation are not just the marks of chronological or sequential time (χρόνος), but belong essentially together and have to be thought together. The beginning and the end are always there in their primordial relationship. Even if we are aware of their inseparability, we must think them in their oneness. The Evangelist Matthew gives us a powerful lesson in thinking time in its divine provenance when the beginning (*Anfang*) cannot be separated from the end, and thinking together the beginning and the end is not a genius discovery of the thinker, but rather a humble reading (*ablesen*) from the disclosure that presents itself to us in the self-manifestation of the trinitarian God. What happens (*sich ereignet*) between the beginning and the end, ἀρχὴ καὶ τέλος, is this mysterious entrusting and belonging to each other, when the positioning and repositioning is the perpetual dance that proceeds without losing anything that is unique and irreplaceable in each of them, and, at the same time, without adding anything to them, since they belong to this simple primordial unity, which is perfection in itself. In Rev 1:8, we read: “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty” — Ἐγὼ εἰμι τὸ Ἄλφα καὶ τὸ Ὠ, λέγει Κύριος ὁ Θεός, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, ὁ Παντοκράτωρ. The Lord God speaks of himself using the well-known formula “I am”, ἐγὼ εἰμι. What is indicative of him is that he is time, time is his, and his time frames us, shapes our experience, and becomes our time.

The actual power of human beings is to recognize that it is God who lets them dwell (*Seinlassen and Wohnenlassen*) in the world with others and work on building (*Bauenlassen*) and thinking (*Denkenlassen*). Thinking is not so much what we do, but what is happening in us and to us when we dwell in our pursuit of a good life and happiness. Blaise Pascal (1958) magnificently summarizes the paradox of the human search for happiness:

What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there once was in man a true happiness of which now remain to him only the mark and empty trace, which he in vain tries to fill from all his surroundings, seeking from things absent the help he does not obtain in things present. But these are all inadequate because the infinite Abyss can only be filled by an infinite and immutable object, that is to say, only by God Himself.

Pascal died at age 39, “being perfected in a short time, he fulfilled long years” (Wisdom 4:13). His genius was to recognize the infinite Abyss in the human heart that can only be filled by the divine. It was the actual work of a δαιμόνιον, the Spirit that dwells in the genius<sup>9</sup>. Pascal firmly believed that only the personal God, not the God of the Philosophers, can satisfy the human hunger for more. This fulfillment is the promise, ἐπαγγελία, that we can treasure at the times of burning joy, the foretaste of the eternal joy to come. The Greek ἐπί, on or upon, and ἀγγελία, a message, announce what is fitting. St. Paul was very eloquent in expressing that this promise is not something, but rather someone who became the Incarnated Word, who himself pointed out for the Paraclete to be sent to those who believe in order to clothe them with power from on high (Lk 24: 49). The word ἐνδύω means literally to sink into the garment that is, unlike any man-made cloth, the power from on high. This power, δύναμις, is the empowerment (*Ermächtigung*) of a human being to apply godly abilities in an intimate relationship with the divine. Here, δύναμις is a fundamental term encompassing the commission of human nature to perform great deeds in the divine assignment. Actualizing this δύναμις, Pascal became a dialectical philosopher who, instead of striving to overcome opposites and intricate intellectual and existential challenges, found the courage to face them and live amidst conflicting interpretations as an honest man (Mueller, 1945). The honest man (*l'honnête homme*) is precisely the art of living the unity of opposites in the absolute attention to their claim (*Anspruch*). Understanding what makes oneself an honest and integral “I” is the fundamental task of human life. Opening to reality and sensitivity to the facticity of life makes Pascal and anyone who follows him a true hermeneutician who knows of the greatness of human capacities and the limitations in their complementary irreducibility and exclusiveness<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Macnaghten (1914, p. 189): “The word δαιμόνιον when used in connection with Socrates’ claim: (I) when used substantively should be translated by the English word ‘deity’ (or ‘divinity’); (2) when used adjectivally should be translated by the adjective ‘divine.’”

<sup>10</sup> “In the expression “*Hermeneutik der Faktizität*,” the genitive is to be understood as *genitivus obiectivus* (interpretation of facticity as a hermeneutic problem) as well as *genitivus subiectivus* (“self-interpretation of facticity”).” (Wierciński, 2019, p. 189). For Heidegger, “the problems of philosophy touch upon Being-as-it-occurs in factual life. In this respect, philosophy is principally ontology, that is to say, that the particular individual worldly regional ontologies take on their reason for being a problem or an explanation of why they are a problem from the ontology of facticity. The problems of philosophy touch upon Being-as-it-occurs in life, in the respective “how” of its being addressed or interpreted. This means that philosophy, as ontology of facticity, is at the same time the categorial interpretation of being addressed and interpreted, and that means, it is logic.” (Heidegger, 1989; cf. Gadamer, 2002).

### **The hermeneutic circle of understanding**

The hermeneutic circle of understanding challenges the limits of intelligibility by opening up the world. Our lived experience and self-understanding lead us toward recognizing the nature of understanding that finds its fulfillment in the innate capability (*l'homme capable*) to understand the Other.

Meditating on *καίρός*, we cannot avoid the question: How does an age, a century, come to expression in a single person? How does somebody like Hans-Georg Gadamer illuminate an epoch in and through his individual life and work (Malpas et al., 2002)? Gadamer reminds us constantly that the power of the enormous progress of science cannot blind a human being from seeing that there is more to life than uniformity, functionality, and acclaimed success (Gadamer, 1983). The task of understanding embraces the whole of what is to be understood (*Universalitätsanspruch der Hermeneutik*), thus essentially transgressing what can be determined by science as worthy of questioning (*fragwürdig*). Therefore, the call for thinking reminds us that with freedom, we also have radical personal responsibility that nobody can take away from us.

To face this radical responsibility, a human being needs to open up their personal horizon to learn what it means to learn and how learning is happening in the unique history of an individual Dasein. Learning to learn is definitely more challenging than acquiring specific knowledge. It is an exercise toward allowing things to happen in life (*Sehenlassen, Hörenlassen*). It is a matter of understanding that the task of learning to learn is to be a wise person, to find the right measure (*das richtige Mass*).

In his long and fulfilled life as a philosopher, Gadamer was very keen to conceive of apprenticeship as the blessed time when our senses are sharpened toward the hermeneutic eye, the hermeneutic ear, the hermeneutic touch, the hermeneutic taste (Gadamer, 1987). An apprenticeship is not predominantly a matter of being under the supervision of someone skilled and knowledgeable, but rather the time of developing toward personal maturity and the ability to face new experiences, precisely because of having learned from the past) experience. This maturity is a question of wise judgment (*Urteilkraft*), of the capacity to see the light: “For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see the light.” Psalm 36:9 in the Septuagint translates this verse as *ὅτι παρὰ σοὶ πηγὴ ζωῆς ἐν τῷ φωτί σου ὁψόμεθα φῶς*, and in the Vulgate: *quoniam tecum est fons vitae in lumine tuo videbimus lumen*. The critical capacity to differentiate between lux and lumen is the purpose of sharpening our senses toward recognizing the plurivocity of meaning and the



metaphoricity of language.<sup>11</sup> Philosophical apprenticeship is an experience stretched throughout the entirety of human life, since it brings into light what our *Lebenswelt* teaches us about our being in the world with others. It is a matter of treasuring and preserving all that calls for understanding in our hearts, even or especially when understanding is not on the horizon.

### **Introduction as leading and being led**

Introducing this collection of papers on the dialectic of power directs the very first gaze toward the meaning of “introduction.” *Intro*, “to the inside” and *ducere*, “to lead”, express the intent of bringing together what needs to be considered in the task of addressing the subject matter. An introduction stands in the nearness of the conclusion. This is how the beginning (*Anfang*) builds with the end (*Endzeit*) the totality of what needs to be understood. Looking back (*Rückblick*) and looking forward (*Vorsicht*) find their *καίρος* in the now of seeing.

As leading into the inside, to the *Sache*, an introduction is a form of preparation and invitation. It discloses to us that we are led through what needs to be thought. It is the capacity of a human being to be guided (*sich Führenlassen*). The experience of learning requires trust that the suggested ways of thinking enrich our understanding. It also develops our confidence in our own power of judgment (*Urteilkraft*) and the indispensability of listening to the Other, including the Other of ourselves, to unfold our personal identity. Our *Lebenswelt* teaches us to be ourselves and reminds us to constantly remain alert. This alertness, *ὑπόμνησις* (*Wachhalten*), is a matter of remembering and recollecting the proper disposition of the mind, *εὐλοκρινῆς διάνοια* (2 P 3:1). It is the art of dialectical thinking that literally reaches across to the other side of a matter.

Intro-duction (*Ein-führung*) is a guide (*Führung*), the art of leading in which the leading person is also led. It reminds us of Gadamer’s genius insight into the conversation that places the participants of the conversation under the spell of the event: The conversation that we are is a dialogue in which we are “far less the leaders than the led” (Gadamer, 2020, p. 383). The logic of question and answer that makes a conversation is a hermeneutic logic that cannot be methodologically established but only experienced in a genuine exchange of insights that lead to other insights. Only retrospectively can we recognize the *how* of the question calling for an answer that

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<sup>11</sup> In the Nicene Creed, we proclaim *Deum de Deo, Lumen de Lumine*. Here, *lumen* refers to the light of God, rather than to the plain sense of light (*lux*).

becomes a question for the following answer. As diligent students of Plato, we acknowledge the brilliance of the way Socrates engaged people he met in life:

The maieutic productivity of the Socratic dialogue, the art of using words as a midwife, is certainly directed toward the people who are the partners in the dialogue, but it is concerned merely with the opinions they express, the immanent logic of the subject matter that is unfolded in the dialogue. What emerges in its truth is the logos, which is neither mine nor yours and hence so far transcends the interlocutors' subjective opinions that even the person leading the conversation knows that he does not know. As the art of conducting a conversation, dialectic is also the art of seeing things in the unity of an aspect (*sunoran eis hen eidos*)—i.e., it is the art of forming concepts through working out the common meaning. What characterizes a dialogue, in contrast with the rigid form of statements that demand to be set down in writing, is precisely this: that in dialogue spoken language—in the process of question and answer, giving and taking, talking at cross purposes and seeing each other's point—performs the communication of meaning that, with respect to the written tradition, is the task of hermeneutics. (Gadamer, 2020, p. 361).

The dynamic of giving and taking emphasizes that neither is a passive role: Partners in a genuine conversation are leading the Other, are being led by the Other, and together are led by the event of conversation (*das Ereignis des Gesprächs*). If we follow Heidegger in his understanding of a human being as Dasein that is concerned with itself (*sich sorgt*), then existence is care (*Sorge*). Being in the world means taking care of oneself seriously: The what and the how will form and transform us. The ability to imagine otherwise is the first step to overcoming existential barriers. It is a capacity of nurturing us with an insight into ourselves that is not easily accessible to us without a serious determination to discern the meaning of the polyphonic voices that (dis)closing the totality of being a human being in the world with others.



De val van Icarus by Pieter Bruegel de Oude (<https://fine-arts-museum.be/nl/de-collectie/pieter-i-bruegel-de-val-van-icarus>)

The importance of understanding the fleeting moment, something that can easily be not noticed in the midst of our busyness (*Geschäftigkeit*) and restlessness (*Rastlosigkeit*) is particularly relevant for meditative being in the world (*besinnliches Denken*) to counterpart the prevailing calculative life (*berechnendes Denken*). Icarus's flight into freedom convincingly depicts the essence of our human in-betweenness: Between the human and the divine, humility and pride, invincibility and weakness, magnificent dreams and modesty. This in-betweenness calls for a permanent deliberation on the power of being a human being in the world with Others and dialectical thinking of how to be oneself, also as the Other of oneself, and with the Others. The Falling of Icarus is a compelling commentary on the world of pain and suffering that seems to be indifferent. Apparently, the death of Icarus does not make any difference to the figures in the painting, who are busy with their mundane tasks. The dialectic of power of reading the painting allows for a deeper phenomenological and hermeneutic access to the understanding of *καίρως* as the event (*Ereignis*) of discovering meaning in the moment which becomes a bliss, an instant of grace. In an instant, looking at the painting means being looked at, letting-see, and being radically responsible and responsive to the experience of the moment as well as the experience it means for one's whole life. As human beings, we are questioned by life: The Word of God and Tradition question us, and in being addressed, we have an opportunity to exercise our responsibility in the innermost core of who we are.

The dialectic power of *καὶρὸς* demands from us the absolute concentration of attention to what is there, an awareness that is not picky and enslaves us by the devotion to the magnitude of information wanted to be managed but the blissful moment of vision, a truly transformative instant. The co-crucified *κακοῦργος* missed obviously his *καὶρὸς*. Here, we see the powerful meaning of the *now and maybe never again*. Following Kierkegaard (1998, p. 338), we can say: “The moment is when the man is there, the right man, the man of the moment.”

The concentration of attention is the intense experience that allows for radical decisiveness and is far away from any simple complacency with the flow of events. It is the art of seeing and listening to the voices that ring out in our *Lebenswelt*. Like in Kierkegaard’s experience:

As though I were out of the body, wafted with them into the ether above - and the hoarse screech of the gulls reminded me that I stood alone, and everything vanished before my eyes, and I turned back with a heavy heart to mix in the busy world, yet without forgetting such blessed moments. - I have often stood there and looked out upon my past life and upon the different surroundings which have exercised their power upon me... Seen thus in perspective only the broad and powerful outline showed, and I did not, as so frequently happens to me, lose myself in the moment, but saw everything as a whole and was strengthened to understand things differently, to admit how often I had blundered, and to forgive others. (Bretall, 1946, pp. 3-4).

Sharpening our hermeneutic senses can help us to recognize the power of the dialectic of seeing with reference to Bruegel’s painting. It is almost an idyllic painting when everydayness witnesses the events of human history. The blessing of different perspectives, different languages, and different sensitivities calls us to be attentive to what needs to be understood. Among beautiful landscapes, beautiful shapes and colors, a momentous event is happening. It is our task to notice it and translate it into something meaningful for our lives. As such, it is always (only) an experiment in thinking (*Denkversuch*). Maybe a small contribution (*Beitrag*), which can turn into the power to carry us (*uns tragen*).

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