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Andrzej Wierciński & Andrej Božič (eds.):

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Tel.: (386 1) 24 44 560

Email:
institut@nova-revija.si
andrej.bozic@institut-nr.si

Fenomenološko društvo v Ljubljani
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Filozofska fakulteta | Oddelek za filozofijo (kab. 432b)

Aškerčeva 2
1000 Ljubljana
Slovenija

Tel.: (386 1) 2411106

Email:
dean.komel@ff.uni-lj.si

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Dilemmas of Education for Democratic Imperatives and Good Citizenship

Anna Zielińska

University of Warsaw, Faculty of Education, Mokotowska 16/20, 00-561 Warsaw, Poland

azielinska@uw.edu.pl

Abstract

Despite the numerous crises of contemporary democracy, there still exists a widespread conviction that democracy is the best approach to ensure harmonious relationships among individuals and social groups. However, in the time of the growing disappointment over our social relationship and the radical decrease of trust within society, we face the question of how to educate for democracy. It is necessary to present to young people the classic disputes of democracy that are still valid and simultaneously

go beyond the traditional thinking about democracy and civic engagement. The understanding of democratic participation and civil activity is currently changing. We experience new, alternative, more individualized, and emotional forms of civic activity among the young. Therefore, we should face the questions concerning contemporary education for good citizenship, for active participation in democracy and in pursuing the goals of democratic societies.

Keywords: democracy, good citizenship, education for democracy, civic engagement, cultural change.

Dileme izobraževanja za demokratične imperative in zgledno državljanstvo

Povzetek

Kljub številnim krizam sodobne demokracije obstaja široko razširjeno prepričanje, da je demokracija najboljši pristop k zagotavljanju složnih odnosov med posamezniki in družbenimi skupinami. Vendar se v času naraščajočega razočaranja and družbenimi razmerji in radikalnega pojemanja zaupanja znotraj družbe soočamo z vprašanjem, kako izobraževati za demokracijo. Mladim ljudem je potrebno predstaviti klasične razprave glede demokracije, ki ostajajo v veljavi in obenem presegajo tradicionalno razmišljanje o demokraciji in civilnem udejstvovanju. V današnjih časih se razumevanje demokratične udeležbe in civilne aktivnosti spreminja. Med mladimi lahko zasledimo nove, alternativne, bolj individualizirane in čustvene oblike civilne aktivnosti. Zato se moramo spoprijeti z vprašanji, ki zadevajo sodobno izobraževanje za zgledno državljanstvo, za aktivno udeleževanje v demokraciji in zasledovanju ciljev demokratičnih družb.

Ključne besede: demokracija, zgledno državljanstvo, izobraževanje za demokracijo, civilno udejstvovanje, kulturna sprememba.

In today's world, despite the numerous crises of contemporary democracy, there still exists a widespread conviction that democracy is the most supportive for the fulfillment of human rights, for harmonious relationships among individuals and social groups, and that it allows the organization of political relations under the principles of freedom and equality. It is frequently said that classical democracy has in the present time of radical inequalities, globalization, and development of new technologies lost its sense and should be redefined. Moreover, one can observe a decline in confidence in it and a disappointment in it. Interpersonal trust within society is increasingly weaker. The belief that our engagement in the public sphere is important and serves the development of *the common good* is fading. Under these circumstances, teachers have to face the challenge of how to prepare the youth for an active participation in democracy and to pursue goals of democratic societies.

Democracy is a widely accepted concept, and yet it remains unclear. Its semantic scope is difficult to specify, leads to controversies and issues with definition—and the discussion on how to educate young people for democracy should begin from determining what democracy is and what its demands are.

The dispute on democracy

The classical understanding of the term "democracy" assumed a certain ideal, a set of values that should be made real. The term *democracy*, to which Giovanni Sartori draws attention, fulfills not only a descriptive, but also the normative and persuasive functions: "[…] democracy results from, and is shaped by, the interactions between its ideals and its reality: the pull of an *ought* and the resistance of an *is*." (Sartori 1994, 22) Although the concept of democracy as a form of rule dates back to ancient Greece, its contemporary understanding was born in the times of the revolutions at the end of the 18th century.

The Greeks associated democracy with such features as the rule of the majority, the right to hold an office, the equality of votes, the equality of rights, the respect for the law, and the participation of citizens in joint decisions. The classical theory of democracy was a normative one, referring to values and based on the assumption that the dignity of a free man depends on the

opportunity to participate in the shaping of decisions, which actually applied to him; it assumed that people actively participate in political life and are involved in public matters. The existence of democracy depended upon the existence of a community of free citizens—*polites*, who accept a similar concept of the common good.

The liberal tradition overtook the development of democracy in the 19th century and led to its different understanding. The fundamental elements of liberal thought on democracy included guaranteeing the rights and freedoms tied to the life of individuals in the society and their participation in the development of the capitalist economy. Liberalism, whose development commenced in the form of liberal democracy, guaranteed the individual freedom from the bonds of old institutions and customs. It guaranteed personal liberty, freedom of speech and association, freedom of private property, offered protection from arbitrary actions by the authorities, but omitted the communal dimension of societal life. In a country of liberal democracy, understood in such a manner, the citizens were individuals who defended their freedoms and rights, and strove for their interests, but they were not united by *the common good*—the latter did not include participation in the political life of the community, because all groups were treated as sets of individuals having specific rights and protecting their interests. Such a concept of democracy can be drawn on the basis of the individualist and instrumental approach to social institutions, based on the natural law of John Locke. The concept of democracy presented in the writings of John Stuart Mill is contrary to that position. Mill's approach could be defined as ethical and communitarian, referring to the traditions of the republican understanding of the state, which in turn refers to Aristotle. For Mill, participation in political life is important, and its goal is equality and a more perfect society. The rights of citizens, including franchise, are supposed to serve that goal. People should develop through their participation in the life of a democratic society, which in this perspective becomes an important value, and not just a means to fulfill the individual goals of citizens.

This legacy determines contemporary thinking about democracy and leads to a differentiation between contemporary theories of democracy—from those assuming only its formal, procedural understanding to theories which support,

or even expand, its understanding as participatory democracy, frequently resulting in blurring the difference between democracy and civil society. Between these two poles lies the substantive understanding of democracy as a political system which guarantees certain values and goods, such as justice and equality.

According to its supporters (who include Joseph Alois Schumpeter, Robert Dahl, and Samuel Huntington), procedural democracy is an adequate response to the complexity and the cultural, ethnic, religious, and all other types of diversity in modern societies. In contemporary, complex state organisms, it is impossible and impractical for people to be directly involved in political life. The representative system appears to be the best response to this situation, as it limits the participation of citizens in public life to attendance at elections, during which those who actually make political decisions are chosen. However, for numerous authors, democracy which is only procedural, without positive values and "cold," is insufficient. The "true democracy" is completed by honesty and openness in politics, by responsible, knowledge-based governance, by rational debates on the most pressing problems, and by equal participation of citizens in social life.

The narrow, procedural understanding of democracy is less useful in the discussion on the shape of education for democracy. For the purpose of school and non-school forms of education, it appears necessary to consider what is important for the proper functioning of democracy and concerns the values on which it should be based. Theories of democracy based on the common good (substantive theories) seem therefore more useful for teachers. The concept that common good is the goal of a democratic rule seems easy to accept and is understandable in an intuitive manner. Problems arise when we attempt to "translate" this concept into specific notions. The first to arise are problems tied to defining the common good and how we can recognize it (Grabowska and Szawiel 2003, 75). Schumpeter goes furthest in criticizing such an understanding of democracy—he states that there is no such thing as *the common good* which could be accepted by all citizens (Schumpeter 1942), while Dahl believes that *common good* comprises only those institutions, practices, and procedures that we share with others and that support the well-being of numerous citizens and communities (Dahl 1989).

Despite this criticism, the normative concept of democracy retains its attractiveness and its motivational nature for citizens, despite the difficulty with a precise definition of *the common good* and how it could be recognized. Many contemporary authors do not agree to scaling the idea of democracy down to forms and procedures, to reducing it to methods of rule—although they simultaneously admit that these procedures can be the most effective means for protecting citizens against the abuse of power (Pietrzyk-Reeves 2004). The postulate for understanding democracy as going beyond the mechanisms of decision-making, law-making, electing and legitimizing governments, provokes us to search for an alternative concept of democracy, one that would assume a certain model of relationships among people—members of a certain community.

This leads us to the substantive perception of democracy—but then we can consider it as a democracy which guarantees values characteristic for individualism and liberalism—that is to say, liberal democracy or a more community-based democracy, where the focus is to protect the common good.

The proponents of *liberal democracy* are characterized by a mistrust towards the state, and their main goal is to protect the freedoms and human rights. The state should be limited, so as not to allow its excessive intervention into the life of individuals and the destruction of social fabric. The crucial attributes of liberal democracy include free elections and the rule of law. Liberal democracy also assumes leaving a broad area for individual and social activity and entrepreneurship. In liberal democracy, the authorities do not intervene in moral or religious disputes among the citizens. A state of liberal democracy cannot impose a system of values; it also cannot allow for a religion, a philosophy, or an ideology to assume the hegemonic position. Some representatives of this concept of democracy emphasize not only the principle of respect for those who think otherwise, but also propose to avoid violent disputes regarding issues on which members of the democratic society differ (Rawls 1993).

On the opposite extreme of the concept of democracy are the supporters of *communitarianism*, which is a special variety of participatory democracy. The basic assumption of participatory democracy is the belief that the dignity of human beings is the basis for their right to have a say in the making of

decisions that affect them, and that an individual is interested not only in the outcomes of political decisions, but also in their very process.

Communitarians go further, without limiting their consideration to the concept of democracy. They are interested in the relationship between the individual and the society, and the essence of social life. They opt for direct democracy—they want to hold elections and referenda more frequently to introduce democratic procedures in various areas of life. Democracy should be characterized by citizens taking part more strongly in the decisions regarding public matters. The communitarian offer goes beyond the sphere of politics and touches upon such important areas of social life as the attempts at achieving higher economic equality, enabling equal conditions for democratic participation to various groups and individuals and manner of the organization of social life which would ensure that members of a given community take actual part in solving its problems. Communitarians raise a number of demands on the pre-political level, concerning the family, school, and the upbringing of young people. They emphasize the importance of community and the need to strengthen the ties between individuals and the community, which would encourage people to become more involved in public life. They also stress the significance of civic obligations and virtues. Under the communitarian approach to democracy, there is less emphasis on the rights of the individual, on their freedom and autonomy, and more on the ties with the community and on civic duties. Without questioning the rights of the individual in general or the political institutions of liberal democracy, communitarians stress their limitations. The individual nature of liberal democracy weakens, in their opinion, civic virtues and responsibility, resulting in excessive concentration on oneself and one's own matters. Liberal democracy turns into a bureaucratic, formalized structure in which the actual power is exercised by the elites—in other words, it becomes *a democracy of the elites*. People are focused on their private matters and on rivalry, they become indifferent to public matters, do not get involved in *the common good*. Such a democracy results in the passive masses, and not in a set of autonomous individuals.

Communitarians criticize liberal individualism also for its negative influence on ties between the individual and the community, depriving people of a sense of rootedness by weakening the ties between the individual and

the family, the neighborhood group, the religious community, and the local community. In the opinion of communitarians, individualism characterizing liberal democracy gives people freedom—but at the same time brings about solitude and anomie. Only a reconstruction of social ties can give a moral sense to democracy. In comparison to the representatives of other approaches to democracy, supporters of communitarianism place a stronger emphasis on civic education and preparing people to take part in political life (Pietrzyk-Reeves 2004).

The communitarian approach to democracy has also raised criticism. Most importantly, critics indicate that it threatens privacy and freedom of individuals, as well as the rational nature of politics. Such an understanding of democracy also assumes strong ties between the form of political order and the traits and virtues of citizens—something that remains uncertain and is not obvious (Dahl 1989).

It is, however, worth noting that the supporters of both of these approaches share a common attitude to the various forms of the organization of civic society, which fill the gap between activity on the micro scale—within family and close neighborhood—and actions in the field of politics. Proponents of liberal democracy believe that it is beneficial if there exist numerous associations, social organizations, and networks of exchange among citizens—characteristic for civic society, enabling citizens to defend their rights and fulfill their interests. Despite the fact that they base their views on other premises, communitarians are definitely in favor of the widest possible participation of citizens in the life of their community—in the local and professional self-governments, in social movements and associations. This perspective of thinking about democracy, as a system creating conditions for the self-organization of society, is widely accepted and should be used in civic education both at school and outside it.

Challenges for civic education at school

With all the differences in approaches to democracy represented by various authors, the different manners of defining democracy can be placed on two axes, whose extremes are: the procedural-only definition of democracy versus the normative definition; and the individual-liberal definition versus the

participation and community definition. The debate on democracy, conducted between liberals and communitarians, led to the formation of various concepts of democracy, containing elements typical for these fundamental positions. It is, however, necessary to remember that civic education must present democracy as having a complex, multi-faceted nature. The various understandings of democracy overlap, share some common fields.

The disputes on democracy are important to understand the contemporary world, they should be presented during school education and submitted to reflection during the teaching process. The syllabus of civic education on democracy is usually similar in various countries, whereas the teachers make choices in their work and place emphasis on various issues which determine the way in which the students perceive democracy (Zielińska 2008).

Empirical research shows that during adolescence some students, especially those with higher educational achievements, form consistent ways of thinking about democracy (Zielińska 2008, 175–206). When analyzing the responses of young people who indicated the traits and behaviors which in their opinion are either good or bad for democracy, it can be observed that a relatively small part of teenagers selected the liberal concept of democracy—more respondents opted for the community concept. It seems interesting that the choice of the liberal concept was usually linked to a high SES (socio-economic status) index of the family, while the selection of the community concept, regardless of family status, depended on the school socialization factors, such as: the open climate of school discussions, the sense of empowerment, and the students' possibility to influence and change the school life.

Among most of the young respondents no coherent thinking on democracy was noticed, the responses were frequently internally contradictory and presented mutually exclusive values. An analysis of civic education conducted at schools shows (Zielińska 2008, 213–222) that teachers willingly deal with democratic institutions and procedures, but feel uncertain in those areas where disputes and conflicts of values appear. The presentation and discussion of the consequences of implementing various concepts of democracy and various forms of the organization of social life is an important—and neglected—area in school education.

Experience and empirical research shows that procedural democracy is not very attractive for young people. They learn, if they have to, about elections

and related procedures, about the constitution, political institutions, and their competences—but all this does not encourage them to civic involvement. An analysis of the results of research conducted in Poland under the international program ICCS IEA 2009 (International Civic and Citizenship Education Study of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement) can lead to the conclusion that civic knowledge is connected with the acceptance of fundamental, procedural principles of democracy and the readiness to participate in elections in the future; however, it does not determine civic involvement, with the exception of readiness for certain activities at school (this is characteristic for the "good students"). A similar dependency was also observed in other countries covered by the study. Good learning achievements clearly do not translate into a readiness for civic involvement to the benefit of one's community (Wiłkomirska and Zielińska 2015, 305–316). This absence of connection requires reflection and poses a challenge for teachers and heads responsible for the civic education conducted at schools.

The readiness for action in a democratic society also means the ability to protest when *the common good* or (under the liberal concept) values and interests important for individuals and groups are threatened. For the protest to be effective, it should be organized within a framework accepted in the given community. The choice of the type of protest is strongly connected with the educational achievements of students. Good and very good students are more frequently ready to engage in legal protests; those with worse learning outcomes and coming from poorer family backgrounds are more often ready to accept illegal actions. Therefore, we can suppose that their actions would be less effective, and can in some situations even marginalize them.

In the contemporary literature on youth, the issues of *citizenship deficit* and the crisis of democracy have been raised. The youth have often been treated as a problem—for being "passive," uninvolved in public affairs, not caring for the common good and ignoring political or civic engagement (Ostrowicka 2012; Bessant, Farthing, and Watts 2016). However, some events in recent years have undermined such a judgment (e.g., the ACTA or climate protests).

It is also worth stressing that authors pointing out *the deficit of citizenship* within youth have treated citizenship as a status, as a certain set of knowledge,

skills, values, and dispositions required for the proper fulfilment of civic roles that young people should obtain (mainly through formal education) to a proper degree. However, there are many arguments in favor of the assertion that in contemporary society young people who give their meanings to terms, create a new language to describe the social world and are not—despite apparent similarities— "carbon copies" of the adult world. One can predict that a similar situation can be encountered in the area of practicing citizenship and constructing the terms related thereto. The forms of participation and practicing citizenship (e.g., e-democracy) may pose a challenge for the traditionally recognized forms of civic involvement. Perhaps we should speak of transformations rather than *the deficit of citizenship*. Literature points to individualization processes, that weaken the power of collective identities and representations, transform the public sphere (Hudzik and Woźniak 2006) and increase the role of identities related to lifestyles (Kluczyńska 2010; Melosik 2013), as being a challenge—and a new context—for civic actions of the young people. Equally critical is also the assessment of formal civic education defining the young as being "not yet citizens" (Biesta and Lawy 2006; Harris 2006). New, alternative forms of civic activities emerge among the young people—more individualized and emotional, of aesthetic and/or expressive nature (Harris, Wyn, and Younes 2010), e.g., *culture jamming* (Zańko 2012), consumer boycott, or art (Niziołek 2009).

The basis for understanding citizenship and the readiness for civic action among the young people comprises both individual and sociocultural factors. The significance of school and the inadequacy of school socialization is often stressed (Siellawa-Kolbowska 2008; Dudzikowa and Wawrzyniak-Beszterda 2010; Szafraniec 2012); the same concerns the importance of informal education and social systems where an individual develops (e.g., the Ecological Systems Theory of Bronfenbrener or the Situated Learning Theory of Lave and Wenger). These theories address environments determining the political socialization of the youth as a construct of cooperating sub-systems. Greatly relevant is also social awareness and collective mentality of the communities where adolescents live (Koralewicz and Ziółkowski 2003). The notion of citizenship and civic participation may function in the collective mentality of various youth groups differently to what is taught in formal education

(national curriculum, textbooks, etc.). Therefore, it is important to understand the process through which these terms are constructed, the factors of major importance for this process, and to understand the ways citizenship is practiced by various social environments that go beyond school education, such as the family or the media. What is most important for educators and teachers, is to understand the meanings and sense given by the youth to citizenship and their actions in the public sphere.

It seems that many countries witness the exhaustion of the citizenship model promoted through formal education, so the youth—faced with new social and cultural phenomena—need to define what it means to be a citizen for them. The problem goes beyond the dispute on whether *the citizenship deficit* exists or not, because not just traditional and new forms of participation—or the absence thereof—, but also new contents of citizenship are at stake here. The literature also recommends addressing citizenship as something people do every day—i.e., *citizenship as practice*, practice of identification with the affairs of the community, always set in the context where the youth live and to which they lend defined meanings (Biesta and Lawy 2006).

Trying to understand everyday and ordinary citizenship enables us "to uncover an alternative landscape of citizenship participation" (Wood 2014, 228), a sense of belonging, rights and responsibilities, complex and often mutually competing ways of understanding the notion. This perspective is particularly inspiring and enables an insight into how young people construct their citizenship in the contemporary world. The idea of *citizenship as practice* and *everyday experience*, allows us to go beyond the dominant perspective regarding citizenship discourse and define this category differently, adequately for the youth and from their everyday experiences.

The old dilemmas and the new challenges indicated above set the framework for a dispute on civic education at school. The primary task for civic education in contemporary school would be to conduct a debate on democracy and citizenship, and not only to provide knowledge. The school frequently limits its activity only to offering the students the democratic principles and procedures, but does not explain the implications that various understandings of democracy have for the organization of social life and the situation of individuals and social groups; it offers no basis for creative and

critical thinking on how to improve the quality of democracy. The school does not sufficiently use the everyday life of young people as a civic experience.

Inequality of access to civic education is another significant challenge for schools. Research shows that some students are excluded from public life already at the school level. Those students do not enjoy educational achievements, they do not value democracy, and do not associate hope for an improvement of their situation with political involvement. Already at school, they learn to be socially passive, helpless in the face of difficulties and challenges, which can lead to their social exclusion. This threat is particularly pronounced in the group of the poorest students (Wiłkomirska and Zielińska 2015, 305–316). It appears that the school does not have an appropriate educational and social offer for this group of adolescents.

Research conducted by psychologists shows that the way in which we perceive people and reasons for their actions, in other words, our fixed patterns of perceiving the world, support cooperative and pro-social behaviors, facilitate relationships with other people, maintenance of friendships—while other beliefs about people and their motivations lead to conflict, violence, and abuse of others (Skarżyńska and Radkiewicz 2007; Putnam 2000).

It can also be indicated that the consequences of a vision of the world assuming an antagonistic and not synergic nature of interpersonal relations are negative for individuals, groups, and societies. Antagonistic patterns of the social world can result in the conviction that life is a zero-sum game, in which we fight with others for some limited goods and our success is tied to the failure of others—our failure means their victory. Under such a vision of the world, there is no "common good" and we can receive no benefits from cooperation (Grzelak 2007).

The antagonistic vision of the world is connected with the belief that most people are immoral, egoistic, and tend to abuse others. Thus, people cannot be trusted (Adorno et al. 1950; Skarżyńska 2005; Putnam 2000). Such a vision of the world is tied to the conviction that threats are everywhere. All these elements constitute an important element of the "culture of conflict" (Ross 1993), block social activity and cooperation, threaten the public debate, and harm the development of democracy.

The development of differential life patterns can depend on macro-systemic conditions (such as: authoritarian regimes, the absence of the rule

of law, violent system changes which deprive people of a sense of security) and on personal and family factors (personality traits, individual experience, family life climate, relationship with parents, the model of relationship with other significant people, etc.). The model of school socialization, significantly exceeding education passed on intentionally by teachers, can have a crucial influence on such a vision of the world. Important factors include the organization of school life and the overall climate at the school, relations among all participants in the school life, possibility of cooperating on solving problems related to school and important school matters. Therefore, apart from the syllabus content, the organization of the teaching process, and the teaching methods, we also need to tackle other issues, in order to improve the quality of education for democracy and to deal with its challenges.

The most significant of them are included in the following questions:

– To what extent should the school be democratic to fulfill its tasks of preparing students for life in a democratic society? And the related question: what ways of practicing democracy should be introduced at various levels of school education?

– How should the debate on democracy be conducted at schools? How to run the debate without excluding weaker students or strengthening the dominance of the stronger ones?

– To what extend should democracy apply to the teaching process or to other issues as well, and to what extend should it lead to empowerment and independence of students (at various levels of education)?

– How to teach about citizenship today? To what extent is the traditional concept of citizenship (understanding citizenship in terms of *the model of a good citizen*, of *citizens' rights and obligations*) still valid, and within what scope should it be extended with new concepts of citizenship emerging today?

Questions also arise regarding the wider, systemic context of civic education and the equal chances for students to better understand the challenges of democracy and be better prepared for life in the civic society. The most important of these include:

– Is it better to decentralize the educational institutions (offer more power to school boards, local authorities, NGO's) or to maintain the state control, exercised by the democratically elected authorities?

– Is it better for a fulfillment of democratic perspectives to individualize education, adapt it according to the preferences of students and parents? Or to unify education in adherence to the standards set by the society?

Answering these questions is difficult. This difficulty is linked to the fact that the issues discussed concern not only the syllabus but also the debates on the level of an openness of the school to democracy, school organization, and the climate of school teaching. Equally important, are macro-level solutions which are deeply rooted both in the history of a particular society and the discussion on democracy, as well as the mutual relations between democracy and civil society deliberated upon in the opening sections of this paper. It is worth mentioning that the concept of civic education is also difficult to negotiate because of various emotions connected with it and different ways of experiencing citizenship. In spite of all these difficulties, such a debate ought to be continued.

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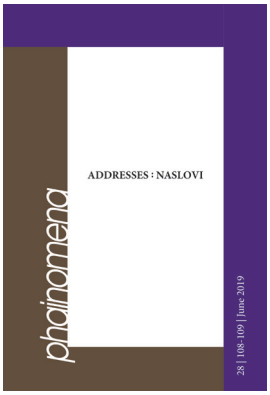

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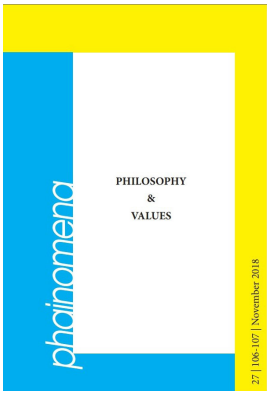

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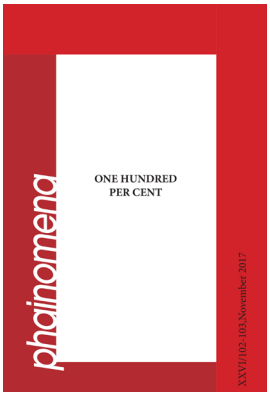

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