

# IN SEARCH OF NEW CONCEPTS

## THE CHALLENGES OF THE MODERN HUMANITIES IN THE PEDAGOGICAL FOCUS

### (ON LECH WITKOWSKI'S PHILOSOPHICAL WORKS)

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#### *Abstract*

The article provides an analysis of the scientific work of the prominent Polish philosopher, cultural critic, sociologist, and educator Lech Witkowski in the field of modern humanities, application of hermeneutics, critical reflection, and anthropology, including: (1) scientific reflections on the integration of the humanities and social sciences, the findings of the humanities as applied to pedagogy; several conceptual ideas of pedagogy viewed in their relation to philosophy and culture; (2) criticism

against dualism towards bipolarity (unifying duality); (3) important aspects of cultural ecology, tradition, and their implications for education; (4) the concept of the “explosive effect” of reading in the humanities and its dynamics; (5) the phenomenon of identity through various perspectives, (6) shedding light on the difficulties concerning the effectiveness of modern scientific research and education. The fundamental concepts of the contemporary humanities are, according to Witkowski, interpreted through such categories as ambivalence, duality, irony, tradition, identity, and others, taking into consideration the extent of ethical and cognitive distancing, as well as the analytical and critical approach to the study of scientific texts.

*Keywords:* modern humanities, hermeneutic circle, anti-positivist breakthrough, critical pedagogy, cultural ecology, interdisciplinarity.

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### **V iskanju novih konceptov. Izzivi moderne humanistike z vidika pedagogike (O filozofskih delih Lecha Witkowskega)**

#### *Povzetek*

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Prispevek predstavlja analizo znanstvenega dela uglednega poljskega filozofa, kulturnega kritika, sociologa in pedagoga Lecha Witkowskega na polju moderne humanistike, aplikacije hermenevtike, kritične refleksije in antropologije. Obravnava vključuje: (1) znanstvene refleksije o integraciji humanistike in družboslovja, dosežke humanistike, kakor jih je mogoče aplicirati na pedagogiko; več konceptualnih idej glede slednje v njihovem razmerju do filozofije in kulture; (2) kritiko dualizma, ki se nagiba k bipolarnosti (enotenje dvojnosti); (3) pomembne vidike kulturne ekologije, tradicije in njihove implikacije za izobraževanje; (4) koncept »eksplozivnega učinka« branja znotraj humanistike in njegovo dinamiko; (5) fenomen identitete glede na različne perspektive, ki (6) osvetljujejo težave, kakršne se tičejo učinkovitosti modernega znanstvenega raziskovanja in izobraževanja. Temeljne koncepte sodobne humanistike, v skladu z razumevanjem Witkowskega, interpretiramo na podlagi kategorij, kot so ambivalenca, dvojnost, ironija, tradicija, identiteta idr., pri čemer upoštevamo tako stopnjevost etičnega in kognitivnega distanciranja kakor analitični in kritični pristop k študiju znanstvenih besedil.

*Gljučne besede:* moderna humanistika, hermenevtični krog, antipozitivistični preboj, kritična pedagogika, kulturna ekologija, interdisciplinarnost.

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## Introduction

An ongoing discourse in the scientific literature revolves around the development of a unified classification, in order to clearly distinguish between the social sciences and the humanities, based on the fundamental argument about their research focus: society—in the social sciences—and the human being—in the humanities. However, these studies are usually integrated, identified, or intersected, depending on the choice of criteria of the research object, methodology, application area, etc. For example, the social sciences are mainly focused on the study of human beings in society and require practical tools for research; the humanities are focused on human beings from the perspective of their spiritual, moral, cultural, intellectual, and social activities.

When reflecting on the approaches to choosing criteria for the study of pedagogy, it is important to point out that the latter “emerged” from philosophy as a meta-science, and thus in this field the methodology of humanistic research focused on axiological contexts is used, although the results of experimental activities are interpreted in the context of the methodology of social sciences. Recognizing philosophy of education as a distinct philosophical field has enabled the application of fundamental principles from philosophical domains, such as ontology, epistemology, anthropology, axiology, and ethics, within educational research, which represents a significant form of socially institutionalized activity. Today, the intricate character of pedagogy results from its predominant categorization within the realms of the humanities and the social sciences, leading to inherent challenges with regard to, among other aspects, its subjects, objectives, fields, and research methodologies.

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Hence, the present investigation outlines specific approaches to addressing this issue within the framework of the scientific heritage of the respected Polish scientist Lech Witkowski who emphasizes the pedagogical perspective within the humanities as well as a metahumanistic, i.e., philosophical approach to pedagogical dilemmas. In one of his monographs, he convincingly defines pedagogy as a “central discipline for the humanities”:

Pedagogy should be regarded as a metahumanist field, demanding critical examination of the quality of our humanistic aspirations. When seen through this lens, philosophy must be recognized as a challenging

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and ongoing process, representing a demanding yet incomplete embrace of the humanities. (Witkowski 2007, 70.)

Describing the dilemma of the humanities in this (pedagogical) context, Witkowski represents himself as a “rebellious pessimist” in academic terms, as he sees the fundamental challenges in realizing the mission of humanistic culture in the university environment, sometimes manifested in drama through misunderstandings. Therefore, he calls for an intellectual “awakening,” “critical and philosophical insight” (Witkowski 2007, 12).

228 The article aims to analyze the current problems of the modern humanities based on the study of Lech Witkowski’s leading scientific research as well as: (1) to interpret some of the scientist’s conceptual ideas regarding the necessity for critical reflection on the prospects for the development of pedagogical science through the prism of a hermeneutic approach to the humanities; (2) to present certain pedagogical ideas in the context of critical pedagogy and bipolarity (unifying duality); (3) to outline the ontological contexts of cultural ecology, tradition, and their application to education; (4) to characterize the theory of the “explosive effect”; (5) to highlight the identity phenomenon in the humanities; and (6) to identify the issues of current scientific research efficiency and academic education. The text outlines only some of the concepts of Witkowski’s scientific works—the closest to me as the author of the paper—that reflect the social challenges of the humanities (including pedagogy) and the methodology for modern interdisciplinary research.

### **The humanities embrace pedagogy in a new way**

In this context, Lech Witkowski’s recent book *Claims and Transactuality in the Humanities. Florian Znanięcki: The Patrimony of Ideas and its Fractures (Uroszczenia i transaktualność w humanistyce. Florian Znanięcki: dziedzictwo idei i jego pęknięcia; 2022)* is extremely relevant and of great importance for accentuating and prompting the reevaluation of value concepts within the realm of scientific methodology. Furthermore, a critical contemporary issue in the domains of the humanities and education, such as, e.g., in the Ukrainian conditions, involves fostering democratic values, nurturing national identity, encouraging civic participation, cultivating media literacy to counter

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information warfare (Budnyk and Mazur 2017), promoting interdisciplinary approaches, embracing complementarity, and embracing a societal perspective within the framework of the so-called posthumanist paradigm.

The author predominantly examines these issues from the perspective of a scholarly interpretation of the famous sociologist Znaniecki's research focused on the necessity of the improvement of the methodological base of contemporary fundamental research at the convergence point of the social sciences and the humanities. According to the scientist, perhaps the most important achievement of Znaniecki's classical doctrine is that it "[...] combines both a rejection of the recent inclination to separate the humanities and social studies, and a perspective that reveals inadequacies" (Witkowski 2022, 22). Witkowski dares to propose a notion, often considered by himself as an important "heresy," suggesting that "cultural meanings exist beyond the realm of the social," which implies that they are "transactual" (beyond actuality) yet detached from active social engagement. This notion aligns with Znaniecki's emphasis on the significance of implicit "deconstruction" in the humanities—a cyclic, deliberate process of rethinking ideas to unveil novel conceptual theories within new settings and frameworks. 229

In Znaniecki's philosophical writings, the concept of "the fracture of duality" is accentuated by the author within a context distinct from dichotomies. Witkowski persuasively asserts that challenging dualistic constructs in cognitive scenarios represents a realm, where the fledgling classical philosopher unveils potential pitfalls and risks confronting both philosophy and the social sciences. This prompts the deduction that "pedagogy [...] needs a breakthrough in the perception of Florian Znaniecki's ideas" (Witkowski 2022, 22). This entails a request for seeing duality as a complex unity both ontologically and epistemologically, where difference does not mean separation, conflict, or alternative, but represents a difficult yet coordinated complexity.

The discourse of integral humanities, for example, focuses on the dual structure in bipolar systems as bipartite setting of tension and cooperation:

Within the domain of values, norms, obligations, and responsibilities, three fundamental principles emerge [...]: firstly, in the realm of pedagogical activities, values and norms operate in tandems, in a collision that cannot be eliminated, even on the side of the good, they

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do not tolerate unilateral absolutizations and the greatest harm is done by their advocates, who affirmatively attach them to themselves, i.e., to their inability to rise to their level. (Witkowski 2007, 17.)

In the chapter of the aforementioned book entitled “Against Pedagogy? Beyond Pedagogy?” Lech Witkowski demonstrates Znaniecki’s contribution to exploring crucial systems within the operational context of academic fields, such as the sociology of education, philosophy of culture, or pedagogy. The monograph delivers a notably critical examination of certain S. Kowalski’s “intellectually unproductive” scientific propositions used by Znaniecki—“[...] the sociology of education does not belong to pedagogy in the sense of its pedagogical significance assigned by the critic to social pedagogy [...]”—as illustrated by “an intellectual vision of pedagogical thinking,” outlining the progress of the pedagogical science (Witkowski 2022, 380).

230 In scholarly circles, occasional discourse suggests that “pedagogy lacks the status of a genuine science,” since it draws upon the methodologies, principles, and frameworks of other disciplines, highlighting the prominence of globalization theory and the priority of philosophy, psychology, or sociology. In *Outlines in Educational Sociology* (1925), Znaniecki—and this is precisely the focus of Witkowski’s emphasis—delineates certain relevant objectives of modern pedagogy grounded in the conflicts inherent in contemporary cultural dynamics or the principles of democratic ideals and human development. The author of the book managed to find in Znaniecki’s research—an advocate of the theory of social education—quite progressive ideas about the organization of work, which should be a place for “practical initiative and critical mind, in addition to outstanding creative skills.” We are talking about the notion of “cultural and creative activities” oriented towards “a comprehensively developed individual” (Witkowski 2022, 219). This book also contains Znaniecki’s opinions on the psychological and pedagogical aspects of the development of children’s creativity, for example, “how to identify and nurture outstanding individuals capable of achieving positions of seniority.” Witkowski disagrees with this definition of “social education” and considers “acknowledging the imperative, commencing from the earliest stages of childhood, to instill an education that validates the distinctiveness of each student,” “cultivating a

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pedagogy of creativity and a pedagogy of competencies” (Witkowski 2022, 220).

Despite Znaniecki’s contradictory views on the role of pedagogy in the system of humanistic knowledge, he still profoundly values it: “the only means of social reconstruction towards a creative, constructive democratism, and the only escape from the ruin of our civilization” is a confident trend towards areas of pedagogical influence, preparing against antagonisms and hatred. To support this notion, Witkowski refers to the eminent sociologist’s definition of the importance of the teacher who “stands as the driving force behind one of the most profound societal shifts in history, initiating a peaceful cultural revolution. The weight of the world’s future rests on their shoulders.” (Quoted by: Witkowski 2022, 220.) This emphasizes the “pedagogy” or pedagogical orientation of Znaniecki’s works rather than his thesis about the “degradation of pedagogy” (Witkowski 2022, 224).

The author uses the terms “caring distancing” or “distanced closeness” rationally, emphasizing the intricate nature of the teachers’ (social workers’) roles in establishing correct interactions within the educational process, aiming at reaching the objectives of education, nurturing, and fostering the young individual’s development (Witkowski 2017, 381). This is an application of Robert Merton’s oxymoronic expression “detached concern,” which represents the dual nature of social roles and can be called “sociological ambivalence.”

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Witkowski critically reflects on the humanistic issues of “Znaniecki’s pedagogy” in a broader context:

[...] by analyzing the sociologist’s epistemological propositions, despite his inclination to consider epistemology narrowly as the construction of a normative framework for valuable knowledge, distancing him from it as a mere perspective. Meanwhile, delving into Znaniecki’s substantial discourse on the concept of “self-education” as a prerequisite for children’s development proves to be valuable. The fact is that the sociologist erroneously perceived (due to a limited comprehension of pedagogical objectives) that this was not related to education. (Witkowski 2022, 690.)

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Or:

If any associations with Znaniecki's references to pedagogy are already becoming evident today, it is usually [...] either through a merely reductive, mistaken, and harmful image of pedagogy as a technology of education without theoretical ambitions; or by pointing out the criticism of the strongly normative postulates of a vision without legitimacy and scientific workshop; or, finally, by ascribing to it a noble utopian project for the future of civilization, previously entangled in the pessimism associated with the perception of the growing phenomena and spaces of civilizational catastrophe. (Witkowski 2022, 148.)

As we can see, Witkowski, in his interpretation, quite convincingly goes beyond the traditional reductive receptions of Znaniecki's pedagogical discourses, which he does not consider narrowly "sociological" or one-sidedly utopian. In a particular manner, this allows us to penetrate the specifics of ideas related to modern science.

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Without an in-depth examination of mistakes or limitations of sociology, the perception of social realities, according to Witkowski, in particular: 1) focuses mainly on practical goals in research; 2) "the generation of dualism in the sphere of norms and normativity at the level of the use of an imaginary criterion of 'normality'" causes an artificial distinction, which is detrimental to educational theory and practice; 3) the recognition of the duality in facts reveals an interconnected yet incoherent relationship between segregation and interrelation of the phenomena. It is equally crucial to highlight the potential advancements in the fields of social psychology and pedagogy, the areas Znaniecki adequately addresses in his scholarly legacy. At the same time, as Witkowski notes, he denies the psychological perspective in sociology, which indicates a rejection of the horizon of humanistic opinions and of the excessive "psychologism" in such studies despite the famous concept of "the humanistic coefficient,"

When analyzing the evolution of Znaniecki's views in Witkowski's reception, it is important to understand their significance for modern science and practice in a broader context (without focusing just on the Polish sociological tradition), in order to identify value meanings, suggestions for pedagogical

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reflections, to update the so-called creative “impulses” from the scientist’s work, and to implement them in the practice of reforming school or higher education, at least in the context of studying the borders as social phenomena, for example, at the crossroads of ethnic territories, which could potentially eliminate the danger of antagonisms.

### **Criticism against dualism and the promoting of duality in Lech Witkowski’s vision of the humanities**

Even in ancient Greek philosophy, the thesis that any thought should have a clear scientific basis and interpretation was dominant: “For how could a reasoning, which cannot even get off to a start without evidence, be trustworthy, if it rails against the evidence ...” (Miller 2013.) Democritus, the founder of the atomistic hypothesis of the explanation of the world, considered the possibility of the existence of an infinite number of unique worlds. He is the author of the already banal expression: “Criticism is a great teacher of people,” because, considering a joyful mood (*euthymia*) as the goal of life, a person always reacts positively to critical things. In the process of real-world perception and discovery of something previously unknown, the truth criteria are important, requiring a critical understanding of the nature of knowledge and the possibilities of its implementation (Budnyk 2023, 9).

In Lech Witkowski’s monographs (2007, 2012, 2014, 2017), including the fundamental study in collaboration with Henry A. Giroux (2010), a comprehensive reception of critical (“radical”) pedagogy from the perspective of humanistic interpretation of pedagogical interaction in social, academic, and scientific space is presented. In his methodological reflections, the Polish scholar (like his American precursors) also refers to it as “critical” pedagogy:

The discussion of critical pedagogy must be critical by nature. And, additionally, broader than concerning some closed entities. I would not like us to repeat mistakes here, or at least habits with the approach to other labels, such as alternative pedagogy, postmodern pedagogy, emancipatory pedagogy; critical pedagogy wants to be pedagogy as such, and not just some marginal or exotic variant, proud of its distinctiveness and generously recognizing the right to equal functioning of currents unaware of their handicaps [...]. (Witkowski 2012, 19.)

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Critical pedagogy is an authentic philosophy of education with different modern interpretations; most of them define its goal as striving for a better, fairer, and more democratic world.

Based on the research results, it can be argued that critical pedagogy as a branch of scientific knowledge is interdisciplinary, as it integrates the study of philosophy, political science, sociology, psychology, pedagogy, cultural studies, and other sciences in the field of presenting “critical” in social life. (Budnyk 2023, 19.)

234 Critical pedagogy creates the foundation for sociocultural policy, because here we face such processes and categories as: “reflection, disagreement, difference, dialogue, empowerment, action, and hope,” etc., which in their turn serve as “tools for a critical approach” to the cognition of reality (Guilherme 2002, 17). Within contemporary scholarly discourse, divergent viewpoints regarding the generalizations of critical thinking, the nuances of its evolution, and the resolution of the perceived “critical thinking crisis” in education (Bishop 2010, 48) are evident. Consequently, there is a growing importance placed on radical approaches within the humanities and the inclination of humans to shape their reality through the lens of integrating bipolarity.

Witkowski sees the potential for the advancement of the humanities in the concept of bipolarity (as unifying duality, representing integrated complexity):

An important aspect of the criticality of pedagogy as a whole of discourse and practice is the recognition everywhere, finally, of the 2-EDGED nature of the means we must use, the DUALITY of the situation of action, which condemns us to tensions and irreducible dilemmas, constantly threatening to make one-sided choices. (Witkowski 2012, 34.)

Through personal observations, the researcher establishes that the author comprehends her professional situation by employing categories that emphasize the dual nature of its diverse facets. This approach vividly illustrates the reality of actions aligned with the three functions of philosophical reflection: (a) regaining access to complexity (even if hidden); (b) revealing the paradoxical dimension and the face of truth, which contradicts the level of popular belief;

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and, finally, (c) entailing concern for the mature normativity of postulates against those usually taken for granted or as being trivial or impossible in advance (Witkowski 2017, 246).

In traditional pedagogical narratives, we cannot neglect the category of duality, which connects key points and dilemmas, and determines the dynamics of tension as well as the degree of complexity in addressing crucial issues of pedagogy. The Polish scientist (interpreting the work of Helena Radlińska) has a very interesting approach to the presentation of the “duality relationship” in the tensions between bipolar systems marked by pairs, for example, when it comes to the influence of the environment on the individual, the structure of social elements and will, the tendencies of modern transformation of society, and the constant return to existing (mostly unrealized) meanings and ideals. In addition, this bipolar pressure is also expressed in the research field, which is framed (outlined) by the “hermeneutic circle of the cognitive process” (Radlińska 1937; quoted by: Witkowski 2014, 536). Witkowski reflects on “the perspectives of an anti-positivist research consciousness, for which the foundation is the ability to critically refer to one’s cognitive activities and correct their initial assumptions” (Witkowski 2014, 535–536). Thus, he describes the “duality of culture and education,” using the concepts of *structural duality and normative duality* in pedagogical discourse, which reveals the category of duality in Bogdan Suchodolski’s conceptualization closely related to the paradigm of ambivalence (Witkowski 2007, 127–263). The scientist explores these categories (in particular, ambivalence) within a clear framework of the coordinate system: “dualism—duality—polarity—bifurcation—ambiguity—multifunctionality—poliformity” (ibid., 105), which makes possible a multidimensional analysis of scientific subjects and phenomena, and—very importantly—sees the prospects of duality in pedagogy, management, cybernetics, and the social sciences (Witkowski 2014).

In fact, in the course of duality, the scientific heritage of the Polish philosopher and sociologist reflects a dynamically changing contradiction. It involves, firstly, the necessity of embracing dialogue, engaging in active communication, and adopting an interactive understanding of the Other. Secondly, it requires the capacity to transcend this level of perception, in order “not to be a hostage to the way the recipient is used to responding to our messages.” To do so, it is

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necessary to respect the interlocutor's opinion (for example, a student), take into account their experience in an interaction of parity, and at the same time show communicative readiness to "pull the recipient out of a certain anomaly," if necessary, in order to overcome the difficulties of "going beyond the level of the addressee," and ultimately achieve a qualitatively higher level of interaction and value development (Witkowski 2017, 382).

236 A thorough analysis of Erikson's life cycle model allows Witkowski to explore a complex (dual) phase structure with shifted dominants in the process of psychosocial development of a personality (Witkowski 2015, 2021). Here, it is worth emphasizing the "fundamental tension between the pole that dynamizes the process and the pole that stabilizes the stage of the process," which he considers inextricably linked, fluctuating, and interacting. The shift in these dominants is manifested in the necessity to balance the tension factors in the structure of psychosocial relations. To ensure a dynamic development process, interaction is necessary, and the degree of its intensity, based, for example, on stigmatization, distrust, shame, withdrawal, etc., provokes a one-sided negative in this intervention. On the other hand, as Witkowski notes, the one-sided positive—autonomy of action, initiative, identity, adequacy, creativity—is also not capable of ensuring a productive development process. Therefore, it is necessary to take into account the dynamics of these links in interaction, and balance the influence of various factors, taking into consideration the variability of dominants; then, we can count on "balance opportunities and threats, risk and potential success" (Witkowski 2021, 78–79). This is of great importance in the context of choosing compatibility aspects, which does not limit their diversity, but regulates the importance of each factor in a real system of social interaction.

Witkowski emphasizes the importance of "considering the tensions between the polarities of tradition and modernity" in an original way for an effective interaction, where tradition is modernized and modernity is filtered through the reconstructed tradition, without losing contact with the real world. In the humanistic context, bipolarity "does not mean a spectrum or continuum"; on the contrary, it involves "interpenetration and interaction, for societies do not exist in pure states delimited by these extremes, but entangled in ambivalence concerning each of the poles" (Witkowski 2012, 170). According to Witkowski, there is a dual relationship, a duality, in interpreting the "tension between

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tradition and modernity.” And this condition reflects co-creation, cooperation, and feedback, instead of opposition, competition, conflict, antagonism, race, etc. The tendency to see the world in contrast is characteristic of tradition, the perception and creation of culture, and the development of education.

### **The field of ecology of culture, tradition, and education**

“Ecology can be perceived as the adaptation of cybernetic principles into the realm of the humanities, presenting an opportunity to construct a cohesive theoretical foundation for the social sciences,” notes Witkowski (2017, 618).

The Polish humanist interprets the essence of ecology in the broadest sense of the word, from the perspective of not only the natural environment, but also culture, education, and society, thereby mostly following Gregory Bateson. Therefore, he emphasizes the consideration of the environment around us as a cultural universe with different dimensions of meaning and levels that one must pass “[...] to understand the internal sense of the contents and to reconstruct it, but also to unveil the dimension, requiring additional references to the senses that compose the meaning (function, importance, applicability, impact value, effect of referring to new contents)” (ibid., 618). In order to achieve this, it is necessary to promote “[...] the requirement for comprehensive ecological reflection on the interaction between the individual and society, society and culture, culture and education, education and ideas, ideas and the mind” (ibid., 614). In the context of ecological humanism, he uses the concept of “eco-philosophy,” and refers to the “ecology of mind” “as a dual strategy for analyzing social communication” by Gregory Bateson (*Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 1972, and *Mind and Nature*, 1979), and distinguish even an “ecological revolution” in the sense of humanistic reflection “revealing the mutual dependencies and entanglements of influence, where discrete discipline worlds or unidirectional determination are perceived” (Witkowski 2014, 95).

At the same time, the so-called “cultural world” is in a dual relationship: “from one perspective, it can be perceived ‘through personal experiences,’ while from another perspective, it can be introspectively considered as either ‘a tangible subject of conscious contemplation’ or a ‘logical notion that impacts reality’” (Znanięcki quoted by: Witkowski 2022, 529).

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Following the principle of cultural appropriateness in the humanities and its dialectical connection with multiculturalism, we can conclude that it has a double interpretation in the pedagogical field. The process of the individuals' obtaining (absorbing) essential cultural knowledge and effectively applying it in their professional, social, and spiritual engagements revolves around the methods and resources that underpin the establishment of everyday-life culture, encompassing cognitive, environmental, informational, and various other expressions. Thus, dialogicality as a special cultural feature can ensure its integrity, self-preservation, and self-development, as well as help to avoid stagnation and rhythmicity, and at the same time to accept "other people's" arguments, the perception of "otherness" to reach a compromise and dialogue.

Lech Witkowski introduces a unique meta-pedagogical strategy founded in philosophical contemplation, encompassing *four distinct modes of engagement with tradition or cultural heritage* (Witkowski 2007, 78).

238 First, he interprets "a conservative or preserving vision of tradition as an unbreakable canon of truths and their interpretation, sanctioning a certain canonized core, immunized against criticism and protected from alteration, considered as a reference point of social order and axiological regulation" (Witkowski 2021, 78). Thus, cultural transmission in this context refers to the continuity of values and authority.

Second, according to the author, there is also a liberal strategy of an attitude to traditions, including pedagogical ones, their interpretation and their revival, considering challenges and features of the modern world. There is also "the right to transgression" (violation, nonobservance, error), which means pedagogical encouragement and evaluation of bold original interpretations, support for challenging canonical definitions, and creative independence. In this sense, we are talking about a creative interpretation of the generally accepted canons.

Witkowski also proposes a different way of interpreting tradition, i.e., a radical social one, suggesting its specific presentation influenced by the imperative of progress, that is, highlighting everything "progressive," in order to modernize education according to the demands of the current times. In this way, the following process takes place: "stigmatizing selection, stigmatizing elimination, serving the desired transformation."

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The scholar refers to the fourth category as a “border zone or translocal perspective on tradition,” intending to accentuate the intricate facets of tradition within a specific geographical or cultural group, aimed at saturation with differences as reflecting richness not to be reduced, but as constituting a chance upon the meeting with the Other for the building of a Horizon and profoundness of perception beyond socialization pressure of what is locally dominant (ibid., 79).

It is challenging to dispute these explanations, as the existential theoretical framework considers human existence as having a dual nature: 1) the “being in the world” of an individual placed in an unfamiliar environment; 2) “coexistence” or living with other individuals in this world. Thus, from the perspective of philosophical anthropology, a person depends on the medium, at the same time impacting it, humanizing or dehumanizing it; he or she is not dependent on vital dependence, is open to the “world,” but at the same time is also the bearer of his or her individual “world.” According to the principle of the hermeneutic circle (circle of comprehension), as Witkowski notes, it is possible to make

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[...] the necessary description of the situation of understanding within the complexity of the bipolar relations between the part and the whole, between dynamizing the process and maintaining the ability to balance its course, where it is necessary to practice reflectivity and correct the situation of operation in the “eternal return” mode, reacting to the new conditions. (Ibid., 78.)

Specific situations of professional influence (e.g., pedagogical development in cognitive and moral dimensions) allow us to assess the problems of mutual understanding and find the reasons for interpersonal misunderstanding, perform reflective activities, and realize the mechanism of new meanings and influences in the dialogue of tradition, culture, art, etc.

### **In the humanistic direction of “the explosive effect”**

In the system of cognitive—value—regulatory coordinates, the integration of an individual into the world of culture is of great importance, and pedagogy

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(education) has the task of creating a favorable environment for the learning (obtaining knowledge), development (self-development), education (self-education), as well as active communication with others, receiving the so-called “impulses” for further progress:

[...] pedagogy serves as a cultural transference endeavor, striving to offer opportunities to the former by maintaining a continuous focus on making content accessible beyond what is readily apparent and known, intending to unveil novel depths of sensitivity. This transference necessitates the enhancement of communication channels, encompassing the environment as well as the individual’s ability to derive inspiration from these sources. (Witkowski 2014, 474.)

240 In his book *The Invisible Environment*, Witkowski identifies common renovated opinions of Polish scholars regarding “the perspective of existence that concurrently permits the transposition and disposition, establishing the individual’s enduring withdrawal from the unproductive terrain to their foundation” (Witkowski 2014, 748). Thus, pedagogy, according to M. Markowski, should simplify the subject’s access to the wealth of culture, whilst H. Radlińska emphasizes the social orientation of pedagogy, which also provides a cultural background for the development of the humanities. Pedagogy aims to “expand the repertoire of discourses, through which individuals and groups define their own identity” (ibid.), and thus it is about interdisciplinarity and the appropriateness of integration in the humanities (as a pattern, necessity, and accident) up to transdisciplinary interaction within a hybrid identity.

Within the domain of the humanities, Witkowski achieves a notable “anti-positivist breakthrough” in comprehending and reevaluating professional engagement and a new epistemology:

The epistemological vector of positivist methodological awareness: to know in order to foresee → to foresee in order to act, requires replacement with the paradoxical antipositivist vector to see the relationship between action and knowledge: to act in order to know → to know in order to correct the premises of action. (Witkowski 2021, 82.)

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Therefore, the writer draws upon Gaston Bachelard's (2000) epistemological considerations, accordingly exploring the proposed cognitive "realism" inherent in action. This realism is connected to the recognition of diverse approaches to comprehending the circumstances that envelop the subject. Witkowski confirms that

[...] the crowning achievement of the processes of action, cognition, and transformation [...] requires, along with an anti-positivist maturity, the recognition that the theories produced in such situations can at best be perceived in terms of a "hypothetical conceptual representation of experience invariants," referring to Enriques's conception (1906). (Witkowski 2021, 82.)

Thus, we are talking about possible confrontations, adaptive weaknesses, or crises due to the unexpectedness of the process, which is why the scientist points out the necessity of "new interpretation up to the level of basic factors and their relations and modes of understanding and assigning meaning" (*ibid.*, 82).

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A truly significant revelation, introduced by L. Witkowski in pedagogy, is the concept of the "explosive effect," which involves engagement in cooperation, "experiencing a community of experience":

In the first aspect of the impact, it is necessary to destroy superficial obviousness or deep beliefs entangled in appearances or unconscious sources of disasters and failure to cope in life. Hence, the importance of creating a plane for the "pedagogy of survival" [as linking knowledge and emotions; O.B.]. In the second aspect of starting the education process as a transformation, it is necessary to explosively pave the way to a new perspective, a new point of view, to open the way to an experience that would not occur to the addressee on its own. This type of explosion not only destroys earlier invariants but also opens the way, paves access to previously inaccessible areas of one's unconscious. (Witkowski 2021, 84.)

The researcher outlines the third basic explosive effect aimed—after destroying previous stages of development and serving as the foundation for the individual's intellectual or moral progress, "opening the eyes to a new type

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of reflection”—at the personal involvement that determines internal processes of transformation of the horizon of perception of the world and oneself, thus enriching one’s identity. The latter brings as well a new type of “pedagogy of awakening” (ibid., 84–85). These symbolic prompts, which catalyze the evolution of self-awareness on an existential level, result in elevated competencies that drive actions and facilitate the emergence of a transformative phenomenon often referred to as “rebirth” during periods of identity crises. Therefore, the next part of our study is devoted to the mechanisms of identity formation.

### **The phenomenon of identity in the humanities (including negative identity)**

242 As mentioned above, Lech Witkowski’s approach is firmly rooted in the pedagogical framework, exemplifying “a pedagogical exploration of the reciprocal relationship between self-awareness and interactions with others in the pursuit of comprehending them” (Witkowski 2014, 474). Through the interpretation of Markowski’s concepts, he reevaluates the humanities and discerns a significant “existential role” in terms of forging a “dual linkage,” connecting identity and otherness:

Within this intricate interconnection of identity and otherness, within this mutual influence of otherness on identity and identity on otherness, which is indispensable to prevent our existence from becoming a monotonous reiteration of past norms or mere replication of ideological stereotypes, lies the potential for the humanities to thrive. (Markowski quoted by: Witkowski 2014, 474.)

I aim to incorporate certain concepts from Witkowski’s works (2010, 2015, 2017) that discuss the significance of identity in contemporary pedagogical discourse. Specifically, I am interested in exploring the identity crisis triggered by abrupt environmental changes or the imposition of values from an “other” environment. The Polish scientist considers the sense of identity as a genetically important component of the “I” (“Me”) that functions in close social contact with the world. At the same time, the main direction of the functional relationship for the concept is presented in the form of an “epistemological vector” as the dominant influence of the logical connection: *competence to*

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*act—concept of oneself—existential state (condition)*, i.e., the so-called three-band horizontal profile of the identity concept (2010; 141, 162).

Following these principles, the scientist addresses a relevant issue of “a negative identity, i.e., an identity that the family wants to drop.” After all, unfair punishment of a child by parents or teachers, humiliation, and disrespect for their dignity can result in future violence, moral degradation, etc. Discussing the notion, according to which the past “must be abandoned and the future embarked upon, whenever and regardless of the challenges involved” (Erikson quoted by: Witkowski 2015, 201), Witkowski reflects on the mechanism of negative identity. Here, one can find “the paradox of such double and inverted normativity: the affirmation of certain goals, while not fulfilling the principle of minimum communicative authority, results in the formation of a negative identity, i.e., there is an identification with antipatterns of the rejected sender of the cultural message” (Witkowski, 2017, 447–448).

As Witkowski notes, the phenomenon of acquiring a negative identity, according to Erik H. Erikson, can apply to individuals and communities, as exemplified by the fact of “dumbing down,” i.e., the spreading of the “negative identity of Germans” among Poles, which was propagated by Hitler during his reign.

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Enthusiasm and a shared sense of pride, alongside intolerance and harshness, emerged as a result of the Germans anchoring their collective feeling of distinctiveness and reinforcing their identity through the endorsement of values that directly opposed a discarded world. Notably, democracy embodied the repudiated heritage of a triumphant Europe. (Witkowski 2015, 204.)

Hence, the discussion revolves around national identity, commonly defined as an individual’s “feeling of allegiance and attachment to a specific nation” (Boerner 1986). Bhikhu Parekh (1995) notes that “national identity is not a substance, but a cluster of tendencies and values, that it is neither fixed nor alterable at will, and that it needs to be periodically redefined in the light of historically inherited characteristics, present needs, and future aspirations.” In the social sciences, these issues became relevant in the mid-twentieth century.

In the context of Russia’s full-scale military aggression against Ukraine, which began in February 2022, one of the most painful issues is the deportation

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of Ukrainian children, forced russification in both Russia as well as Belarus, and adoption of children into Russian families, in order to deprive them of their Ukrainian identity. Can we consider these phenomena on the part of the Russian occupiers as a mechanism of negative identity in the twenty-first century?

In his book, Witkowski refers to Erikson's idea that "identity formation involves constant conflict with strong negative identity factors" (Erikson quoted by: Witkowski 2015, 61). Within scholarly discourse, diverse interpretations and rationales regarding identity crises, notably during childhood or adolescence, can be found. Can the process of the "russification" of Ukrainian children during the war be considered as one necessitating a struggle against unfavorable elements to preserve their national identity? Is an underage child able to solve these "existential problems" in this situation and "fight against negative identities"? Is it easier for them to accept a negative identity or to be a "nobody"?

244 To answer these and other questions, it is worth reading Witkowski's books (2010, 2015, 2017), in which he clearly explains the mechanism of negative identity in the pedagogical sense, when, for example, it comes to the social upbringing of children (adolescents) in a foreign environment. If false narratives about the abandonment of children by their parents and other (non-)axiological attitudes presented by individuals and groups are forced upon children (which is in line with the phenomena of the "russification" of kidnapped Ukrainian children), the philosopher believes that this can lead to irreversible consequences: the child develops a victim syndrome, aggression, alienation towards parental influence and premature withdrawal from relationships with them, and thus the "principle of minimal communicative authority is violated (lost)" (Witkowski 2017, 693). And vice versa: in crisis conditions, a group or society unites in solidarity to form a national identity, patriotism, etc. (ibid., 52).

Another relevant thesis by Witkowski is that "identity processes are subject to mechanisms of radical disutopianization, which is expressed through the "paralysis of the imagination of the future" and is realized existentially in the mode of "the aesthetics of serenity" (ibid., 54). Expressing apprehension, I highlight the parallel processes of the russification, affecting Ukrainian children

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in the presently occupied territories, and those forcibly displaced, intended to strip them of their familial national identity. It is crucial to underscore the impact on their cognitive senses, cultural values, and the evident “paralysis” in their mental and spiritual realms. These so-called “teachers,” currently instrumental in shaping a negative identity for these children, play a significant role in this context. Because in such situations “we are in danger of activating the negative identity mechanism, i.e., generating a tendency to identify with forbidden or stigmatized content” (ibid., 70).

As Witkowski points out, “the identity between critical pedagogy and anti-pedagogy is no more if only for the very different quality of their inscription in the traditions of the humanities and the quality of social criticism” (2007, 708); however, the processes that he postulates as the acquisition of a “negative identity,” in my opinion, refer to an anti-pedagogy itself—from extreme nihilism to radical idealism—based on the theory of slavery, when the goals of “education” are not valuable and noble.

Regarding the development of one’s identity under the conditions described above, the author notes:

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In a situation where positive identity influences are lacking, individuals often resort to retaliatory simulation and compensatory decisions, finding a relieving sense of being nobody instead of “not quite somebody.” Finally [...] not quite clear—since to a large extent unconscious—mechanism consists of accepting negative contents, referring to the self-image and that of the world, simultaneously unconsciously with this state of affairs. (Witkowski 2015, 211–212.)

These and other issues are still open for discussion by philosophers, sociologists, political scientists, psychologists, and lawyers, and may become the subject of scientific research by contemporary humanists.

### **On the effectiveness of research in the humanities**

Within the contemporary academia, the term commonly used is “academic integrity,” which encompasses the commitment to ethical standards within research, namely values, such as honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and more. As a consequence, dishonesty is spreading at a rapid rate. And this is

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what we read in Witkowski's new book, where Znaniecki's theoretical concept of conjugated duality, because rationality sometimes "pushes into chaos," irrationality, we have a bureaucratization of science.

Duality implies bipolarity, involving the recognition that any unambiguity may be biased as a reduction of complexity. Expressing ourselves within the context of a broad model, outlining the configuration of social roles, [...] we are bound by closeness, with all the associations that go with it, and therefore: empathy, involvement, caring, and subjectivity in treatment, and on the other hand we have the pole of opposing demands, the distance pole, i.e., composure, coolness, neutrality, procedural objectivity. Well, neither the one nor the other pole in itself can be the source of professional action. The ideal must be—as we have put it—oxymoronic, contradictory, combining proximity and distance [...]. (Witkowski 2017, 380–381.)

246 The permanent crisis manifestations, characterizing science in the context of the implementation of education and the projects of humanization, the actualization of global issues, and European integration processes, as well as the necessity for intercultural scientific communication in combination with the realities of the pandemic and martial law, have given rise to pessimistic prognoses in the area. Due to a range of factors, the significance of scientific rationality is progressively diminishing, allowing what is commonly referred to as pseudo-projects to permeate the scientific landscape, without undergoing a thorough evaluation of their potential to effectively address the fundamental challenges of reshaping the realms of science and education. Hence, primarily, there is a necessity to reevaluate the methodology of science. A mistake, and very "harmful to the development of science." As Witkowski notes, there exist appeals to the content of institutions, ideas, or norms, "without examining the real role they play in a particular society." "The differentiation between content and meaning appears to be a crucial methodological principle"; at the same time, "ascending to the realm of meaning, when a mere presentation of content is no longer enough, but realizing the level of significance, is an important new frontier to reach" (Witkowski 2022, 436).

We believe that Witkowski's ideas, which penetrate a significant number of his scientific works (2012, 2015, 2017, 2021, 2022), are important for

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contemporary humanities regarding the critical and analytical approach in the scientific field, and should therefore be implemented in theory and practice. Within an educational setting, he suggests assessing the potential of pedagogy through the lens of critical philosophy. “In particular, it is an opportunity to reflect on the state of pedagogy as a whole [...] and its parts, such as general pedagogy, social pedagogy, comparative pedagogy, and to assign tasks for each and recognize their shallows or backwardness.” (Witkowski 2012, 19.)

Witkowski characterizes the change of Znaniecki’s presentation of humanistic challenges in the sociological narrative as being “integral and carrying professional initiation effects, rather than [remaining] mere decorations or methodologically disconnected stimuli” (Witkowski 2022, 421–422). At the same time, focusing on the said aspect, the author of the book mentioned above distinguishes three areas of cognitive validity (strangeness, dualism, and meta-humanist perspective).

Witkowski notices Znaniecki’s revolutionary ideas, which remain significant in the realms of the social sciences and the humanities. Through the prism of sociological research, Znaniecki sounds the alarm regarding the “depth,” comprehensiveness, and importance of current research, motivating scholars to “search for new ways” of learning, rather than rephrasing findings in existing fields of scientific knowledge. After all, it is necessary to develop not only new subjects, but also entire areas of research in the field of the humanities: the quotation that “new facts are constantly being discovered, but the discovery of new general truths is hardly heard of” (Znaniecki; quoted by: Witkowski 2022, 422), embodies the most classical of such radical suggestions.

The other, which Witkowski calls “even deeper in its paradoxical nature,” concerns the tasks and challenges for solving a specific scientific problem in general (in the field of philosophy, sociology, or pedagogy):

[...] The advancement of science cannot be grasped solely through accumulating facts. Furthermore, in the context of addressing the theoretical complexities surrounding the concept of alienation in social interactions, Znaniecki revealed the insufficiency of diverse approaches in depicting and investigating the essence of this concept as a foundational source of social conflicts.” (Ibid.)

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Znaniiecki's third radical proposal aimed at improving the effectiveness of scientific research, and its presentation, according to Witkowski, concerns his radical disagreement with existing research approaches, entailing the formulation and testing of scientific hypotheses as well as their integration into conclusions. Therefore, it is not without reason that the sociologist is quite responsible, when it comes to "the methodological status of attempts to disprove scientific statements and theories, without extreme falsificationism" (ibid.).

And, of course, Znaniiecki, as a high-level scientist, is concerned with the reliability of scientific research, especially in sociology, and its theoretical and practical importance for the progress of science.

For a thesis to be "scientifically fertile" and not just more rigorous, it is often necessary to "subject the facts to a more thorough analysis, in order to unveil concealed intricacies in relationships and variations that would remain elusive, thus paving the way for a fresh interpretative lens, through which the described phenomena can be understood" (Znaniiecki; quoted by: Witkowski

248 2022, 422).

Considering that science has a significant impact on education and that fundamental scientific and philosophical principles, as well as methodological approaches, permeate educational models, it is essential to "strengthen" the methodological component of science, in order to achieve appropriate results in professional practice. After all, these results may transform education into "the loss of credits and the degradation of the value of diplomas" (Witkowski 2022, 698).

## Conclusions

Lech Witkowski's monographs circumscribe "novel frontiers," exemplifying profoundness and agility in depicting influential figures from the realm of science through a historical lens. These monographs encompass the methodology of the humanities, the prospects for the evolution of unexplored research domains, and the scholarly persona of a scientist.

The present article focused predominantly on his most recent book, which delves into the interpretation of the works of the distinguished sociologist

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Znаниеcki. Witkowski's interpretation presents a fresh scholarly and intellectual journey, enabling an exploration of the philosophical underpinnings of Znаниеcki's thought across various phases of his evolution as a globally recognized scholar. It delves into humanistic intricacies within the sociological narrative, examines concepts of creativity in sociology, critically evaluates educational pedagogy, and investigates perspectives on social education and roles of the teacher. Moreover, it assesses the methodological importance and prospects for the development of the humanities, among other themes. The simplicity of the analytical and critical content here is traditionally complemented (as in the author's other 20 books!) by attractive chapter titles that charismatically reflect the individual style of the presentation of scientific material and encourage reading (re-reading) and rethinking.

However, no less interesting are the other books (2007, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2017), in which Witkowski defines "complete pedagogy as a critical ecology of thoughts, ideas, and education," and considers it as being "embedded in humanistic culture" (Witkowski 2014, 739). He expresses the latter's symbolical reflection in the sequence of interpretative frameworks: philosophy of education—philosophical pedagogy—integral humanities (Witkowski 2007, 15), which leads him to the conclusion that "pedagogy must be able to assimilate much more from the paradigm of dynamics as the anti-positivist breakthrough in the humanities" (*ibid.*, 16). The "anti-positivist breakthrough" in interpreting and reconsidering professional practice (Witkowski 2021, 82–83) is the focus of his scientific works, which in a few years will continue to be relevant and interpreted in a new way, since they still contain many unexplored depths of invaluable wisdom of the humanities of the past and the present.

The ability to see the world in binary oppositions, crucial for the communication process, and to determine the intensity of the respective type of thinking, makes it possible to analyze the problem of duality in Witkowski's humanism in conjunction with the elements of critical pedagogy. This facilitates a more authentic understanding and construction of the educational/scientific environment, incorporating binarity and duality in the dynamics of various activities, including the professional ones. The article additionally delineates certain mechanisms of identity formation, extending beyond the realm of social education. It draws parallels, in order to highlight the significance

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of Witkowski's concept of negative identity in the context of contemporary pedagogical discourse.

In conclusion, I would like to return once more to Lech Witkowski's words about the necessity of critical reflection in science, in order to be able to really see it through the prism of the functioning of the category of "the transactional," to reveal the progressive dynamics in interaction "between the current state and the experience of updating in action," and to achieve "explosive effects" in the development of modern humanities by using the progressive experience of the scientific classics (Witkowski 2022, 693).

It would be reasonable to translate several (key) aspects of Witkowski's humanist discourse into other languages (perhaps in the future). After all, topical issues of the philosophy of education, sociological and humanistic pedagogy, including axiological and anthropological perspectives of development, pedagogy of culture, cultural ecology, etc., stay open for discussion. We hope that these and other issues will be the subject of coverage of Lech Witkowski's wide-ranging creative work in phenomenology and hermeneutics.

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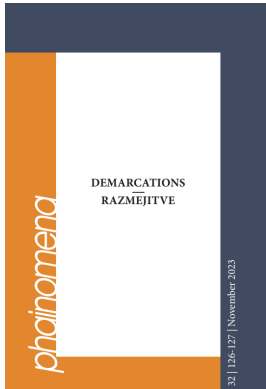
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# phainomena

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*Phainomena 32 | 126-127 | November 2023*

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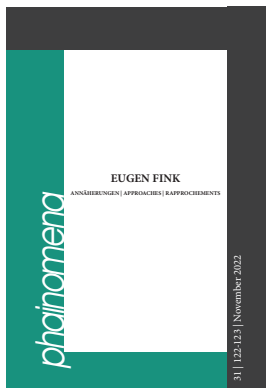
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