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Education, Citizenship, Social Justice

Janusz Korczak and Jewish Community Action in Warsaw at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century

Introduction

> "The hero the story discloses needs no heroic qualities [...]"[1]

At the beginning of the twentieth century, in all European countries the so-called "social question" was closely linked to women's emancipation, recognition of minorities, and children's rights.[2] The process of modernization had torn families and communities apart. Under the influence of Marxist analyses, the need for the workers' class to establish networks of support had become quite obvious during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Although imperialist Germany under Bismarck had strategically undermined the socialist urge for a just redistribution of common goods,[3] the German workers' insurance and the state-run social welfare served as an inspiring example for social movements all over Europe.

The situation in Central Eastern Europe was quite different, especially for the large Jewish minority that for centuries lived in this geographical region. Social inequality induced by a rigid industrialization went together with fierce oppression on the political level. Although there was a strong Jewish upper and also middle class, economic hardship and anti-Semitic discrimination were intertwined. The Polish and Yiddish language were subdued by the Tsarist regime and school education was organized in a military-like discipline with the consequence that a lot of children did not go to school at all. In order to produce a critical knowledge that linked personal empowerment to the awareness of social inequality, Jewish intellectuals in Eastern Europe started to act as inspiring lead-

1 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, Second Edition 1998), 186.

2 Robert E. Blobaum, "The 'Woman Question' in Russian Poland, 1900 – 1914," *Journal of Social History* 35, no. 4 (2002): 799 – 824.

3 Lucjan Blit, *The Origins of Polish Socialism: The History and Ideas of the First Polish Socialist Party, 1878 – 1886* (London/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971); Albert A. Lindemann, *A History of European Socialism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983); Michael Newman, *Socialism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

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ers of emancipation. Warsaw as one of the main cities in Eastern Europe was a quite specific place with its vivid communal life and transcultural activism. As a foremost urban phenomenon, Jewish welfare circles of support succeeded in attenuating the most evident forms of poverty.[4]

Born as the son of a Jewish couple in 1878, Janusz Korczak (1878/1879 – 1942) belonged to the assimilated middle class of Warsaw. After the early death of his father, the family experienced economic hardship and instability. Although the Jewish community was very secular and socially active, it was a very new idea to establish secular educational institutions. When thirty-four-year-old pediatrician Henryk Goldszmit decided to become a pedagogue in a home for Jewish orphans in 1912, he had in mind to empower the younger generation to fight against anti-Semitism and social inequality. In his opinion, the growing gap between poor and rich endangered to split the Jewish community itself. Working as a doctor between 1905 and 1912, Korczak had profited from his rich patients. But he resigned this privilege in order to become a social worker and pedagogue for the rest of his life. The decision to devote his life to support the most vulnerable members of the Jewish community did not come overnight and was not only situational. Korczak had in mind to develop a pedagogical concept substantiated by empirical research. His aim was to generate reliable information on how to arrange educational settings adequate for the oncoming political transition towards a democratic society.

Being able to profit from an extensive research on Korczak's life and his written *oeuvre* published in Poland, Germany, the United States, and Israel,[5] this chapter is a case study on Jewish community action in Warsaw in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Dealing with specific aspects of Janusz Korczak's life and work, I want to illustrate what can be understood as "Jewish radicalism" or, as Korczak researcher Marc Silverman has put it: "radical humanism"![6] I will prove the thesis that Jewish radicalism was not merely based on ideas but ex-

4 Anthony Polonsky, ed., *The Jews of Warsaw, Polin 3* (London et al.: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004); Glenn Dynner and François Guesnet, eds., *Warsaw, the Jewish Metropolis: Essays in Honor of the 75th Birthday of Professor Antony Polonsky* (Amsterdam: Brill, 2015).

5 German readers have access to a sixteenth volume edition of Korczak's writings, translated into German. Janusz Korczak, *Sämtliche Werke* (*Collected Works)*, eds. Erich Dauzenroth, Friedhelm Beiner et al. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1996 – 2010).

6 Marc Silverman, "Korczak's Road to Radical Humanism," in *A Pedagogy of Humanist Moral Education* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 19 – 70, accessed July 17 2017, doi https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-56068-1_2.

pressed by critical interventions into the everyday life of a Jewish community.[7] Korczak's engagement aimed at bridging the gap of social inequality by empowering marginalized Jewish youth through participative educational practices. His pedagogical ideas were based on concepts of a radical democracy that focused on consciousness-raising. Experiences of self-efficacy and democratic discourse should enable the children and youth to speak up for their rights and to transcend the barriers of structural exclusion. Social justice education wanted to empower especially those who because of their social background had no access to economic, social, and cultural capital. In the face of rapid capitalist progress, Korczak put forward his idea to tackle the root causes of the "social question" by education. Democratic settings were seen as an important trajectory towards a just society. Korczak hoped that those who were raised in the spirit of active citizenship would have the power to construct a democratic Poland without anti-Semitism.

In the first section, I will describe some central aspects of Jewish life in Warsaw under Russian occupation at the beginning of the twentieth century in order to make intelligible the relevance of this specific historical context for Jewish community action. In the second section, I will highlight Korczak's social and intellectual engagement as a student and young doctor between 1900 and 1912. The third section will give a closer insight into the contemporary European debate on educational reforms. The fourth section focuses on the development of Korczak's pedagogical theory and practice, after he had taken over the management of the Jewish orphanage Dom Sierot in 1912. In the fifth section, I will provide evidence to Korczak's radicalism by a theory-led reflection on "humanity in dark times."[8] In evaluating courageous acts, German-Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt reminds us of the fact that human beings are foremost moral and political subjects who challenge old truths and create new realities, thus leaving traces in the course of history to posterity. The conclusion points to the fact that for us today, ideas of social justice and democracy reinforce the relevance of Janusz Korczak's radical intervention into social community life for future political action.

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7 For a sociological approach to the link between the history of ideas and personal action see Robert J. Brym, *The Jewish Intelligentsia and Russian Marxism. A Sociological Study of Intellectual Radicalism and Ideological Divergence* (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1978).
8 Hannah Arendt, "On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing," in *Men in Dark Times*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 3–31.

Jewish Culture in Warsaw at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century

"Change is constant, inherent in the human condition, but the velocity of change is not."[9]

How can a Jewish life be reconstructed in the midst of political turmoil and under rapidly changing circumstances in Eastern Central Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century? Historians can only access the traces people have left in the form of images or written documents whose transmittance through history is always connected to questions of power. Many lives have disappeared, are forgotten, and therefore will not have a meaning for further generations. Historiography after the Shoah has to deal with an enormous destruction of Jewish sources, but with a rich heritage and memory at the same time.[10] The work of Simon Dubnow[11] (1860 – 1941) is crucially important as well as that of Emanuel Ringelblum (1900 – 1944) and his colleagues, who collected an extensive amount of written information on Jewish social history.[12] The staff of the *Yidisher visnshaftlekher institut* (YIVO) founded in 1925 in Vilnius (Lithuania) had transferred documents to archives in New York early enough to preserve them from Nazi aggression. Tens of thousands of photographs, taken by Roman Vishniac (1897 – 1990), Alter Kacynze (1885 – 1941), and others, deposited at the YIVO-*Institute for Jewish Research* in New York, give a striking impression of the vivid and diverse Jewish culture in Poland between 1864 and 1939.[13] Similar to the material of the Warsaw Ghetto archive, the so-called Ghetto diary of Janusz Korczak has survived hidden by his scholar Igor Newerly (1903 – 1987) in the "Aryan" quartier of Warsaw.[14] Thus a lot of documents of the Jewish com-

9 Hannah Arendt, "Civil Disobedience," in *Crisis of the Republic,* ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1969), 78.

10 Natalia Aleksiun, Brian Horowitz and Antony Polonsky, eds., *Writing Jewish History in Eastern Europe, Polin 29* (Oxford, Portland, Oregon: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilizations, 2017).

11 Semjon Markowitch Dubnow, *Jewish History: An Essay on the Philosophy of History* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1903).

12 Samuel D. Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History? Rediscovering a Hidden Archive from the Warsaw Ghetto*, Reprint Edition (New York: Vintage Books, 2009).

13 Lucjan Dobroszycki and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Image before my Eyes: A Photographic History of Jewish life in Poland, 1864 – 1939* (New York: Schocken Books, 1977).

14 Betty Jean Lifton, "Who was Janusz Korczak," in *Janusz Korczak, Ghetto Diary*, with an introduction by Betty Jean Lifton, first published by the Holocaust Library (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), XXIII-XIV.

munities in the Warsaw region could be transmitted to the post-Shoah generation.

Korczaks's written heritage encompasses twenty-four books, over one thousand professional articles, numerous radio features, contributions to schoolbooks and pedagogical statements. His complete work has been published over a period of fifty years in Polish, translated already during Korczak's lifetime into many languages, particularly into Yiddish and even Esperanto.[15] Research into Korczak's work deals with his biography, his pedagogical theories, and his educational practices. Often, his life is presented by underlining his heroic behavior, because he did not take the chance to evade the Warsaw Ghetto. During the deportation procedure at the *Umschlagplatz*, a German Gestapo man offered Korczak to deliver only the children and to stay back himself. With inner contempt, Korczak commented that he – as a human being – did not want to become as corrupt as the Nazis were. Because of this act of solidarity, Korczak is honored in Yad Vashem as Righteous among the Nations.[16] At the age of sixty-four, he was deported to Treblinka, leaving behind a life's work that to this day represents an elaborate concept of Jewish democratic culture and education.[17]

Korczak always defined himself as a Polish citizen. However during his lifetime, the Polish state had only existed twenty-one years until it was attacked and occupied by the German army in September 1939.[18] Besides travelling because of medical studies and pedagogical trainings in European cities like Paris, London, Zurich, and Berlin, Korczak also visited Palestine several times during the 1930s. Demonstrating a certain readiness to learn from life, Korczak enunciated ideas and points of view that reflected no national or otherwise predetermined boun-

15 Friedhelm Beiner, preface to *Janusz Korczak, Themen seines Lebens: Eine Werkbiographie* (*Janusz Korczak. Themes of his Life: A Biography based on his Oeuvre*) (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2011), 13.

16 Moshe Gilad, "Righteous among the Nations – and Much More," *Haaretz*, July 30 2012. Accessed March 3 2017. http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/culture/leisure/righteous-among-the-nations-and-much-more-1.454502.

17 Michael Kirchner, "Das Lebenswerk von Janusz Korczak," in *Pionier der Kinderrechte. Ein internationales Symposium,* ed. Manfred Liebel ("The Lifework of Janusz Korczak," in *Pioneer of Children's Rights. An international Symposium*) (Berlin, Münster, Wien, Zürich, London: LIT Verlag, 2013), 13.

18 Alexander B. Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland: Blitzkrieg, Ideology, and Atrocity* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003); Bogdan Musial, "The Origins of 'Operation Reinhard': The Decision-Making Process for the Mass Murder of the Jews in the General Government." *Yad Vashem Studies* 28 (2000): 113–153. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact had led to the division of Poland already in August 1939.

daries. Korczak was cosmopolitan who fused openness to the world with loyalty to local roots and practices in Warsaw. Because of migration movements, the urban conglomeration was one of the most vivid centers of Jewish life in Central Eastern Europe. In this multicultural environment, Jewish individuals developed quite diverse understandings of what it meant for them to be Jewish.[19] When Janusz Korczak was born on July 22 1878 or 1879 – his parents did not register him for an official birth certificate[20] – the impressive Great Synagogue built by the Warsaw's Jewish community since 1875 had just opened at Tłomackie street, at the south-eastern tip of the district in which the Russian Imperial authorities had allowed Jews to settle. The Korczak family adhered to the secular branch of the Jewish community. Józef Goldszmit, a lawyer, was well-known for his publications on the liberalization of divorce. He had also publicly argued for the integration of the Jewish community into Polish society and addressed the Jewish bourgeoisie to institutionalize secular public schools.[21] Efforts to mediate between the Jewish and the Christian communities and the engagement for a civic, not religious, understanding of society appeared to be a family heritage. The young Korczak preferred to define himself as someone relating to different lifestyles, in the midst of a hybrid construction of being Polish and Jewish. He felt like a citizen of a prospective democracy and a cosmopolitan Jew at the same time. In the first instance, Korczak saw himself as a political defendant of a secular society. His motivation was based on a strong moral obligation, such that he transformed into an intellectual habitus combined with a strong urge for social action. Although he personally preferred the Polish national option to the Zionist idea of a Jewish state in Palestine, he sympathized with the Zionist movement, was befriended by many Zionists, visited Palestine, and received visitors from the Kibbutzim-movement, where European social progressivism had found a new home.[22] Facing the growing anti-Semitism of the 1930s, even Korczak considered to migrate to Palestine.[23]

19 For the history of Warsaw see the website of the Jewish Virtual Library, a project by AICE, accessed March 30 2017, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/warsaw-poland-2.

20 Korczak, *Themen seines Leben*s, 15.

21 Ibid., 16.

22 Ludwig Liegle and Franz Michael Konrad, eds. *Reformpädagogik in Palästina: Dokumente und Deutungen zu den Versuchen einer 'neuen' Erziehung im jüdischen Gemeinwesen Palästinas, 1914 – 1948* (*Reform Education in Palestine: Documents and Interpretations of Experiments with* '*new*' *Education in Jewish Community Life in Palestine, 1914 – 1948*) (Frankfurt a. M.: dipa-Verlag, 1989).

23 In 1934 and 1936, Korczak visited Palestine. In 1938, he was in close contact to the emissary of the Kibbutz Ejn Harod, the poet Zerubal Gilead, who visited Warsaw. Korczak, *Themen seines Lebens*, 205 – 210, 215 – 217, 225 – 229.

According to Norman Davies, "for most of the period 'Poland' was just an idea – a memory from the past or a hope for the future."[24] Since the so-called third division of Poland in 1795, no Polish state had existed until November 9 1918. The Warsaw region underwent a very specific political development with liberal periods but also strong oppression. As an effect of political instability and changing working conditions, between 1858 and 1897, the population of Warsaw had risen from 160,000 to 600,000.[25] Attacks and pogroms against Jews alternated with strikes of Jewish workers. The Jewish social movements were widely connected all over Eastern Europe, claiming an international approach to Jewish emancipation under the roof of solidarity. This secular idea of belonging encompassed the idea that the engagement for social justice should primarily be realized by workers' self-associations.[26] The redefinition of Polishness played a significant role in this political process and became even more decisive after the First World War.[27]

The Second Polish Republic was founded as a progressive parliamentary democracy with women granted the right to vote by a decree of Józef Piłsudski (1967–1935) on November 28 1918.[28] The landscape of political parties at this time was vast. The *Socialist General Jewish Labour Bund* (The Bund), parties of the Zionist right and left wing, and religious conservative movements were represented in the *Sejm* (the Polish Parliament) as well as in the important regional councils.[29] However, the political situation remained unstable and after the mili-

24 Norman Davies, *Heart of Europe: The Past in Poland's Present*, New Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 139.

25 Gérard Kahn, *Janusz Korczak und die jüdische Erziehung: Janusz Korczaks Pädagogik auf dem Hintergrund seiner jüdischen Herkunft* (*Janusz Korczak and the Jewish Education: Janusz Korczak's Pedagogy in the Context of his Jewish Origin*) (Weinheim: Deutscher Studienverlag 1993), 36.

26 Isaac Deutscher, *The Tragedy of Polish Communism between the Wars* (London: Socialist Labour League, n.d.). The publication is a reprint of an article that had first appeared in *Les Temps Modernes*, March 1958 (Vol. XIII, 1632–1677) in the form of an interview between Isaac Deutscher and the Polish journalist K.S. Karol.

27 Edyta Barucka, "Redefining Polishness: The Revival of Crafts in Galicia around 1900," *Acta Slavica Iaponica* 28 (2016): 7, 76.

28 Feigue Cieplinski, "Poles and Jews: The Quest for Self-Determination 1919–1934," *Binghamton Journal of History* 3 (2002), accessed March 27 2017, https://www.binghamton.edu/history/resources/journal-of-history/poles-and-jews.html; Joseph Marcus, *Social and Political History of the Jews in Poland, 1919–1939* (Berlin/New York/Amsterdam: Mouton Publishers, 1983).

29 Zvi Y. Gitelman, *The Emergence of Modern Jewish Politics: Bundism and Zionism in Eastern Europe* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002); Jaff Schatz, "Jews and the Communist Movement in Interwar Poland," in *Dark Times, Dire Decisions: Jews and Communism. Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, ed. Jonathan Frankel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 13–37. The *United Jewish Socialist Workers Party* strongly established in the Ukraine was not represented

tary coup in 1926, the social climate became even more harsh and rigid. Under the economic crisis of 1929, social conflicts increased. When General Piłsudski – the Polish dictator, as Hannah Arendt called him – died in 1935, an authoritarian constitution had just been approved.[30] Polish nationalism was now exclusively defined as being anti-Jewish. In addition, the social democrats who traditionally had propagated Jewish assimilation now wanted to reduce the political and public participation of Jews. From all Polish parties, only the socialists took a stance against anti-Semitism.[31] The everyday life of migrated Jews who lived in Poland without valid national identity papers thus became more and more difficult. Although the protection of minorities as outlined in the Paris treaties of 1919 had been adopted by the Polish constitution of 1921,[32] the Jewish situation was not particularly mentioned, meaning there did not exist any public or legal shelter against anti-Semitic discrimination.

Formative Experiences as a Student and Doctor

> "Power is what keeps the public realm, the potential space of appearance between acting and speaking men, in existence."[33]

Janusz Korczak was twenty years old when he enrolled in medical studies at Warsaw University for the winter semester 1898/99.[34] After six years of studies, he gained experience in the medical profession for another seven years, until he took over the educational management of Dom Sierot in 1912. Korczak was thirty-three years old when he decided to become an educator, strongly motivated by his social and political engagement. He was also affected by his earlier personal and intimate life experiences. In disappointing childhood episodes

in the Polish parliament. The party was also called *Fareynikte*, founded in June 1917 through the merger of the Zionist Socialist Workers Party (SSRP) and the *Jewish Socialist Workers Party* (SERP). It adhered to the Second Socialist International. Politically the party favored a secular, national autonomy for the Jewish community.

30 Hannah Arendt, "Rosa Luxemburg (1971–1919)," in *Men in Dark Times*, ed. Hannah Arendt, 33–56, 42.

31 Kahn, *Janusz Korczak und die jüdische Erziehung*, 49–51.

32 Dobroszycki/Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Image Before My Eyes*, 133; Martin Scheuermann, *Minderheitenschutz contra Konfliktverhütung? Die Minderheitenpolitik des Völkerbundes in den zwanziger Jahren* (*Protection of Minorities versus Prevention of Conflict? Minority Policy of the League of Nations in the 1920s*) (Marburg: Verlag Herder-Institut, 2000).

33 Arendt, *Human Condition*, 200.

34 Korczak, *Themen seines Lebens*, 28.

that he remembered, he had not been allowed to play in the streets with children from poor families. It was precisely this reminiscence of segregation and social inequality that let him delve deeper into his past. As a student and young doctor, he analyzed his biographical experiences, thus becoming convinced of the need and necessity to develop a new approach to education.

The influence of formative life-experiences on Korczak's decision to become an educator has often been underlined.[35] Besides childhood, the *Model of Productive Processing of Reality* (PPR), well known from human development studies, calls our attention to the relevance of formative learning processes during youth.[36] The idea of life passages, as outlined by biography-researcher Gail Sheehy, seems additionally helpful to understand the influence of life experiences at certain ages.[37] Following the traits of biographical formation, Sheehy differentiates between a provisional adulthood (between eighteen and thirty) and an early adulthood (thirty and forty-five), a classification that helps to structure the circle of life. Korczak's active engagement in intellectual discourses and social projects during his provisional adulthood influenced him to develop a perception of human beings – including himself – as being strongly affected by their socialization. This perspective on human subjectivity underlined the necessity of a sustainable social citizenship education for democratic participation.

Looking back at his life as expressed in a letter to a friend in Palestine, Korczak described his political engagement as bound to the decision not to start a family himself.[38] He compared his situation to that of "a slave who is a Polish Jew under Russian occupation."[39] Since Russian had become the official teaching language in 1885, Polish and Yiddish only existed in clandestine instructions.

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35 Friedhelm Beiner, "Wie wurde Korczak zum 'Pionier der Menschenrechte des Kindes' – und welchen Beitrag leisteten Stefania Wilczynska und Maria Falska dazu?," in *Janusz Korczak. Pionier der Kinderrechte. Ein internationales Symposium*, ed. Manfred Liebel; *Pionier der Kinderrechte. Ein internationales Symposium*, ed. Manfred Liebel ("How Korczak became the 'Pioneer of Children's Rights' – and the Contribution of Stefania Wilczynska and Maria Falska," in *Pioneer of Children's Rights. An International Symposium*) (Münster: LIT Verlag 2013), 29 – 31.

36 Klaus Hurrelmann, "Adolescents as Productive Processors of Reality," in *The Developmental Science of Adolescence*, ed. Richard M. Lerner, Arthur C. Petersen, Rainer K. Silbereisen, and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn (New York: Psychology Press, 2014); 230 – 238.

37 Gail Sheehy, *New Passages: Mapping Your Life Across Time* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1995).

38 Janusz Korczak, "Brief an L. Zylbertal, 30. 3. 1937," in *Sämtliche Werke, vol. 15, Briefe und Palästina Reisen*, ("Letter to L. Zylbertal, 30. 3. 1937," in *Collected Works, vol. 15, Letters and Travels to Palestine*) (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagsanstalt, 2005), 54.

39 Betty Jean Lifton, *The King of Children: The Life and Death of Janusz Korczak* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin 1988), online edition provided by the Janusz Korczak Communication Center, accessed August 18 2017, http://korczak.com/Biography.

The typing fonts of the administration had been replaced by the Cyrillic alphabet. During his studies of medicine at Warsaw University, Korczak visited the seminaries of the so-called "Flying University" (*Uniwersytet Latający*), a subversive learning structure to empower young Jews to further their emancipation.[40] Women played a substantial role in these clandestine practices that formed an effective counterculture against the authoritarian Russian regime. The curriculum of the "Flying University" covered five or six years with eight to eleven hours per week of study on five main subjects: social sciences, pedagogy, philology, history and natural sciences. Korczak underlined that his interest in education emanated from his studies at the "Flying University."[41] One of Korczak's teachers, the sociologist Ludwik Krzywicki (1859–1941), had cooperated in the translation of Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* into Polish and also edited the newsletter of the *Polish Socialist Party* (*Polska Partia Socjalistyczna*). Language skills were seen as very important. Taking a stance against the Russian monolingual habitus, the Jewish community furthered multilingual competencies and transnational communication. Korczak's Polish written publications were translated into Russian, Czech, Yiddish, and Esperanto in 1905.[42]

Jewish intellectuals of the younger generation, women and men, decided to work for the integration of Jewish children from poor families by supporting their alphabetization and social learning. Poverty was a mass phenomenon, although mostly hidden from the bourgeois perception by urban segregation. Child-work, child-neglect, depression, sexual violence, suicide, child prostitution, and trafficking were usually dealt with by police. The city council provided some provisional measurement of social hygiene and clinical expertise. However, deviant youths were medicalized or criminalized without taking into account the effects of social inequality. Facing this striking injustice, many students looked for fields of engagement, whether it might be political organization, social welfare, or public education. Jewish youths who were affected by anti-Semitic discrimination, in particular, showed a strong interest in engaged research and socialist practices. When Korczak visited the slums of Warsaw together with his friend, ethnographer Ludwik S. Licinski (1874–1908), this field study taught him a lesson for life.[43] The idea of children's rights and the obligation of a society to take care of children's dignity and well-being had already been developed during that time, but not yet been institutionalized. In Central Eastern Europe, influences

40 The "Flying University," sometimes translated as "Floating University," operated from 1885 to 1905 in Warsaw. Lifton, *King of Children*, 35.

41 Korczak, *Themen seines Lebens*, 29.

42 Ibid., 50; Dobroszycki/Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Image Before My Eyes*, 202.

43 Korczak, *Themen seines Lebens*, 30.

from the Proletkult Movement could be observed[44], but the negative experiences with the Russian occupation made most political activists in Warsaw turn towards Western trajectories of democratization. This might have been one reason why Korczak decided to go to Zurich in order to visit educational institutions that worked on the basis of the pedagogical concept of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi. A century ago, the Suisse pedagogue had developed a humanist approach to social work at the orphanage in Stanz[45], influenced by the French Children's Rights Movement.[46]

For Korzcak, spoken and written language was a precondition of social learning and emancipation. After his return to Warsaw, he opened a public library in his little backyard flat in a worker's district.[47] In 1904, he also started to work as an educator in the summer colony *Michalówka*, organized by a welfare society in Warsaw. Korczak made friends with many of the children and youths who visited him in his flat in Warsaw the following winter. They met for reading circles or spent the Sabbath evening together, playing domino or lottery.[48] On March 17 1905, Korczak gained his degree as a doctor, but it seemed as if he was rather productive in the field of writing. Between 1904 and 1905, he published around fifty articles in the radical social journal *Głosz*. Korczak spoke up against anti-Semitism and at the same time criticized the hypocrisy of Jewish philanthropy that failed to address the economic foundations of social inequality.[49]

In the beginning of 1905, Korzcak started to work as a ward physician in the Berson-Bauman-Spital, one of the Jewish philanthropic centers in Warsaw. But the political conflicts in the city escalated because of the aggressive anti-Semitism of the National Democratic Party.[50] In July, Korczak was conscripted into

44 Lynn Mally, *Culture of the Future. The Proletkult Movement in Revolutionary Russia* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1990), 181–182.

45 Rebekka Horlacher, "Schooling as Means of Popular Education: Pestalozzi's Method as a Popular Education Experiment," in *A History of Popular Education: Educating the People of the World*, ed. Sjaak Braster, Frank Simon, and Ian Grosnevor (London/New York: Routledge, 2012), 67–69.

46 Yves Denérchére and David Nigel, *Droits des Enfants au XXe Siècle. Pour une Histoire Transnationale* (*Children's Rights in the 20th Century. A Transnational History*) (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2015), 210; Joseph M. Hawes, *The Children's Rights Movement: A History of Advocacy and Protection* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991).

47 Korzcak, *Themen seines Lebens*, 32.

48 Ibid., 41–43.

49 Ibid., 44 and 49–50.

50 Ury Scott, *Barricades and Banners: The Revolution of 1905 and the Transformation of Warsaw Jewry* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012).

the army to serve as a doctor in the Russo-Japanese War, from which he returned in March 1906. The war experience had deepened his critical analyses of illness and disability. Inspired by sociological and psychoanalytic ideas, he diagnosed states of mental confusion and expressions of fear as traumatic experiences triggered by the violence of war.[51] He had also felt the hardship and distress of injured people, whom he could not help because of the lack of infrastructure. In an article in the journal *Nowa Gazeta*, he campaigned for the support of care workers who went on strike against poor resources and the mismanagement in health clinics.[52] He signed the article with Dr. Henryk Goldszmit, adding his title in order to underline the writer's authority. He also criticized his own status group of being ignorant. In his opinion, medical professionals should not function as subaltern executors of authoritarianism, but speak up in public as representatives of a future democracy.

In his studies in medicine, Korzcak had specialized on pediatrics, although there did not exist such a chair at Warsaw University. However, the European discourse was quite advanced and transnational. Many pediatricians, a lot of them Jewish, were socially engaged with a fierce interest in social medicine and structural prevention. When Janusz Korczak visited Berlin during winter 1906/07 for medical training, he met the Jewish pediatrician Heinrich Finkelstein (1865–1942), who was responsible for the child asylum in the Kürassierstraße as well as for the city orphanage.[53] In 1918, Finkelstein followed Adolf Aron Baginsky (1843–1918) as medical director of the *Kaiser- und Kaiserin-Friedrich-Kinderkrankenhaus* (Emperor- and Empress-Friedrich-Children-Hospital) in the workers district Berlin-Wedding, where Korczak had taken some practical lessons during his stay in Berlin more than ten years before. During that time, Baginski had managed a home for people with learning difficulties, a sector of the psychiatric station at the *Charité*, where Korczak also had taken a traineeship. Visiting the rehabilitation centers for so-called deviant youths, Korczak must have also met Gustav Tugendreich (1876–1948), who until his emigration from Germany in 1933 led the infant and youth welfare center of the public health department in Berlin.[54] Korczak showed himself to be impressed by these professional en-

51 Korzcak, *Themen seines Lebens*, 50.

52 Ibid., 52.

53 Konrad Weiß, "Kinderarzt und medizinischer Lehrmeister," (Pediatrician and Medical Teacher) *Aufbau* 61, no. 15 (July 21 1988): 17.

54 Max Mosse and Gustav Tugendreich, *Krankheit und Soziale Lage* (*Disease and Social Situation*), ed. Jürgen Cromm, Third Edition (Göttingen/Augsburg: Jürgen Cromm Verlag, 1994); Eduard Seidler, *Jüdische Kinderärzte 1933–1945. Entrechtet, geflohen, ermordet* (*Jewish Pediatrists 1933–1945. Deprived of Rights, Escaped, Murdered*), Second Edition (Basel: Karger, 2007).

counters as well as by the advanced infrastructure of the Prussian welfare system.[55]

However, the living conditions in Warsaw were completely different. There did not exist comprehensive public schooling, most welfare networks were privately organized and poor families could not afford medical services. Facing this striking poverty, Korczak decided to become even more socially engaged and also deepened his political affiliations. Although he was never a member of a political party, he subscribed to the publications of the *Polish Socialist Party* (PPS-Lewica) and often met with the left-wing political activist Tadeusz Rechniewski (1862–1916) who had been arrested during the 1905 conflicts and later returned to Warsaw.[56] In 1909, Korczak himself was imprisoned for a short time. Together with his old teacher from university times, sociologist Ludwik Krzywicki, also his supervisor and even friend, Korczak gave a lecture at a public meeting of a women's organization explaining the link between poverty, political oppression, and authoritarian education. This critical intervention did not please the authorities, so it was not surprising that the two activists were denounced on the grounds that their payment for the lecture should have benefitted the Socialist party.[57] Although an anti-Leftist and anti-Semitic attitude became very present in public life, Korczak held on to his idea of Jewish/non-Jewish cooperation, united in a common fight against social inequality and political intolerance with the aim to establish a sovereign Polish democracy.[58]

Korczak critically observed the different world views separating Jewish community members from each other. By confronting the respectable citizens of Warsaw with the social needs of marginalized youth, he hoped to reduce prejudices and enhance social integration. Although a humanitarian credo was part of the self-concept of the Jewish elite, signs of bourgeois hypocrisy were always present. Korczak suggested approaching problems of disintegration not with social hygiene or medicalized therapy, but socially engaged practice.[59] By establishing

55 Janusz Korzcak, "Eindrücke aus Berlin," in *Sämtliche Werke, vol. 8., Sozialmedizinische Schriften*, ed. Michael Kirchner and Henryk Bereska ("Impressions from Berlin," in *Collected Works, vol. 8, Essays in Social Medicine*) (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus 1999), 29–31.

56 Korczak, *Themen seines Lebens*, 66. See also Stefan Wiese, *Pogrome im Zarenreich: Dynamiken kollektiver Gewalt* (*Pogroms under the Tsarist Regime: Dynamics of Collective Violence*), (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, HIS Verlag, 2016).

57 Korczak, *Themen seines Lebens*, 72–74; Beiner, "Wie wurde Korczak zum 'Pionier der Menschenrechte des Kindes'," 33.

58 Korczak, *Themen seines Lebens*, 78–79.

59 A desideratum of research is Korczak's dealing with eugenics in the context of special education. Stanislaw Rogalski, "Das Schulexperiment Dr. Janusz Korczaks," in *Von der Grammatik, und andere pädagogische Texte*, ("The school experiment of Dr. Janusz Korczak," in *About Gram-*

networks of care and education, he acted as an important mentor of Jewish emancipation. His enormous competence to deal politically with the overall presence of social inequality was connected to his non-academic, existentialist approach to life. "The reason I became an educator was that I always felt best when I was among children," Korczak told a young interviewer many years later. "The road I have chosen towards my goal is neither the shortest nor the most convenient" he said, but he underlined that he felt completely convinced by his decision, "because it is my own." And he added: "I found it not without effort or pain and only when I had come to understand that all the books I read, and all the experiences and opinions of others, were misleading."[60]

Understanding Pedagogics: A Scientific Approach to Education

> "We start with a very necessary distinction. Education is what the educator does. Pedagogy is the research and teaching, the science of this action."[61]

When Swedish civil rights activist Ellen Key proclaimed the "century of the child" in 1900,[62] efforts to liberalize education were substantiated by new arguments. Similar to reforms in the political realm, educational concepts were now closely linked to ideas of social justice and democracy. In contrast to some reform pedagogues who adhered to ideas of heredity as explanatory models of social inequality, Janusz Korczak preferred to focus on learning and socialization.[63] He felt inspired by the liberal pragmatism of John Dewey[64] and the socialist ap-

mar and other Pedagogical Chapters), ed. Friedhelm Beiner and Elisabeth Lax-Höfer (Heinsberg/Rhld.: Agentur Dieck, 1991), 205.

60 Lifton, *King of Children*, chapter 8, accessed 30 July 2017, http://korczak.com/Biography/kap-8.htm.

61 Siegfried Bernfeld, "Sozialistische Erziehungskritik (1926)," in *Sozialistische Pädagogik und Schulkritik*, ("Socialist Critique of Education," in *Socialist Pedagogics and Critique of Schooling*), vol. 8, ed. Ulrich Herrmann (Gießen: Psychosozial Verlag, 2016), 11. (Translation mine, "Wir beginnen mit einer sehr nötigen Unterscheidung. Erziehung ist das tatsächliche Tun des Erziehers. Aber Pädagogik ist die *Lehre*, die Wissenschaft von diesem Tun.")

62 Ellen Key, *Century of the Child* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009).

63 Sjaak Braster, "The People, the Poor, the Oppressed: The Concept of Popular Education through Time," *Paedagogica Historica* 27 (2011): 1–14.

64 Jim (James) Garrison, Stefan Neubert and Kersten Reich, *John Dewey's Philosophy of Education: An Introduction and Recontextualization for Our Times* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

proach of Anton Semjonowitch Makarenko, especially by his experiments in group-education.[65] Korczak's later secretary, Igor Newerly (1903–1987), had been engaged in the Communist Youth after the Russian Revolution and later studied pedagogics in Warsaw.[66] Korczak was extremely critical of any authoritarian style of education and concerning the hegemony of grown-ups in general. Instead, he saw children as persons – or better, personalities – who had an intuitive perception of their environment with an unmistakable idea of truth and justice. To him, children even seemed to be more sophisticated than grown-ups; Korczak was impressed by their sensitivity in dealing with dependency and practicing cooperation. It seemed as if not foremost that they had to be educated, but that the educators had to learn to be critically reflective themselves.

In Korczak's opinion, professionals had to learn from their encounters with children, and at the same time, it was their obligation to guarantee stable educational settings seen as a precondition for human growth. Korczak did not believe in a just individual by nature. Instead, he thought that justice had to be learnt by democratic processes and dialogical encounters. Finding a non-violent way to deal with conflicting exigencies and expectations seemed to be extremely necessary in times of rapid social change. The declining importance of religious traditions, according to the argument of Korczak, could only be compensated by educational networks that assured a new secular credibility, especially for those who lived at the margins of society. Korczak also sympathized with an understanding of liberty and free will as binding individuals together on the basis of moral obligations and political rights.[67] The organization of social life in Korczak's orphanages and foster homes aimed at generating confidence through democratic procedures similar to forms of self-government practiced in the institutions for Jewish youth provided by ORT (*Obchestvo Remeslenogo Truda*, the Association for the Promotion of Skilled Trades, founded in St. Petersburg in 1880), Centos (Association of Societies for the Care of Jewish Orphans, founded 1924),

65 Anton Semjonowitch Makarenko, *Kinderrepubliken: Geschichte, Praxis und Theorie radikaler Selbstregierung in Kinder- und Jugendheimen* (*Children's Republics: History, Practice and Theory of Radical Self-Government in Hostels for Children and Youth*), ed. Johannes-Martin Kamp (Opladen: Leske+Budrich, 1995), see chapter 20: "Makarenko u. a. in Russland und der Ukraine," ("Makarenko i.a. in Russia and Ukraine,") 467–544.

66 Konrad Weiß, "Wie Igor Newerly Janusz Korczak kennenlernte," ("How Igor Newerly got Acquainted to Janusz Korczak,") *Die Weltbühne* 83, no. 11 (March 15 1988): 339–341.

67 Michael Kirchner, "Anarchistische Spuren bei Janusz Korczak," ("Anarchical Traces in the Work of Janusz Korczak,") *Korczak Bulletin* 9, no. 2 (2000): 32–40.

or TOZ (*Towarzystwo Ochrony Zdrowia*, Society for the Safeguarding of Health, established in 1921, sponsored by the American Joint Distribution Committee).[68]

The German pedagogue Emil Dauzenroth once called Korczak "the Pestalozzi from Warsaw."[69] However, the conceptualization of childhood and youth during the eighteenth century fundamentally changed in the nineteenth century. On one hand, the prospect of work had become the central motive of governing the proletariat during industrialization. On the other hand, during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, human sciences had become much more influential with the effect that children and youth were seen as interesting study objects of medical, criminological, and psychological research.[70] Jewish children coming from the poor quarters of Warsaw belonged to this target group. Many of them lived as abandoned children, some of them foundlings right after birth, others *mamzers* from forbidden relations.[71] Making a living in the streets, along with their fellow peers, many of them resorted to beggary in order to support their mothers, sisters, and brothers with some money. In orthodox religious contexts – Catholic or Jewish – unmarried mothers were disregarded and morally despised; modern welfare states like Prussia went on criminalizing illegitimate births.[72] Poor women with an offspring from an illegitimate relation had nearly no chance to provide adequate education for their children. The situation of single mothers and orphans aggravated during the First World War, when many Polish men did not return from their war mission.[73]

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68 Dobroszycki/Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Image Before My Eye*, 173–174 and 184; Marcus, *Social and Political History of the Jews in Poland*, 143.

69 Erich Dauzenroth, *Janusz Korczak – Der Pestalozzi aus Warschau* (*Janusz Korczak – The Pestalozzi from Warsaw*) (Zürich: Schweizerische Lehrerzeitung, 1978).

70 Elisabeth Wiesbauer, *Das Kind als Objekt der Wissenschaft: Medizinische und psychologische Kinderforschung an der Wiener Universität 1800–1914* (*The Child as Object of Science: Medical and psychological Research on Children at the Vienna University 1800–1914*) (Wien: Löcker, 1981).

71 A *mamzer* is a person born from certain (forbidden) relationships or the descendant of such a person, in the Hebrew Bible and Jewish religious law. In modern Jewish culture it is someone who is either born out of adultery by a married Jewish woman and a Jewish man who is not her husband, or born out of incest, or someone who has a *mamzer* as a parent. *Mamzer* status is not synonymous with illegitimacy, since it does not include children whose mothers were unmarried.

72 Teresa Dworecka, "Illegitimate Births in Selected Poviats of Northern Mazowsze in the Period of the Second Republic of Poland," *Med. Nowouzytna* 14, no. 1–2 (2007): 137–166; Percy Gamble Kammerer, "The Unmarried Mother: A Study of Five Hundred Cases," *Criminal Science Monographs* 3 (1918): 1–337; Solomon Schechter and Julius H. Greenstone, "'Foundling", *Jewish Encyclopedia*, accessed March 30 2017, http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/6255-foundling.

73 Robert Blobaum, *A Minor Apocalypse: Warsaw during the First World War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017); Robert Blobaum, "A Warsaw Story: Polish-Jewish Relations during the

However, the growing demand for justice and rights challenged the practices of denigration and exclusion, especially concerning women, youth, and dependent minors. As Hannah Arendt has explained, this new democratic thinking was linked to the concept of citizenship that should guarantee respect and equal recognition despite of economic differences, social segregation, and political exclusion. On one hand, the "right to have rights"[74] meant the right to vote and to represent oneself in public contexts. This right could be understood as the founding act of political participation that no longer was reserved to property owners. On the other hand, a "democracy in the making"[75] promised to protect its citizens against harm and violence not only by other state power, but also by the state itself. Civic education became a very important tool to bind hopes to the new democracy. Not only the emancipation of the Jewish "minority" – a numeric majority in Warsaw as in many parts in Central Eastern Europe – was now on the political agenda. The status of children and youth as well as of other vulnerable groups – for example stateless people – could no longer be ignored in the political realm. The human rights discourse started to fill the gaps of injustice that had broadened through the course of industrialization and could no longer be ignored since the First World War.[76] Defining human rights as universal, imprescriptible, and impartible meant a commitment to those who lived on the margins of society. With this promise of inclusion in mind, Janusz Korczak devoted his first articles to the rights of children.[77]

Korczak wanted to modernize society by challenging authoritarianism through democratic education. The idea of children as right-bearers had first been discussed at the international child-welfare congress in Brussels in 1913 and became effective approximately ten years later by the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child, approved by the League of Nations on September 26 1924. The five points of the declaration still reflected the disastrous situation during and immediately after the First World War, addressing mainly nourishment, shelter, protection, support, spiritual, and material development and

First World War," in *Warsaw – The Jewish Metropolis: Essays in Honor of the 75th Birthday of Professor Anthony Polonsky*, ed. Glenn Dynner and François Guesnet (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015), 271–296.

74 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: André Deutsch, 1986), 277.

75 Kathleen M. Blee, *Democracy in the Making: How Activist Groups Form* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

76 Micheline Ishay, *The History of Human Rights: From Ancient Times to the Globalization Era* (Los Angeles, California: University California Press, 2004).

77 Friedhelm Beiner, "Wie wurde Korczak zum 'Pionier der Menschenrechte des Kindes'," 29–31.

the guarantee of a basic education for children.[78] It was underlined that children "must be the first to receive relief in times of distress" and that "the needs and demands of each individual child has to be satisfied corresponding to its life situation." And it was emphasized that "the child that is backward must be helped; the delinquent child must be reclaimed; and the orphan and the waif must be sheltered and succored."[79] Korczak's social engagement was inspired by the idea of Zedaka (in Hebrew צְדָקָה, translated as "charity") and a dialogical approach to education, also well-known from the Jewish tradition that said that truth does not exist, but can only be generated by the exchange of diverse opinions.[80] According to Korczak, scientific knowledge was essential, but needed a continuous "radical revision by living research."[81] He explained his educational diagnostics as based on detailed observations and empirical data collection. To recognize structural habits – or the typology – of children was one focal point, but his main interest was to find out about forms of cooperation in social interaction. Only after thorough research, he validated conclusions for the arrangement of adequate educational settings.[82] Korczak's scientific approach qualified him as an educational advisor for the school system of the Second Polish Republic. Later, when the German authorities asked him whether his work could be judged as scientific, he answered: "Tak, obserwacje dziecka." ("Yes, I observe children.")[83]

Korczak was undogmatic, agnostic, sceptic; he identified himself as non-religious although sometimes longed for an existentialist encounter with God through prayer.[84] He did not foster a dogmatic political orientation. Deeply influenced by a humanist tradition, Korczak's reflective educational approach aimed at establishing networks of self-help and support. In his opinion, political and cultural change could only be implemented by anticipatory practices; this urge for social justice was deeply linked to ideas of a radical democracy. Korczak's idea of pedagogical professionalism referred to a concept of a conscious subject

78 Friederike Kind-Kovács, "The 'Other' Child Transports: World War I and the Temporary Displacement of Needy Children from Central Europe/Les déplacements temporaires d'enfants déshérités en Europe centrale pendant la première guerre mondiale," *Revue d'histoire de l'enfance "irregulière"* 15 (2013): 75–109.

79 Eglantyne Jebb, "Declaration of the Right of the Child – 19," adopted by the League of Nations in 1924, accessed October 14 2017, www.crin.org/en/library/un-regional-documentation/declaration-rights-child-1923.

80 Korczak, *Themen seines Lebens*, 31.

81 Ibid., 28.

82 Ibid., 115.

83 Ibid., 117.

84 Ibid., 145.

that showed courage for political action in a sense, which Karl Marx had underlined in his early *Reflection on the Jewish Question:* "*All* emancipation is a *reduction* of the human world and relationships to *man* himself."[85]

Formative Practices and Concepts of Education

"One deed, and sometimes one word, suffices to change every constellation."[86]

During his time as a medical practitioner, Korczak had seen the constraints of those people who could not afford adequate medical treatment. In his opinion, not heredity or infections, but urban segregation, educational exclusion, and economic poverty caused people's maladjustment and suffering. When Korczak decided to work in the field of education, he had a clear strategy in mind. Based on his observation of children in social settings, he sympathized with the idea of creating an experimental environment. In this "laboratory of education"[87] he wanted to arrange and influence the conditions of development in order to retrieve reliable and valid information, proving his educational approach on an empirical basis. His idea was that pedagogical interventions could effectively ban illness, depression, and disease and at the same time support the development of resilience necessary to resist against the structural reproduction of poverty. For Korczak, education seemed to be the best method to explore the possibilities of acquiring alternative knowledge and life skills. Pedagogical practices were seen as a systemic intervention into the everyday life of communities, thus providing a basis for the more far-reaching democratization of society as a whole.[88]

Korczak referred to *wychowywać*, the Polish word for education derived from the word *chowac* that means protection, welfare, and support. There is a significant difference in meaning in the Anglo-American context that defines "education" as "learning" and the German concept that defines "education" as "development."[89] The word *chowac* underlines the link between dignity and advocacy,

85 Karl Marx, "The Jewish Question," first published 1844 in *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher.* Accessed July 11 2017. https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/jewish-question/.
86 Arendt, *Human Condition*, 190.
87 Liba H. Engel, "Experiments in Democratic Education: Dewey's Lab School and Korczak's Children's Republic," *The Social Studies* 99, no. 3 (2008): 117–121.
88 See also Daniela G. Camhy, ed., *Dialogue – Culture – Philosophy: Philosophizing with Children in Transcultural Environments* (Sankt Augustin: Academia, 2009).
89 Korczak, *Themen seines Lebens*, 223.

referring to the idea of humanity, defined as a community of individuals with their lives interconnected and embedded in networks of support. Autonomy and dependency were not constructed as oppositions or even as mutually exclusive, but as interconnected qualities of life. Similarly, Korzcak analyzed children within the context of systemic settings. Practices of everyday life should keep the young people grounded and provide a framework with rules for a "just community."[90] Korczak believed being raised in this special mindset would empower young people to confront anti-Semitism and also to overcome a precarious social position.[91]

In his first writings on education, published in 1900 in the literary revue *Wedrowiecz*, Korczak had underlined that children needed love, respect, and confidence.[92] He criticized the bourgeois style of education using the German term *Affenliebe* (monkey love),[93] indicating an over-idealization and infantilization of children. Instead, Korczak portrayed the influence of social conditions on the well-being of children with a sensitive awareness for dependency, denigration, and assertiveness. Following a materialist approach, he underwent some self-studies demonstrating that the stomach was more important than the intellect or the heart.[94] In other words, children should not feel hunger and suffer agonies, otherwise they could not become social subjects. With his public lectures, radio contributions, journal articles. and books, Korczak assumed the role of a public counselor and intellectual mentor of pedagogical approaches to society, thus influencing the philosophy of life and the mindset of the Warsaw urban community. Jewish as well as non-Jewish citizens knew Korczak as a gifted man of words right from his youth. His early public acknowledgement as a writer gave Henryk Goldszmit the impulse to use his pseudonym Janusz Korczak as his professional name. During his medical studies, Korczak had stayed in close contact with Polish and Jewish intellectuals at the "Flying University" who believed in the power of the written and spoken word. Subjective writings from the per-

90 Fritz K. Oser, "Towards a Theory of the Just Community Approach: Effects of Collective Moral, Civic and Social Education," in *Handbook of Moral and Character Education*, ed. Larry Nucci, Darcia Narvaez, and Tobias Krettenauer, Second Edition, (New York/London: Routledge, 2014), 201.

91 Dietrich Beyrau, "Anti-Semitism and Jews in Poland, 1918 – 1939," in *Hostages of Modernization: Current Research on Antisemitism*, vol. 2 – 3, ed. Herbert A. Strauss (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993), 1063 – 1090.

92 Korczak, *Themen seines Lebens*, 33 – 34.

93 Ibid., 35.

94 Ibid., 39 – 41.

spective of children had a long tradition in Poland.[95] Korczak created a rich literature, radio speeches, and feuilletons for children and young people that related directly to their living environment.[96] Stories and narratives had several educational benefits: they developed the reading and writing ability of children and young people, enlarged their intellectual horizon, and transported socializing messages in a very unpretentious but effective way.[97]

When Korczak was appointed director of the Dom Sierot in the Krochmalnastreet 92 in October 1912, he transferred his idea of democracy into his educational practice right from the beginning. The rules regulating the social life at the orphanage were based on participative agreements and announced in written form via notice boards or poster sites. This transparency should allow new children to become familiar with the rules of common life in order to feel "at home" at *Dom Sierot* or later at *Nasz Dom*. Mentors supported the newcomers, until they felt secure and accepted.[98] The house regulations demanded respect of privacy. Some playful competitions and gambling were organized in order to further inclusion. Contemporary witnesses also remember public writing activities organized for the children and youth of Dom Sierot. The most important medium was the handwritten weekly journal that served as the central communication tool to spread issues of concern for all; the journal also functioned as an archive/"memory" of the house history.[99] Thirteen years later, in 1926, the journal – now in a

95 Janusz Korczak, *Das Recht des Kindes auf Achtung* (*The Children's Right to Respect*), translated from Polish by Armin Dross (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), 233; Eugenia Prokop-Janiec, "Children's Literature: Polish Literature," *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2011, accessed October 28 2017, http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Childrens_Literature/Polish_Literature. Korczak once stated that Maria Konopnicka and Bolesław Prus had been his instructors of writing literature and theater plays for children.

96 See the articles in Janusz Korczak, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 13, 97–310; George Z. F. Bereday, "Janusz Korczak. In Memory of the Hero of Polish Children's Literature," *The Polish Review* 24, no. 1. (1979), 27–32; Kahn, *Janusz Korczak und die jüdische Erziehung*, 42–44. For a critical discussion on racism see Manfred Liebel, "'Weiße' Kinder – 'schwarze' Kinder. Nachdenkliche Anmerkungen zu Janusz Korczaks Kinder-Roman vom kleinen König Macius," in *Janusz Korczak. Pionier der Kinderrechte. Ein internationales Symposium*, ed. Manfred Liebel ("'White' Children – 'Black' Children. Reflexive comment on Janusz Korczak's novel on the little King Macius," in *Pioneer of Children's Rights. An International Symposium*) (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2013), 105–136.

97 Ute Frevert et al., *Learning How to Feel: Children's Literature and the History of Emotional Socialization, 1870–1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). The anthology presents case studies of emotional education through children's literature, but without referring to Janusz Korczak.

98 Korczak, *Themen seines Lebens*, 132–134.

99 Ibid., 88.

professional version – became an addendum to the weekly journal for the Warsaw Jewish community, *Nasz Przegląd*.[100]

After the first half year of improvised living, the newly established building of Dom Sierot was finished in March 1913. In his inaugural address before the Jewish sponsors of the orphanage, Korzcak promised that the professional educators could offer a more qualified education than traditional families.[101] He worked together with Stefania Wilczynska (1886 – 1942), who had been voluntarily engaged in the assistance of Jewish orphans after her return to Warsaw from natural science studies at the University of Liège. The two pedagogues now were responsible for the well-being of eighty-five children between the ages of six and fifteen. Together with Maria Falska (1877 – 1942), Korczak founded a second home in Pruszków that was relocated to Bielfang ten years later. *Nasz Dom* accommodated around fifty children from workers' families and carried the specific mandate to train pedagogues in the methods of group education.[102]

Seen from the distance during his military service in World War I, Korczak evaluated his pedagogical experiences with the aim to elaborate a programmatic approach to education.[103] The first part of his tetralogy *Jak kochac dziecko* (How to Love a Child) was published at Christmas 1918 with the title *Dziecko w rodzinie* (The Child in the Family); the other three parts were published two years later. In the first book, Korczak proclaimed the central rights of children. The so-called *Magna Carta Libertatis* that outlined the right to death, the right to the present day, and the right to be what you are was a passionate plea for autonomy and the freedom of children. In Polish, there are two meanings of "liberty": *swoboda* means control over body and mind, *wolnosc* means the free will to act. In Korczak's opinion, the responsibility of the educator therefore was twofold: firstly, to guarantee the rights and the freedom of the child in their current situation, and secondly, to create a future society through the means of education. The child should not feel any pressure and did not have to be perfect, but like all human beings had to learn to accept mistakes, errors, faults, and its own imperfection. The German pedagogue Friedhelm Beiner has underlined the specific relevance of esteem and dignity in Korczak's educational concept; in a Kantian sense, these qualities had no equivalent and could not be transferred into other

100 Leon Harari, "Janusz Korczak und die 'Kleine Rundschau'," in *Von der Grammatik, und andere pädagogische Texte* ("Janusz Korczak and the 'Little Review'," in *About Grammar and Other Pedagogical Chapters*), ed. Friedhelm Beiner and Elisabeth Lax-Höfer (Heinsberg/Rhld.: Agentur Dieck, 1991), 184; Korczak, *Themen seines Lebens*, 170.

101 Ibid., 86 – 88.

102 Ibid., 120.

103 Ibid., 109 – 114.

(economic) values.[104] Both characteristics were seen as deeply linked to the inviolability of body and mind. This meant dignity and esteem could not get lost by unworthy or dishonorable behavior nor be taken away from a person.[105]

Besides dialogical recognition, Korczak also encouraged free speech in a public *agora*, which he believed was central for a democratic education.[106] Pedagogical arrangements were seen as learning facilities, where children could show their readiness to assume responsibility and act in cooperation. It took Korczak approximately eight years, from 1912 to 1919/20, to conceptualize and implement three different institutions of a self-governed social justice.[107] The first institution was the fellowship court, established right from the beginning at Dom Sierot. Its first mandate was to elaborate a code of ethics and justice that could be applied to the cases treated before the court. However, most of the cases were simple and accusations could easily be redrawn.[108] The court functioned more or less like an arbitration panel or a mediation board that did not decide about punishment but suggested forms of conflict regulation.[109] In order to guarantee cooperation on an eye-to-eye level, educators could also be accused or forward a self-accusation.[110] The second institution was the council that should supervise the "alphabet of rights"[111] and decide on issues of more fundamental concern for the house community. Obligations and liabilities that functioned like a normative constitution were elaborated and decided upon by a council of five children and one educator. Those children, who wanted to do the job and had been accepted by the

104 Beiner, "Korczak," 12–13, fn. 12. Unlike Kant, who thought that one becomes human through education, Korczak underlined that a child is already human without education.

105 Christine Baumbach and Peter Kunzmann, eds., *Würde – Dignité – Godność – Dignity: Die Menschenwürde im internationalen Vergleich* (=*Ta ethika* 11) (*Human Dignity in International Perspective*) (München: Herbert Utz Verlag, 2010).

106 Hermann Giesecke, "Janusz Korczak: Das Kind als unterdrückter Mensch," in *Die pädagogische Beziehung: Pädagogische Professionalität und die Emanzipation des Kindes* ("Janusz Korczak: The Child as Oppressed Human Being" in *The Educational Relation: Pedagogical Professionalism and Emancipation of the Child*), ed. Hermann Giesecke, Second Edition (Weinheim und München: Juventa Verlag, 1999), 161–169.

107 Korczak, *Themen seines Lebens*, 30–32; Tadeusz Lewowicki, "Janusz Korczak (1878–1942)," *Prospects: The Quarterly Review of Comparative Education*, XXIV, no. 1/2 (1994): 41; Wincenty Okoń, "Janusz Korczak – ein heroischer Pädagoge," in *Lebensbilder polnischer Pädagogen* ("Janusz Korczak – Heroic Pedagogue," in *Curriculum Vitae of Polish Pedagogues*), ed. Oskar Antweiler, transl. Janusz Daum (Köln/Weimar/Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 1998), 175–178.

108 Ibid., 178. Statistics collected over one week showed that from fifty-seven accusations thirty-four were either withdrawn or mediated without a court hearing.

109 Korczak, *Themen seines Lebens*, 136.

110 Ibid., 139.

111 Okoń, "Janusz Korczak," 177.

majority of the house inmates in secret ballots, were elected to the council. The council also had a kind of executive function in dealing with problematic cases whose impact was too far-reaching in order to be decided by the court.[112] The third institution was the children's parliament, the *Sejm*, founded as the highest legislative authority, that confirmed or abrogated laws, passed resolutions, and was responsible for general decisions concerning the house community.[113] The democratic procedures also embraced the possibility of a plebiscite and the assignment of rights, for example to allow individual children to possess memory cards.[114] These memory cards were part of a reward system that signified recognition for good behavior. Many aspects and elements of Korczak's pedagogical work remind us of methods we know today from social-cognitive learning, systemic counseling, or trauma therapy.[115]

The three institutions mentioned before should assure social justice and guarantee a basic climate of respect and tolerance, cooperation, and solidarity. By these institutions, social justice, public transparency, and participative control were anchored in the center of educational practices. To experience democratic principles in a very early period of life seemed to be the best guarantee to develop a democratic personality. For Korczak, the educator was responsible for the education of children, but his main task was to implement arrangements that teach children the basic principles of a just society.[116]

112 Ibid., 180 – 182.

113 Korczak, *Themen seines Lebens*, 133.

114 Okoń, "Janusz Korczak," 181.

115 Christine Rothdeutsch-Granzer, Wilma Weiß, "Reformerische und emanzipatorische Pädagogik: Inspirationen für die traumapädagogische Praxis und Theoriebildung," in *Handbuch Traumapädagogik* ("Reform and Emancipation in Pedagogics: Inspirations from Trauma Therapy for Pedagogical Practice and Theory," in *Handbook of Trauma Pedagogics*), ed. Wilma Weiß, Tanja Kessler, and Silke Birgitta Gahleitner (Weinheim: Beltz Verlag, 2016), 43.

116 Korczak, *Themen seines Lebens*, 140 – 141.

"Men in Dark Times": Jewish Radicalism as Political Action

> "Goodness can only exist when it is not perceived not even by its author …"[117]
>
> "Context is everything."[118]

For Korczak, education was a necessary consequence of his analyses of social inequality, while at the same time seen as a tool of democratic transformation. Although he legitimated his educational competence in a scientific way, his life work has mostly entered historical memory by a narrative of personal courage and integrity. Indeed, his last act of braving the German Nazis and getting deported together with the Jewish children carries an enormous symbolism. For Korczak himself, his refusal to cooperate with the Nazis was the logical consequence of his lifetime commitment. He certainly felt obliged to the children whose education and well-being had been in the center of his interest. As a pedagogue, he had acted like an advocate defending the rights and dignity of children, based on an emancipatory attitude that wanted to overcome the striking social inequality. With a radical consequence, Korczak transferred his ethical orientation into a solid educational practice. As a student of medicine and as a young doctor, he had started to support the political emancipation of the Jewish minority. In 1912, when he decided to become an educator at the age of thirty-three, he transformed his political conviction into pedagogical professionalism.

Korczak was a multitalent. He provided medical care to children, lectured at the university, wrote for radio stations and journals, worked as a hairdresser of children, engaged himself as a social politician, and spoke as an expert in court trials against young offenders. He combined clinical expertise with the knowledge of social science and practical analyses. Korczak felt inspired by theories of democracy, psychological knowledge, and philosophical reflections which deepened his insight into the necessity of constructivism, subjectivity, and inclusion.[119] Korczak did not believe that interests were the most intriguing

117 Arendt, *Human condition*, 74.

118 Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, "Context is Everything: Reflections on Studying with Antony Polonsky," in *Warsaw – The Jewish Metropolis: Essays in Honor of the 75th Birthday of Professor Antony Polonsky*, ed. Glenn Dynner and François Guesnet (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015), 613–616.

119 Kirchner, "Das Lebenswerk von Janusz Korczak," 18.

social motive but focused on the "moral grammar of social conflicts."[120] His educational practice based on dialogical elements of the Haskala[121] as well as on socialist experiences in group-education. By creating democratic realities for those on the margins of society, he turned history against the course of political events, which during this time period were unfolding rapidly, seemingly directed by an "invisible actor behind the scenes."[122]

Being honored with the Lessing-Prize in Hamburg in September 1959, German-Jewish Philosopher Hannah Arendt elaborated the concept of "men in dark times" that can serve as an analytical frame in order to get a closer insight into the cultural and historical meaning of Korczak's work.[123] With "dark times" – a metaphor borrowed from a poem by Bertold Brecht – Arendt did not refer especially to the "monstrosities of this century," but wanted to give a lecture on relatively "normal" political periods.[124] Arendt did not present Janusz Korczak in her collection of honorable men and women whose action left some kind of "illumination" to posterity. However, without doubt, if she had known him and his work in the late 1950s, she would have integrated his biography into this collection. With these biographical portraits, Hannah Arendt reminds us of the human obligation to make the world humane. Without denying psychic complexity, she suggests judging people foremost on the basis of their actions. Her concept of society is based on political dialogue, existentialist encounters, and dialectic thinking. "In acting and speaking, men ... make their appearance in the human world"[125], Arendt underlines, "where people are with other people, in sheer togetherness."[126]

Arendt differentiates between three dimensions of the "vita activa": labor (necessity), work (utility), and action (mostly referring to a language-based social engagement).[127] Action – in difference to labor and work – opens our perception for the political realm: action "always establishes relationships and therefore has

120 Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995/1992); Axel Honneth and Nancy Fraser, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (London and Brooklyn: Verso, 2003).

121 Jan Woleńsk, "Jews in Polish Philosophy," *Shofar: An Interdisziplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 29, no. 3 (2011). Accessed June 29 2017. https://muse.jhu.edu/article/478211.

122 Arendt, *Human Condition*, 199.

123 Hannah Arendt, "On Humanity in Dark Times".

124 Arendt, preface to *Men in Dark Times*, ix.

125 Arendt, *Human Condition*, 179.

126 Ibid., 180.

127 Ibid., 79 – 81; Christian Trottmann "Vita activa/vita contemplative," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (*Historical Encyclopedia of Philosophy*), vol. 11 (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2001), Sp. 1071 – 1075.

an inherent tendency to transcend limitation and cut across boundaries."[128] Action is not output-directed, but boundless and unpredictable[129]; "its full meaning ... reveals itself fully only to the storyteller, that is to the backward glance of the historian."[130] That "action" can pass by rather unperceived and unacknowledged by contemporaries makes it so extraordinary. Unlike human behavior "judged according to 'moral standards' – taking into account motives and intentions on one hand and aims and consequences on the other – action can only be judged by the criterion of greatness".[131] This means that action foremost has to be understood as a political expression with the power to humanize society. Hanna Arendt states that "the popular belief in a 'strong man' who isolated against others owes his strength to his being alone is sheer superstition." She further states: "Action ... is never possible in isolation; to be isolated is to be deprived of the capacity to act."[132]

From this perspective, it is convincing to state that Janusz Korczak acted as part of the Jewish social movements in Eastern Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century. With his democratic aspiration, he gained enormous charisma and strength. He implemented democracy through radical interventions into society's everyday life. In giving voice to the experiences of a minority, authoritarian traditions were put into question. Emancipation as a code of social and cultural change was stimulated. Practical associations, public debates, the written and the spoken word, educational and social projects facilitated experiences of solidarity, thus improving the quality of life for all members of the Jewish community. Improving the cohesion of society was fundamentally important at a time when doubt had replaced religious ideas.[133] Skepticism and an inner restlessness led to the production of new knowledge. The old habits continued, but the "loss of certainty"[134] stimulated a "radical change in moral standards."[135] As Hannah Arendt underlines, "the Cartesian solution of this perplexity was to move the Archimedian point of knowledge into man himself."[136] A growing need in personal resources (not *cogito ergo sum*, but *dubito ergo sum* – not '*I think, therefore I am*', but '*I doubt, therefore I am*') became necessary. This decentering

128 Arendt, *Human Condition*, 190.
129 Ibid., 191.
130 Ibid., 192.
131 Ibid., 205.
132 Ibid., 188.
133 Ibid., 273 – 275.
134 Ibid., 277.
135 Ibid., 278.
136 Ibid., 284.

of perspective allowed new insights, evaluating the subjective experiences of former excluded members of the Jewish society as reference points of a new ethics.[137]

Janusz Korczak's self-reflexivity had a high intellectual quality based on a "commitment" to the world.[138] What Arendt said about Lessing – that "his attitude toward the world was ... radically critically" – can also be said about Korczak. However, it has to be doubted that Korczak, in respect to the public realm of that time, was "completely revolutionary."[139] A more convincing interpretation seems to be that his "partiality" and his "pedantic carefulness"[140] empowered him to such an extent that he really "enjoyed to challenge prejudices."[141] As for Lessing, Korczak also believed that the "essence of poetry was action."[142] Both pleaded against the dogma of the rational argument because it endangered the freedom of thought. The link of "self-thinking to action"[143] had to be improved, and therefore Korczak never intended "to communicate definite conclusions but wanted to stimulate also in others independent thought."[144] The solidarity with those at the margins of society allowed Korczak to get into contact to a world that he always had perceived as estrangement. In the Jewish community he found what Arendt calls the "warmth of human relations", a "kind of humanity" which "is the great privilege of pariah people."[145]

To fully understand "the political relevance of friendship"[146] as the uniting force of the citizens of a polis, it should be acknowledged as a "gift ... with openness to the world, and finally, with genuine love of mankind."[147] Janusz Korczak, whose engagement resulted from an inner devotion towards humanity, enjoyed a high credibility. Similar to other members of the Jewish intelligentsia during that time, he did not live as a "rootless cosmopolitan," but engaged himself as an active citizen. But instead of striving for status positions, he rather avoided them.[148] Korczak was more interested in the kind of power that "arises only where people

137 Ibid., 280 (Descartes spoke of the "certainty of the I am").
138 Arendt, "On Humanity in Dark Times," 3.
139 Ibid., 5.
140 Ibid.
141 Ibid., 6.
142 Ibid.
143 Ibid., 10.
144 Ibid.
145 Ibid., 13.
146 Ibid., 24.
147 Ibid., 26.
148 Brym, *Jewish Intelligentsia and Russian Marxism*, 111–113.

act together, but not where people grow stronger as individuals."[149] As Gérard Kahn, vice-president of the Suisse Korczak Society, has underlined, Korczak's political action was part of a Jewish secular culture directed towards emancipation, justice, and solidarity. The lifetime achievement of the Jewish pediatrist Henryk Goldsmith (Janusz Korczak) survived the Nazi Holocaust, documenting fundamental humanism and social responsibility as central qualities of an educational professionalism that also today might navigate societies into a democratic future.[150]

Conclusion

The social engagement and educational practices presented in this chapter refer to a time period when Janusz Korczak found himself in the most productive phase of his life. His social consciousness had been formed by childhood and adolescent encounters with social inequality. As a student, Korczak had been engaged in the Jewish social movements, taking care of and supervising children from poor families. Between the age of twenty and forty-five, the pediatrician gained practical experience in social justice education, thus anchoring the discourse on inclusion in the midst of Jewish community life in Warsaw. Above all, Korzak wanted to ensure that Jewish minorities could voice their experiences, thus transgressing the limits of social engagement into the political realm. The pedagogue strongly sympathized with secular and socialist ideas of a community organization. His educational institutions aimed at empowering marginalized youth to become future political leaders, making inclusion imaginable in a highly segregated urban society. Although the urge for democratization was so obvious, the Jewish struggle for recognition remained difficult after the foundation of the Polish state. Facing growing anti-Semitism all over Europe in the 1930s, Jewish youth started to organize emigration to Palestine on one hand, while on the other practicing self-defense against the violent discrimination in their European home countries. Many activists had personally profited from Korczak's democratic learning arrangement, in education or in pedagogical training. Their competence to act as democratic subjects made the subsequent resistance against Nazi violence possible, finally leading to the revolt in the Ghetto of Warsaw in April and May 1943.

149 Arendt, "On Humanity in Dark Times," 23.

150 Kahn, *Janusz Korczak und die jüdische Erziehung*, 140.

Seen in this context, it sounds convincing to state that Janusz Korczak acted as part of the Jewish social movements in Eastern Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century. Korczak's democratic aspiration and political participation allowed him a degree of credibility and radicalness that he himself was rarely aware of. Although he was a public person, well-known for his intellectual inspirations, he always acted very decently and took a back seat at public events. Korzak's charismatic personality was elucidated by a high degree of authenticity. He renounced the option to become a member of the bourgeois Warsaw middle class, and preferred instead to follow his inner convictions with radical consistency.

Korczak's pursuit of personal autonomy revealed a definition of Jewish radicalism that can well be understood with the help of Hannah Arendt's ideas on "Men in Dark Times". Arendt reflects her characters within a contextualized historical analysis, thus emphasizing the fact that the personal is always political. Korczak, together with his friends and colleagues, embodied the social consciousness of an unjust society, by implementing democracy through radical interventions into society's everyday life. By giving voice to the experiences of marginalized Jewish youth, personal emancipation was stimulated as well as social and cultural change. Janusz Korczak's pedagogics of respect and esteem could hardly guarantee the survival of the Jewish people under Fascist violence. However, the radical educational practices and the firm belief in a socially just democracy have been passed on to us today and to future generations as a heritage of Eastern European Jewish life prior to the Holocaust.

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