Hope in Janusz Korczak's Pedagogy of Realistic-Messianism

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Abstract

This paper explores the approach of 'Realistic – Messianism' to moral education developed by the humanist-progressive moral educator Janusz Korczak, and the role hope plays in it. This pair of terms seems to be an oxymoron. However, their employment is intentional and the paper will demonstrate their dialectical interdependence: 'Messianism' encapsulates the educative drive to humanize the world and 'Realistic' sets up empirically verifiable, ethical limits to messianic strivings, and serves as an antidote to the dangerous pitfalls into which romantic and mystical forms of Messianism fall.
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Opening
In this paper I will explore an approach to moral education developed by the outstanding humanist moral educator Janusz Korczak and implemented by him in the two orphanages he led from 1912 to 1942. I call this approach 'Realistic – Messianism'. In the course of describing and analyzing its main features I will examine the role hope plays in it.

As Korczak is relatively unknown to the educated English speaking public, I want to share some words on Janusz Korczak's life before entering into the heart of this paper's argument. Henryk Goldszmit, known to the world by his pen name, Janusz Korczak was born in Warsaw to a highly acculturated Polish Jewish family, in 1878/9, and was murdered in the Treblinka death camp, in 1942. Those familiar with his life, writings, educational thought and work consider him as one of the twentieth century's outstanding humanist moral educators and an exceptionally gifted, path-breaking social-pedagogue.¹

In the two orphanages he headed, a Polish one (1919-1936) and a Polish-Jewish one (1912-1942) he developed and implemented a rich array of educational practices, methods and frameworks later known as the Korczakian system. This 'system' enabled emotionally deprived and abused children from broken families with considerable social-interpersonal pathologies to undergo significant processes of self-re-formation during and through their residence in the orphanage over a period of six to eight years.

Lending respect to human beings in general, and to children, in particular, in their respective concrete, physical, and mental particularities including (paraphrasing Dostoyevsky) the--person-coughing--next-to-you-on-a-bus is the hallmark of Korczak’s humanism. The type of respect to human beings in their concreteness and particularity that Korczak accorded to them differs considerably from the self-proclaimed humanism of so many highly educated people who greatly respect their ideal conception of humanity while encountering great difficulty in actually respecting the real people who comprise it. Korczak translated this humanism throughout his adult life into actual educational practice devoted to accompanying, supporting and advancing persons’ – mainly children's - well-being, positive growth and development.

The Messianic Component in Korczak's Realist Messianism

The Messianic component of realistic-messianism as I conceive it, in the apparent oxymoron-like nature of this conceptual pair, connotes a strong educative drive, more precisely a powerful existential drivenness to humanize the world. From his early years as a secondary school student (in the early 1890's) to the very end of his life (August 5, 1942) Korczak sought to make the world a better place for human beings and to make better human beings for the world. His struggle to realize goodness in an evil world was indefatigable².

¹ Kohlberg, 1981; Frost, 1983; Lifton, 1988
² Janusz Korczak: The Struggle for Goodness in an Evil World is the title the accomplished scholar of Korczak's life, writings and educational work, Dr. Shimon Frost, may his memory be a blessing.
This drivenness was inspired by two main sources: One related to Korczak's personal consciousness, his sense of self; the other to the world-view he developed and held.

**Korczak's sense of self**

Evidence garnered from his auto-biographical writings suggests that Korczak was a child of ethical and psychic sensitivity; indeed he was a bearer of "... a dangerous excess of sensitivity." (Neverly in Wolins,1967:12). Korczak's sense of being called upon to serve humanity and the world and to make a significant contribution to improving things, coupled with Welschmerz, feeling the painfulness of existence, and compassion for suffering - "for all that lives, suffers and wanders"(Korczak, 1998: 357) appear consistently throughout his life and are expressed in many of his writings. The following passage quoted from the diary Korczak kept during the last months in the Warsaw Ghetto (May-August, 1942 ), later published as The Ghetto Diary3, suggests that already at a very early age – to be precise at the age of five - Korczak experienced such feelings and held such thoughts:

> In an intimate chat, I confided to grannie my bold scheme to remake the world. It was—no less, no more—to throw away all money. How and where, and what to do next I probably had no idea. Do not judge me too harshly. I was only five then, and the problem was perplexingly difficult: what to do so there wouldn’t be any dirty, ragged and hungry children with whom one was not allowed to play in the backyard...

(http://arvindguptatoys.com/arvindgupta/ghettodiary.pdf:17)

In a semi-autobiographical work which reflects his sense of self as an adolescent we find the following passage (a good number of others in a similar vein appear in this work):

> I was walking on a board-walk over a stream and noticed a small insect drowning in it...I wondered why - for what- is this insect struggling so hard to survive? ...Is its minuscule life so precious to it? And suddenly the thought “to human beings?” crossed my mind. Saving the life of this insect would entail getting down from the board-walk and getting the bottom of my feet wet. Is this worth such efforts? And then all of a sudden I heard a voice: - If now, young man, you are unwilling to make a small sacrifice to save this insect’s life, when you become an adult you will not be willing to make a larger sacrifice to save the life of a human being. How ever-so delighted I became when I observed the insect spreading-out, drying and

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3 Internal self-reflection in the wake of various experiences and autobiographical accounts play a significant role in much of Korczak's writings. Korczak had considered writing a personal diary before the outbreak of World War Two, in August, 1939. However, he actually only managed to begin writing it on May 15, 1942 and continued writing it until his deportation to the Treblinka death camp with the children of the Jewish orphanage he headed and its educational administrative staff on August 5, 1942. Thus the diary covers less than three full months. In this diary Korczak relates to a rich variety of subjects and topics: Distant memories from his childhood and adolescence; his hopes for the future; mysterious matters beyond and above him; responses to major perennial questions on the world, society and human beings; sincere, harsh and painful reports about daily life in the ghetto, and his struggles with its difficulties and with himself, on dreams, visions and fantasies, and more.
straitening its tiny wings in my hand. We won’t meet again - Fly away and be happy!” (Korczak, 1999: 189)

Jumping ahead some 40 years later to two passages from his Ghetto diary mentioned above, and thereby skipping over other passages expressing these feelings from his writings in his young and older adult years, Korczak states:

My life has been difficult but interesting. In my younger days I asked God for precisely that. 'God, give me a hard life but let it be beautiful, rich and aspiring'.

(http://arvindguptatoys.com/arvindgupta/ghettodiary.pdf:64)

I exist not to be loved and admired, but myself to act and love. It is not the duty of those around to help me but I am duty-bound to look after the world, after man. (Ibid: 53)

Korczak’s world-view

Korczak was endowed with superior analytical-conceptual skills, and he adopted a strict empirical-statistical approach based on in-depth observation of phenomena – behavioral modes, physical expressions (body language) and more – to gain knowledge of human beings, especially children and their worlds. At the same time, his precise in-depth observation of phenomena and his exceptional ability to read people and children accurately with an impressive minimum of subjective bias led him to a religious-ethical perspective generated by the radical wonder he experienced in his encounter with the mysterious, impenetrable aspects of life. In strong contrast to many positivists whose scientific-empirical observation of the world lead them to a certain conclusion that God does not exist and that human beings should not believe in anything beyond what they can learn from their reason and senses, it is precisely these observations in their intricate details that inspired Korczak with religious-ethical belief.

An examination of Korczak’s writings and life experiences from his youthful through his mature and older adult years discloses that Korczak’s religiosity was inspired by his encounters with the ‘world and all its inhabitants’ (Psalms, 24-1) and was composed of the following main sensibilities: i. A Supreme Being exists; ii. This Supreme Being is infinite, and experienced in terms of an infinite harmony; iii. Human reason cannot grasp the Supreme Being; iv. However, this Being can be experienced in “everything”; v. God’s presence is especially evident in ethical behavior and prayer. (Korczak, 1999:146-147; 156-157).

Korczak’s experience and understanding of Creation and not of any particular-historical revelation is the centerpiece of his religiosity. His religious faith and the demands it made on him flowed from his understanding of God’s presence in Creation and in human phenomena emerging out of it. In many of the passages in his writings Korczak relates passionately to the power of growth in nature, often using poetical language. These passages, which can be called odes to creation, are essentially personal prayers of gratitude to God for His gifts. As one illustration among many, in the following passage from his Ghetto diary Korczak contrasts his world view to

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4 Simon, E., 1949

Nietzsche's:

I intend to refute a deceitful book by a false prophet. This book has done a great deal of harm.

Also sprach Zarathustra.

And I spoke; I had the honor to speak, with Zarathustra. His wise mysteries, profound, difficult and piercing, have landed you, you poor philosopher, behind the dark walls and the heavy bars of a lunatic asylum, for that is how it was. It says so in black and white:

“Nietzsche died insane, at odds with life!”

In my book I want to prove that he had died painfully at odds with truth. The very same Zarathustra had taught me something different. But perhaps I had better hearing, perhaps I listened with greater care.

In this much we are together: the road of the master and my own road, the disciple’s, were both difficult. There were more defeats than successes, many deviations and thus much time and effort wasted, or seemingly wasted.

For in the hour of reckoning I am not inside a solitary cell of the saddest hospital in the world but surrounded by butterflies and grasshoppers, and glowworms, and I hear a soloist high up in the sky—the skylark.

Merciful Lord!

Thank you, Merciful Lord, for the meadow and the bright sunsets, for the refreshing evening breeze after a hot day of toil and struggle.

Thank you, Merciful Lord, for having arranged so wisely to provide flowers with fragrance, glowworms with the glow, and make the stars in the sky sparkle.

How joyous old age is. How delectable the silence.

How sweet the repose.

“Man is so immeasurably blessed with Thy gifts, whom Thou hast created and saved” (http://arvindguptatoys.com/arvindgupta/ghettodiary.pdf:15-16)

Borrowing the terminology of the sociologist of religion, Peter Berger, we may state that Korczak experienced “signals of transcendence” by which "the tragedy of man is bracketed…and ultimate redemption is intimated" (Berger,1969: 69-72) - in all that grows and lives in Nature, and in these human phenomena:

- Human longings, aspirations and hopes for a better life and world; and the frequency people turn to pray to God to assist them to realize these hopes.
- Human strivings to realize goodness in the world;
- The respect, love and support human beings can and often do lend to human others (as well as to animate and inanimate ones).

Korczak understood Creation in terms of two recurring and interdependent processes of life: growth and decay, development and death. Korczak's view of all natural life in terms of an endless cycle of birth and death led him to believe that in a spiritual sense, death is an aspect of life, a necessary stage in the generation of new life. Several passages in his writings, such as the one below from an entry in his Ghetto Diary suggest that he believed in the immortality of the soul:

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Korczak, 1999: 80-81; 2003:206-7
The spirit feels a longing inside the narrow cage of the body. Man feels and ponders death as though it were the end, when in fact death is merely the continuation of life, it is another life. You may not believe in the existence of the soul, yet you must acknowledge that your body will live on as green grass, as a cloud. For you are, after all, water and dust. "The world is the metamorphosis of evil, everlasting" Tetmajer has said. This unbeliever, pessimist, nihilist, he too speaks of eternity. The amoeba is immortal, and man is a colony of sixty trillion amoebas. (http://arvindguptatoys.com/arvindgupta/ghettodiary.pdf:24)

Radical amazement at the interrelatedness of these two processes underlies Korczak’s three major responses to them:

- **Hopefulness** – it fortified his belief in the human capacity to grow, flourish, love and do good and gave him great strength to inspire this capacity in people in general and in the children he educated in particular.
- **Consolation** - it assisted him in dealing with the inherent, natural limitations that impede human growth, providing him with consolation in response to these limitations.
- **Equanimity** - it led him to adopt an attitude of stoical equanimity in the face of the given ineradicable destructive forces in the world – in nature and humanity.

**The Realistic Component in Korczak’s Realist Messianism**

While Korczak's resolute determination to try to humanize the world is encapsulated in the noun messianism, realistic, this worldly, empirically verifiable criterion encapsulate the way he defined the substance, the aim and the means of approaching the realization of this messianic drive. His realistic messianic perspective posited a direct positive correlation between expanding people’s response-ability, increasing their ability to accompany others, and sanctity. Formulated in more theological-metaphorical terms, in his eyes, life-constructing inter-personal relationships, enhancing the conditions of human life, inspiring cooperation between people, and reducing animosity, harm and alienation between them advance the footsteps of the Messiah.

Korczak’s realistic-messianic pedagogy rests upon the arduous, complex, and perpetual effort to arrive at the most realistic possible evaluation of human potential and limitations: To uncover the secret of achieving a sensible balance between them, while ever-maintaining the tension between ideal aspirations and practical feasibility.

The prayer for tranquility lends shape and gives form to this pedagogy:

“**My God, give me… the tranquility to accept the things that I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can change, and the intelligence to distinguish between the two**” (Niebuhr, 1926)

As deeply moved, consoled and inspired by the powers of creativity, construction and growth he experienced in nature, Korczak was at the same time ‘aware-too-aware’ of the endless evil, destructiveness, injustices, sorrow, suffering and pain in human life. Korczak took serious issue with Rousseau's understanding of human nature. He

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7 The name of a [Polish poet, novelist, playwright, and representative of “Young Poland” (1865-1940).
8 Heschel, 1955
9 "Publishers sometimes print the golden thoughts of great men. It would be far more useful to put together a collection of frauds published by the classics of truth and knowledge. Rousseau begins Emile with a sentence, which all the contemporary science of heredity contradicts." (Wolins, 1967:201)
attributed great importance to heredity, and, from his experience as a practical educator working closely with children over many years, he knew how much work had to be invested—sometimes with no positive result—to cope with the weighty burden of pathological heredity. In Korczak's view every child at its birth enters the world with a package of drives: negative ones, such as hatefulness, hostility, jealousy, aggressiveness, violence…and positive ones, such as love, cooperation, mutuality, generosity. In his best known pedagogical work *How to Love a Child*, he warns educators to refrain from adopting a sentimental view of children as pure and innocent beings:

A teacher starting out with the sweet illusion that he is entering a little world of pure, affectionate and open-hearted souls whose good will and confidence are easy to win will soon be disappointed. …There are just as many evil ones among children as among adults … All adult passions are latent in [children]…I may be able to create a tradition of truthfulness, tidiness, hard work, honesty and frankness but I shall not be able to make any of the children other than what they are. (Wolins, 1967: 246-247)

In Korczak's view human evil, in addition to emerging out of these innate negative impulses some of which cannot be controlled completely or channeled in positive directions, arises and develops out of negative personal and social encounters. Korczak thought that parents and teachers could either reinforce and deepen a person's negative impulses or promote positive impulses and channel the evil ones in positive directions, thus fostering positive growth. Korczak's bouts of despair and isolation were caused by the many instances in which he witnessed adult society exacerbating evil instead of promoting goodness.

Consequently, according to Korczak, evil is inherent in human nature and cannot be entirely removed from the world. Although the presence of evil limits people's responsibility for their actions and reduces the presence of goodness in humanity and the world, they are not exempt from the duty of trying to achieve goodness, or from seeking to improve the world. Improving the world is a demanding task, involving hard and persistent intellectual and emotional work. The possibility of human goodness is not a gift but a matter of giving and investing great effort.

In light of Korczak's understanding of human reality, Korczak's messianic drive of humanizing the world was based on the more realistic aim of world-improvement rather on that of world-redemption. The significant difference that is made when world-redemption is replaced with world improvement can be understood in terms of Korczak's strong sense that the ideal of "redeeming the world" carries with it a number of psychological-ethical-educational pitfalls. The primary one among the latter is intellectual and ethical arrogance that almost always leads to the creation of unbridgeable gaps between declarative expectation and realistic achievement. The primary educational danger derived from these exaggerated and unrealistic intellectual and ethical demands and expectations is that they represent ones that human beings cannot fulfill, and justifiably so.10 There undoubtedly is educative

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10 Korczak's political orientation was social-democratic and humanistic. He identified with the Polish social democratic party, which advocated human fraternity and workers' rights, but he never joined a political party or engaged in politics. He avoided lofty rhetoric and grandiose plans to reform the world, because he believed in improving things on the micro level, with diligent work, and that improvement of the world would come with the reform of education. Pedagogy is about humanity, not just children. In his own strong words: "One of the worst blunders is to think that pedagogy is the science of the child; no! It is the science of man." (Wolins, 1967:204) Education was not meant to reform adults directly, because their defaults were too solid and deep; but
power in striving to reach beyond one’s grasp, as intimated in these words of the poet Robert Browning:

“Ah, but a man’s grasp should exceed his reach / Or what’s the heavens for?”

(Browning, 1970: 673)

However, here too one should draw limits. Achieving a wise balance between the ideal and the real is a delicate secret, and “the greater the expectation – the greater the disappointment”. As is well known, frustration, anger, despair, even aggression, violence and destructiveness are the very possible emotional companions of grave disappointment when expectations are raised too high.

‘Improvement’ includes an awareness that rejects the possibility that human beings can indeed “repair the world into the kingdom of the Almighty.” More precisely, it rejects the exhortatory rhetoric and the concomitant policies and actions pursued in its name, employed by those who believe that the world can be repaired with finality - especially if they have discovered, and they usually believe they have, the single or unifying principle by which the world can and should be redeemed – cf. totalitarianism. In this context the warning of Sir Isaiah Berlin, the renowned Anglo-Jewish philosopher, is particularly telling:

One belief, more than any other, is responsible for the slaughter of individuals on the altars of the great historical ideals…. This is the belief that somewhere, in the past or in the future, in divine revelation or in the mind of an individual thinker, in the pronouncements of history or science, or in the simple heart of an individual thinker, there is a final solution. This ancient faith rests on the conviction that all the positive values in which men have believed must, in the end be compatible and perhaps entail one another (Berlin, 1969:127).

In light of these perspectives, as will be discussed immediately below, Korczak attributed decisive importance to the human will, along with human beings' two other central powers: intellect and emotion. His entire educational project was based on the persistent effort to encourage his pupils to subject the good and evil impulses that control them to their will, so as to strengthen the goodness and creativity within them while moderating the negative impulses. However, he knew that some things resist the will: certain genetic and social factors that cannot be channeled or completely neutralized. As he states in *How to Love a Child*.

In the eyes of educational thinkers, researchers, educators and teachers Korczak's Tetralogy *How to Love a Child* is considered his pedagogical masterpiece. Its first part is called "The Child in the Family"; its second part "The Boarding School"; its third, "Summer Camps"; and its fourth, "The Children's Home. Educators and teachers in the diverse fields of education are likely to enjoy and gain insights from this work. However, each of its four parts seems to address specific types of educators: The first part, which focuses on early childhood development, is of special interest to parents of young children and to educators and teachers in this field; the second and third part, that address children's development from their youth and up through their adolescence, as well as the fourth part, which reviews and describes most of the educational frameworks Korczak created and implemented in the two orphanages he led, are directly related to formal and informal educators who work with children from the age of primary school to the last years of secondary school.
"I may be able to create a tradition of truthfulness, tidiness, hard work, honesty and frankness but I shall not be able to make any of the children other than what they are. A birch will stay a birch, an oak an oak, and a thistle a thistle. I may be able to rouse what is dormant in the soul but I cannot create anything. It will be stupid of me to be annoyed with myself or the child."

(Wolins, 1967: 247)

‘Compassionate amelioration’: The Translation of Korczak's realistic-messianic pedagogy into educational practice

Korczak’s educational practice and writings lend testimony to his strong conviction that true education worthy of this name is moral education. Accordingly, in his eyes, the quintessential aim of education is educating children’s character in the fullness of their personalities in the present while encouraging and strengthening their will towards goodness. In light of their positive growth powers on one hand, and the genetic and social forces inhibiting, limiting and in some cases eliminating these powers, the main educational question his realistic-messianic pedagogy was called upon to address was: Through what processes can children's will towards goodness be strengthened and advanced and their will to badness be reduced and re-channeled to more constructive life-building directions?

Aware of the profound difficulties to confront effectively the very problematic gap between the life-improving possibilities emerging out of constructive work on the human will, and the serious limitations negative genetic and social forces exercise over it, Korczak developed an educational approach that can be called “Compassionate amelioration”. This approach can be viewed as the translation of Korczak's realist-messianic pedagogy into educational practice.

Education is here conceived as an existential calling to undertake wholehearted responsibility towards the present given personalities of the children and to the possible facilitation of their ethical development and advancement. Response-ability, the ability to respond in compassionate amelioration – care and critical-ethical concern – to the real worlds, aspirations, dilemmas and struggles of their charges in the here and now of their existential presence is the hallmark of good educators. In his article on Theory and Practice (Wolins, 1967: 392-395) Korczak asks: Who are the true educators? And he answers: Those who while clearly recognizing their charges’ faults and failings continue to confirm, trust, support and encourage them to improve themselves.

Korczak constructed and implemented an interrelated net-work of educational practices, methods and frameworks that at once were grounded in and fostered a social climate of “compassionate amelioration”. The most outstanding among these were: the children’s parliament and court; this court’s constitution; the apprenticeship system; gradated citizenship status; ethical-improvement wagers and growth-charts; work assignments, units and points. Each of these independently and through their interrelationship encouraged educational processes that sought to realize a persuasive integration between a relational ethic of caring (a compassionate accompanying of human others) and a cognitive-reflective-critical ethic of justice (fairness) - committed to seeking just social relationships between people. A profound and uncompromising...
respect for persons is the thread that ties these two distinct types of ethics and moral
education together.

How do these educational processes leading to ‘just caring’ – caring and caring
for justice – work itself out through the frameworks mentioned above? They work
themselves out in three crucial interrelated practices. I’ll demonstrate the nature of
these three practices through an exploration of them in the context of the children’s
court and its constitution.13

i. Educational understanding and genuine respect for the child's present
personhood

Korczak’s uncompromising insistence that education of children must be with
them - through genuine dialogue with them - and his translation of this principle into
affording them self-governing institutions with ‘real teeth’ are expressed in his
establishment of a children’s parliament and court, and in his composition of a
constitution for this court’s proceedings. The pre-amble to the constitution that he
penned contains the phrase “if a person does something bad, the best thing is to
forgive her/him”. This phrase repeats itself twice as if Korczak sees it as a given
postulate of any work with people, especially with children, worthy of the name
education.

A deep respect and a deep caring for children combine together in offering them
forbearance regarding their bad deeds through adopting a compassionate-
understanding of the many circumstances and causes that diminish their capacity to do
good things or increase their capacity to do bad ones. As pointed-out above, in
Korczak’s eyes good educators are those individuals who despite their close
familiarity with their charge's faults and failings continue to believe in them, to trust
and encourage them to undertake paths of further self-improvement.

Furthermore the forbearance inspired by this compassionate understanding is not
conceived as a special favor or unwarranted gift but as an imperative commanding
ethical respect for the child's given-presence. Indicting children for their present
respective personhoods not only demonstrates a lack of respect towards them. It
strongly militates against, indeed often eliminates any possibility of the children re-
considering the problematic aspects of their respective personhoods. Angry accusation
and blaming locks-up children’s possible entrance into the gates of self-
transformation, pedagogical forgiveness unlocks and opens them widely.

ii. Offering self-reformation practice-fields

The compassionate understanding and forgivingness offered to the orphanage's
children is not meant in any way to lend them a do-wrong-freely pass. This
forbearance of bad deeds is accompanied by and predicated upon the hopeful notion
that in the future, hopefully the next time around, these children will not commit these
unethical deeds again. Or, phrasing this point in terms of the traditional Jewish norm
of repentance articulated in the spirit of Maimonides (1135, Cordova; 1204, Cairo):
When opportunities for these children to repeat their unethical deeds present
themselves again, they will mend their ways and refrain from committing them. (The
Laws of Repentance, Ch. 2-1). They will undergo self-reformation.

13 These three practices are employed in all of the educational frameworks, programs and methods
Korczak and his staff developed in the orphanages he led. Several of these are mentioned above.
Depending on the way they are counted the number of them ranges from eighteen to twenty two. Due
to limits regarding the length of this paper I can only explore the children's court and its constitution –
the two most important frameworks in Korczak’s eyes - in the light of these three practices.
Korczak’s system of education abounds with ‘offerings’ of second, third, fourth and more self and social re-formation behavior opportunities. Were space available we could explore a good number of these among the practices mentioned above, such as children entering into a wager with Korczak regarding a negative behavior they wanted to overcome (ethical-improvement wagers); the preponderance of non-indicting over indicting by-laws in the children court’s constitution; the possibility of re-applying to the orphanage three months after expulsion from it on grounds of considerably improved behavior of the expelled child; raising one’s citizen’s status on grounds of having become a more socially cooperative person (upgrading citizen status); raising the breadth of one’s working responsibilities as well as becoming efficient in the specific type of work to which the child is assigned (work units and points); and more…

The ubiquity and abundance of self-reformation opportunities clearly demonstrate that Korczak’s hope that his charges would undertake responsibility under their own volition to mend their unethical ways was not pious, rhetorical, idle or empty. On the contrary, it was based on his and his leading educational workers conscious, creative, often joyful and humorous, wise, pro-active design and devising of a relatively inexhaustible – perhaps, as well, at times exhausting – individual and interpersonal re-formation opportunities.

iii. Not just caring but Just-caring

Pedagogical forgivingness is not only predicated on encouraging the orphanage’s children (as well as its educational leaders and staff of councilors) to pursue paths of personal and social re-formation. There are also borders which such compassionate accompaniment should not be allowed to traverse. Such forbearance cannot, encourage, or advance the development of an unjust social-climate in which the strong, aggressive, violent, mischievous, manipulative, lazy, irresponsible children become stronger and stronger while the weaker, quiet, shy, reserved, cooperative, industrious, responsible ones become weaker and weaker. The last sentence of the passage from the pre-amble to the constitution that Korczak composed states clearly that the pursuit of justice and truthfulness is the very core of the children court’s *raison d’etre*:

“The children’s court is not justice, but its mission is to aspire towards justice; the court is not truth but its members seek truth.” (Wolins, 1967: 313).

Retributive justice provides the grounds on which the array of diverse self-reformation practice-fields is built. A relational paradigm of justice underlies and shapes the very substance of the children’ law court’s constitution and its procedures. Constructing these fields on these grounds assisted the children, educators and administrative staff of the orphanage to learn and internalize rational ethical principles of give and take, effort and outcome and in-put and out-put. On the other hand relational justice not only encouraged but actually ‘compelled’ children, educators and councilors to develop emotional-intellectual capacities necessary to make informed, intelligent and responsible ethical judgments and decisions.

More specifically the many social frameworks that engaged them and in which they engaged, and the interest in and commitment to justice, fair-mindedness, rationality and truthfulness underlying them, ‘called-out’ to them to work on gaining self-knowledge, and to develop and actually exercise moral reasoning based at once on rational thinking, critical reflection and judgment, beneficence, empathy and compassion directed towards themselves and to others.
Conclusion

As stated in the opening of this paper, Korczak’s originality as an educator is embodied in the educational system he developed and implemented, discussed above, which enabled children suffering from considerable social-interpersonal pathologies, to undergo significant processes of self-reformation over the six to eight year period they resided in the two orphanages he headed. This paper has attempted to shed light on this system of education, on the educational ethos of ameliorative compassion underlying it, and on the world-view of Realistic Messianism which provides philosophical grounds for this system and ethos.

In 1933, Korczak conducted a follow-up study of all the children who had spent a number of years in the orphanage for Polish-Jewish children in Warsaw, which he founded in 1912. He found that only a very few had turned to crime or prostitution as adults. The overwhelming majority of his graduates was living normative lives, had found decent employment, and had established families of their own.

The effectiveness of this system under his supervision and leadership earned him world-wide recognition as an exceptionally gifted pedagogue and moral educator of the highest order. In many European educational circles he was called the twentieth century’s Polish Pestalozzi – after the famous Swiss social-pedagogue and educational reformer Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827) whom Korczak himself greatly admired. In some very significant ways, once one accesses his educational theory and practices, it would be fair to say that Korczak is the twentieth century Polish version of John Dewey (1859-1952).

Korczak’s tireless efforts and steadfastness throughout his life to increase good and diminish evil in the world is an inspiring example that offers hope for possible victories – even if only partial – of hope over despair, good over evil, beauty over ugliness, of the gentle, the decent, and the just over the harsh, the rigid, the brutal, and the malicious. To a very impressive, indeed awe-inspiring extent Korczak’s humanist moral pedagogy achieved this goal through his development and implementation of educational frameworks and processes that encouraged the growth of free, reflective and critical human persons who sincerely care about the world and work to improve it.

Freely employing several phrases borrowed from John Milton’s poem ”Paradise lost” it seems appropriate to close this article by suggesting that those who become familiar with Korczak’s life and legacy will likely 'gain reinforcement from Hope', or at least, 'resolution from despair'.

Tam Ve'Lo'Nishlam

14

14 ”Tam Ve'lo Nishlam” - A Hebrew phrase appearing at the end of many traditional Jewish Rabbinic works. Translated freely into English it means ”Concluded Yet-Ever-To- Be-Completed".
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