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DEVELOPMENT AS LABOUR AND LABOUR AS DEVELOPMENT: KORCZAK'S PHILOSOPHY OF LABOUR AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF INTERWAR CHILDHOODS

Abstract: In this article, I consider two Korczakian conceptions complementary to each other of children's labour as a means of building their agency and autonomy. The first is the concept of labour as development. While the second is development as labour. I analyse testimonies from Korczak's institutions, including notes gleaned from children's accounts *Wspomnienia z maleńkości dzieci Naszego Domu w Pruszkowie* [Recollections from the Children of Our Home in Pruszków], children's texts (*Mały Przegląd* [Little Review]) and programme and literary texts by Janusz Korczak/Henryk Goldszmit and Maria (Maryna) Falska, who collaborated with him. In the anthropological perspective of new childhood studies I ponder the radicalism of Korczak's projects involving child labour in light of the time, their perspective on child labour, and childhood itself. In what sense did they have modern origins? And in what sense did they transcend modernity – along with its concepts of childhood and child development?

Keywords: Janusz Korczak/Henryk Goldszmit, children's labour, child development, children's labour agency, new childhood studies, anthropological perspective

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INTRODUCTION

In 1924, *Recollections from the Children of Our Home in Pruszków* was published. Our Home was an institution run from 1919 by Maria (Maryna) Falska in collaboration with Janusz Korczak/Henryk Goldszmit. The booklet, with an introduction by Korczak, contains voluntary accounts of children of their lives before coming to the care facility, as elicited by Falska. Falska noted that the children talked a lot about their past, "in the bedrooms,

classrooms, bathrooms, corridors" (*Wspomnienia...*, 2007: 126). They responded to the proposition of writing down their own memories by "coming forward". The pedagogue would repeat this method. "You said you wanted to dictate your recollections, do you want to do it now? – They either wanted to or they did not. There was no encouragement on my part". She made sure to preserve the individual language and storytelling characteristics of the children (*Wspomnienia...*, 2007: 126), whom she tried not to interrupt with questions or comments. Since she wrote her own interjections in square brackets, it is evident that there were hardly any interrupting questions. Children, understood as "people who had been overlooked until then", Korczak's introduction proclaimed, were to "speak with their own voice" in "a document of historical significance" (*Wspomnienia...*, 2007: 96).

All the stories in the memoirs were harrowing. They told of illnesses, the death of close family, hunger, extreme poverty and helplessness, and above all about the hard, physical work of children and their families. "When my dad took us to Smolna street," recounted eleven-year-old Janek,

we waited there for an hour, there were people standing there with children standing in line behind them, and there was an announcement saying: 'Register children to stay on a farm'. But it did not say 'to feed the cows' because no one would go as everyone would think: 'If I die of hunger, you will die with me, all of us together,' and no one would go to the farm (*Wspomnienia...*, 2007: 121).

Janek ended up "with a farmer", and before that in a place, they were beaten by adults or bullied by older children, who had become "feral in the shelter" (*Wspomnienia...*, 2007: 122).

In this article, I consider two Korczakian conceptions complementary to each other of children's labour as a means of building their agency and autonomy. The first is the concept of labour as development. While the second is development as labour. I analyse testimonies from Korczak's institutions, including notes gleaned from children's accounts (*Wspomnienia...*, 2007), children's texts (*Mały Przegląd*, 1926–1939) and programme and literary texts by Janusz Korczak/Henryk Goldszmit and Maria (Maryna) Falska, who collaborated with him. I ponder the radicalism of Korczak's projects involving child labour in light of the time, their perspective on child labour, and childhood itself. In what sense did they have modern origins? And in what sense did they transcend modernity – along with its concepts of childhood and child development? To understand Korczak's philosophy of labour and working, I show its social and

cultural background: interwar Polish, Christian and Jewish childhoods in underprivileged social classes, their beliefs and values and social stereotypes about them.

“WE”: CHILDREN, THEIR FAMILIES, AND SOLIDARITY

In *Recollections from the Children of Our Home in Pruszków* one boy, Wacek accounted how he was

ordered to do everything on the farm; they constantly told him to do everything, to prepare food for the cows, the pigs, the hens, and the rabbits. The pots were so big that when I couldn't manage, I rested it on my belly. Once, I was putting out a pot of food for a calf and I rested the pot on my belly. It slipped because it was terribly hot, and it fell onto the ground, and everything spilled out. The farmer's wife started screaming and I had to prepare it all again. She shouted at me and I burst into tears because of it all. I wanted to eat, because first they cooked for the animals and then for us. I wanted to eat, so I took a potato, which was for the cows, peeled it and ate it. Only when I had fed all the animals did they tell me to go to the cellar to get the potatoes and peel them ('Wspomnienia...', 2007: 99).

After some time, Wacek fell seriously ill. One day he had such a high fever that he could not get up for work: the farmer told him to put on a coat and cool off outside. The boy lay down in the hallway on the stones because they were cool. He was sent out to the cows, but he fell asleep in the field, so the farmer, on his return, "grabbed a strap and gave me spanking" ('Wspomnienia...', 2007: 100). Falska meticulously recorded the boy's manner of narration: "he speaks with emotion, unevenly, his voice stutters, as if there are tears in his voice, he relives what he says [...] No one can be present. When he tells his story you get the impression that he is, as it was, looking for help from someone" ('Wspomnienia...', 2007: 127). Most intriguingly, despite working, it appears from the children's stories that they did not view themselves as workers. It is the adults – parents, extended family – who "go to work" or do "a job". Children's work is invisible to those around them, and therefore to the children themselves.

The disregarded or overlooked forced labour of children, which not only hindered their development but also posed a real threat to their health, is a phenomenon that both Falska and Korczak were very concerned about. Their observations also demonstrate a strong anthropological sensitivity to its social context. Falska saw that children from underprivileged backgrounds exhibited an extremely strong solidarity with

members of their own community. They were keen to use the word “we” when discussing paid or unpaid work for the family, carrying out adult responsibilities in a way that, in her opinion, merited social concern, respect, and in-depth reflection. Korczak and Falska emphasised that labour in the communities he described was often seen as a condition that granted agency and dignity because it was through labour, rather than age, that a child felt valued as an “adult”. Adulthood meant not only having to work for a living, but contributing to tasks and responsibilities, the sharing of which was seen as a particularly valuable contribution to shared life. This participatory attitude towards work perceived as an important contribution to a modest family household is a subject of evident fascination for both pedagogues.

In their notes and texts, Falska and Korczak also list numerous examples of children being frugal, including their understanding of prices, their awareness of the situation on the job market, and their appreciation of the value of home possessions. They see numerous examples of loyalty and generosity, as in the case of the boy in *Recollections* quoted above, who, despite his despair at the death of his own mother, stands in for his grandmother selling sweets in the street so that “she can keep her feet warm” (*Wspomnienia...*, 2007: 109). In the introduction to his report to the Help for Orphans Society for the year 1933–1934, Korczak noted that children already living in the orphanage expressed solidarity in regard to family issues.

The following image can be found under the perverse title *A Beautiful film*:

Saturday morning. A hundred children are on the orphanage’s playground – small, medium, young: girls and boys – so many and so different, and together they play in many groups, gently giving way, kindly supporting each other, exchanging a friendly word, a favour, a warning, a smile (in a classroom, the Peer Court adjudicates the minor quarrels of the past week). A joyful vision of a life not too far away. A moment of serene confidence in the future. Unfortunately (confirmed by experience). When one is called out from the group at play and asked: How are things at home? How is your health? How are your sister and brother? How is work, earnings, home? The child quietyens, lowers his head, his face turns serious, his mouth in a painful spasm, his eyebrows come together in a cloud and tears well up in his eyes. You cannot ask either them or yourself because you will evoke a burden of sorrow. Sitting alongside this festive merriment is grim, everyday pain (Korczak, 2008: 174–175).

Solidarity towards and ties with the family, described by Korczak with the words “grim, everyday pain”, was the daily experience of children. Especially in the 1930s, when, in addition to the global economic crisis, a boycott of Jewish shops and goods was being keenly felt. Concern for the

family was expressed in simple, purely financial terms related to employment, housing, and income. Thus, in terms that are nowadays not a concern of children, who are excluded not only from earning an income, but also from thought that something like that would strictly concern them.

In one of her later letters to Jan Pięciński, an educator working at Our Home who would die in Auschwitz during the Second World War, Falska questioned the validity of a boarding school upbringing built on the Korczakian model. In view of the relative prosperity of the institution, which was later in a better material situation than the Orphanage, and which moved in 1924 to a modern building in Warsaw's Bielany district and was supported by Aleksandra Piłsudska, the educationalist saw a danger in accustoming children to having "everything done for them" and in awakening ambitions according to which "being an artisan" and working physically is something "degrading" (Kowalska et al., 1989: 17). In the letter, Falska refers to her time in Pruszków and to *Recollections of Childhood* as being formative for her. "When the children wrote," she states, "they dictated their memories to me, it was a constant feature that when talking about the activities of older people they used the word 'we'". Seven-year-old Staś Pyszkowski, recounting his mother's death (he was 5 years old at the time) reported:

we bought a coffin (it was a problem because **we** didn't have the money for a coffin), **we** asked a neighbour for a cart; **we** [original emphasis]. The child in a proletarian environment felt co-responsible for what the adults did, he cooperated, coexisted in those conditions as they "really were", he shared concerns, enjoyed success and was resigned to deprivations because he understood everything. What a child's toy, what a sham - any school or boarding school "children's council" is compared to the living speech from the real-life circumstances - inherent to the child (Kowalska et al., 1989: 17).

These remarks - relatively rarely analysed in works on Korczakian pedagogy - are interesting in that the category of labour as both a subject of social criticism and a value and creative activity that goes beyond producing goods and generating profits, plays a key role in Korczakian pedagogy, as well as in many modern social pedagogies associated with the New Education. This took place at a time when in Poland child labour, which according to the categories of the time included persons essentially up to the age of 14, was not legally regulated and, moreover, was the subject of tensions between constitutionally sanctioned compulsory schooling and the frequent, also in textbook contexts, positive image of hard-working children. These observations therefore provoke fascinating research ques-

tions. First: how did Korczakian institutions process children's class-based and family-based experiences of work? Second: what philosophy of work did Korczak himself propose for children and how did he understand this work? To answer them, however, it is first necessary to understand who children were in Korczak's time. Or rather, who at that time had not so much the status of a child, but the privilege of having a childhood?

MODERN PAEDOCENTRISM AND DEFINITIONS OF CHILDHOOD

According to Tarzycjusz Buliński, an anthropologist who reconstructs child-rearing issues, "in modern culture, as in no other, attention has been focused on the proper upbringing of children and all efforts have been subordinated to this" (Buliński, 2002: 147). Therefore, according to Buliński, this culture can be defined, among other things, by the phenomenon of paedocentrism, understood as "the concentration of social attention on children" (Buliński, 2002: 147). It was thanks in part to the formation of a paedocentric outlook that child labour began to be a phenomenon that was noticed, commented on and problematised. And it was through this that the children's rights movement arose in the 20th century to eliminate forced child labour and replace it with compulsory schooling.

The thesis of paedocentric modernity, i.e. the social appreciation of childhood that took place between the 19th and 20th centuries, is, of course, risky for a number of reasons. First, it is concerned with discourses rather than practices, and therefore describes the realm of beliefs and proposals rather than actual social practices. Second, "paedocentric" discourses then vary widely depending on the cultural, national, political and social context. As the sociologist of childhood Chris Jenks reminds us, they do not form a coherent set of norms specific to European modernity, although their impact on social life is gradually expanding (Jenks, 2008: 112).

Equally diverse are the categories of child and childhood that were operating at the time. It is not enough to say – following Philippe Ariès's celebrated and much-criticised book – that the notion of childhood is a historical construct, developing in Europe more or less from the seventeenth century onwards alongside phenomena such as increasing urbanisation, the development of nation-states, Protestantism and its emphasis on proper child-rearing (Luke, 1998), and finally industrialisation, the growing role of the bourgeoisie and the capitalist economy (Jenks, 2008: 112).

The concept of the child changes not only with the era, but also with the local context of its use, both in social and cultural terms. What Philippe Ariès described as the birth of childhood was not universal. Rather, it was a time of youth primarily associated with the rising French bourgeoisie, whose discourse became so dominant that it imposed on others a belief not only in its own importance, but also in its universalism (Gittins, 2008: 55). As Diane Gittins put it:

the term 'childhood' suggests that all childhoods are equal, universal and in some way fundamentally identical: it conceals more than it reveals and denies the fact that the meanings and assumptions inherent in the term (innocence, dependence) were constructed by a certain social group at a certain point in time and then used to create definitions defining what all families and all types of childhood should be (Gittins, 2008: 55-56).

In Korczak's interwar institutions – the Orphanage for Jewish Polish children and Our Home for Christian Polish children from working-class communities – the pupils remained in institutional care until the age of 14 or 15. Clearly, both Korczak, Falska and Stefania Wilczyńska, who worked at the Orphanage, tried to help their fosterlings once they left. In Korczak's report to the Help for Orphans' Society, already referred to, a list appeared in the introduction:

Three concerns:

1. How do we ensure that children have a job, an income two years from now, a year from now, or in the case of older children in a few months' time?
2. How and by what means can families and siblings be helped?
3. How can a care home that has been laboriously planned and finished, and only on the face of it operational, be protected from ruin?

The report justifies our concern and fears (Korczak, 2008: 175).

Both Korczak and Wilczyńska were aware of the challenges they faced and which were increasingly acute due to the rampant unemployment of the 1930s and, in the case of the Orphanage, the darkening political atmosphere in Poland and Europe. Despite this, children at that time were considered, irrespective of their own backgrounds hindering or preventing them from entering adulthood, to be generally capable of undertaking work. And they were therefore considered to be independent.

The diverse paths of contemporary childhood are well exemplified by the issue of child labour as a social problem. There is a strong correlation between the rise of industrial civilization and the widespread employment of children in non-domestic, "hands-on" labour (Humphries, 2010: 2-11).

The factory worker child is not a pre-modern figure, although, like the pre-modern child, it is a child without a childhood defined as a period of asylum or development and at the same time a privilege of particular social classes. At the same time, the scandalousness of widespread child labour in expanding industrialism is being emphasised more and more in contemporary discourses. Not coincidentally, an important element of the critique of capitalism of the industrial era – undertaken by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, among others (Engels, 1952: 214–216) – was the problem of child labour, often “rented in clusters to factory owners” (Engels, 1952: 214) from poorhouses. These children, it should be added, were often five years old, who often worked 14–16 hours a day. The theme of labour – whether inhuman, alienating or humanising as a pipe dream of political thinkers and social activists – would become an important theme in nineteenth-century debates.

In the 20th century, the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1924) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1959) would expand on these discussions. As early as 1900, Ellen Key, a Swedish writer and activist for children’s and women’s rights, and author of the celebrated book *The Century of the Child* – a book that Janusz Korczak was very familiar with and which had great resonance in inter-war educational circles – described how four and five-year-old children were forced to work in industry (Key, 1928: 201). Key stressed that regardless of the legislative solutions applied in some European countries, forced child labour was still being practised. In Russia, the writer alarmed, “in weaving workshops, three-year-old children were found at work, and very many children under the age of 10 were working 18 hours a day”. In toy production in Germany, four- and five-year-old children were employed in “home industry”, “while the age limit for factory work there, as in Switzerland, is set at 14” (Key, 1928: 201). “In magnesium mines,” writes Key, “in Spain they employ a lot of children from six to eight years old; the poisonous fumes there make them severely ill. And other children, carrying heavy buckets of water on their heads, have to water the dry fields with them, as labour of a child is cheaper there than a donkey” (Key, 1928: 201–202).

Nineteenth-century criticism of child labour does not propose any coherent systemic solutions though. Frederick Engels admitted that a nine-year-old child “can endure 6½ hours of work a day without suffering a visible and clearly consequential harm from the work”. However, he regards this time as time lost for the “physical and mental development” obtained through “fresh air” and “school” (Engels, 1952: 214). In contrast,

neither Robert Owen, Claude Henri Saint-Simon nor Charles Fourier saw anything terrible in properly managed physical work of children, as long as it was free of coercion, or combined with learning and play. Fourier included four-year-olds in this idea. Accepting that children by nature like to play in the mud, he would assign them the job of rubbish collection in phalanstères (Bobrowska-Nowak 1978: 376–384).

Owen's educational establishments would advocate the employment of children as young as 10, with the proviso that, according to their talents and interests, they would be allowed to continue their education outside the factory (Bobrowska-Nowak, 1978: 104). As we can see, questions of what childhood was and at what age a person grew up and acquired independence were hotly debated in Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries. Notwithstanding the diverse content of the discussions of the time, even more diverse were the real experiences of children in society, experiences to which access was not only mediated, but often impossible.

Let us take an example. When Henry Mayhew describes in *London Labour and the London Poor* (Mayhew, 1851/2010) – in a book that for many later generations of Britons would be a tool for awakening social sensitivity – an eight-year-old street peddler whom he describes as a “watercress girl”, he recognises with horror that she is not a child because she does not have a childhood congruent with his ideas (Mayhew, 1851/2010: 63–65) She is, according to him, neglected, does not talk like a child, does not play, does not go for walks in the park, does not have toys or any attributes that he would be inclined to attribute to a child. The girl works hard and is happy to talk about her responsibilities. Mayhew does not know how to talk to her, so he just lets her talk. Janusz Korczak/Henryk Goldszmit attempted to listen to children's voices – with a similar social function – a little later in Poland. He visited the poorest neighbourhoods, whose inhabitants he would later make the protagonists of his novels, journalism and education projects (Korczak, 2023a; 2023b). Korczak's oft-exploited maxim “there are no children, there are people” can therefore be understood differently than according to its most popular interpretation. Korczak, perhaps, was not only concerned with seeing in children – contrary to infantilising, bourgeois notions of childhood as a time of sweet and innocent carefreeness – a fully-fledged human being struggling with challenges, difficulties and dilemmas commensurate with their age. He was also probably concerned with reminding us that childhood – as a social condition imposed on children – is sometimes the privilege of the few and that many children, as a result of the conditions of their own lives and

those of their families, have a maturity of perception and judgement of social reality that adults lack.

It is important to note that discussions about the limits of childhood and the circumstances that are appropriate for it would become increasingly connected to child labour in an era of expanding industrialism. In the Polish context, literature from the 19th and 20th centuries as well as children's textbooks would prominently feature work and its representations as a tool for fostering particular values. Such a childhood world would not be a place of blissful carelessness outside the realm of economic necessity (Landau-Czajka, 2002: 189–201). For example, textbooks from the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century described children selling newspapers, sweeping chimneys, hawking on the street, working in backyard workshops and collecting rubbish. Although they frequently lamented the consequences of this work (in Niewiadomska's *Readings for Middle Schools*, the child newspaper seller Józio falls under a tram and loses his leg while working), the work of children at the age of twelve years and older did not generally arouse much emotion among educators. Antek from one of the readings helps his father in the mine because "he is 12 years old; he already has to work for bread" (Landau-Czajka, 2002: 189–201).

Working on a farm also raised approval rather than objections. In the textbook *First Book* by Bogucka and Niewiadomska, a boy aged eighteen leads oxen to plough and explains to a playing peer from the city that "Sunday is for playing [...] Am I three years old and good for nothing?" (Landau-Czajka, 2002: 195). Even in textbooks for children from affluent families, in which little shepherds, apprentices or farmhands are situated on the margins of the main narrative, learning is presented as a gift and a privilege, and therefore something that is not common. "Remember my child, when the time to study or some other activity comes, don't complain, just get down to work eagerly. There are lots of poor children in the world who have to work just for a piece of bread" (Landau-Czajka, 2002: 192). Paid work was frequently presented as being the independent choice of children, especially in times of economic crisis. In the 1930s, in the book *Readings for Children*, we read about brothers aged 7 and 8 who collect rags for a paper factory to help their cleaning-woman mother (Landau-Czajka, 2002: 192).

Mały Przegląd [Little Review], edited by Korczak and his young co-workers and published from 1926 as a supplement to *Nasz Przegląd* (1926–1939), is a very interesting resource for the study of children's perceptions of work. Of course, this newspaper, due to its editorial choices and selections, which were heavily influenced by the ethos of Korczakian child

rearing, was not – as Anna Landau-Czajka rightly reminds us – a simple representation of the views of children and young people of the time on the issue of work. *Little Review* was a socially conscious publication that, while it took extraordinary care to evoke a variety of opinions, featured narratives that were sympathetic to Zionism, with its emphasis on labour that was strenuous and physically demanding, its faith in progress, and the creation of a new Jewish society. Additionally, it firmly believed in the concept of a multicultural, democratic modern state built on communication and interaction between various social, cultural, and religious groups. It was a “progressive” newspaper because it presented the various social experiences of children, including those who were Jewish, Christian, wealthy, and less wealthy. This made it a tool for covertly revising political, social, and cultural orthodoxy insofar as it endangered children’s ability to mature freely and with knowledge.

From the accounts of the children who were correspondents of *Little Review*, it is clear that in the 1920s and the 1930s, the lack of learning opportunities and the compulsion to help out in backyard factories or shops begin to be associated by children with harm and injustice. The newspaper’s content stressed that paid work should be prohibited. But also – in line with Korczak’s unwritten principle of avoiding one-sidedness in all opinions – it criticised the fact that police officers prosecute children who hawked on the street due to poverty at home (Landau-Czajka, 2018: 168). Children relatively rarely mentioned helping out at home as they probably took it for granted. Perhaps, however, it stopped being an unquestioned part of their everyday life. The children compared the different conditions of their work. For example, an alumna of Korczak’s Orphanage wrote in a letter that in the family home: “I worked a lot, scrubbing floors, peeling potatoes, but here there is little to do: I have to sweep with a small brush every day” (Landau-Czajka, 2018: 169). The young journalists increasingly interpreted housework as exploitation rather than a necessity. In a 1933 article, Basia wrote critically:

Even 10-year-old girls work at home. They often miss school. Then the principal says she can’t keep such slackers. At first the mother worries but then thinks: OK, at least I will have her at home all day. She would not become a doctor anyway. That would certainly not be a doctor. Why should she get tired. From then on, the girl does nothing other than housework (Landau-Czajka, 2018: 169).

Of course, contrary to simplistic interpretations of the situation at the time, school and paid work are often not entirely disconnected domains for chil-

dren. Many children are only able to educate themselves through intensive tutoring of younger children, and therefore through work.

Numerous testimonies to this are provided by accounts of Jewish children collected by the JIWO social research institute in Vilnius in the 1920s and the 1930s. For example, in the *Diary of an unemployed intellectual*, acquired by the Institute, Mojżesz Tendlarz, who, with heroic efforts on his own and those of his father, a poor craftsman, began his secondary school education, wrote:

Forever: a book – an essay – doing Latin – learning a poem – tutoring in one part of town, giving a lesson in the other part – hurry, grind and more grind. [As] I hurried through the streets for tutoring, reflections arose in me on how they live, those stiff who in summer parade around on bicycles and in winter proudly stride with skates in their hands; and me – busy, living in fear of losing my only source of income – tutoring (EM.TEPA, 2003: 221).

DEVELOPMENT AS WORK

Interestingly, in the 1920s and the 1930s, pedagogical discussion on industriousness and laziness began to be increasingly problematised. For example, in 1936, the Lviv Pedagogical Library as part of a series published a fascinating pamphlet entitled *Lenistwo u dzieci i młodzieży (źródła i sposoby leczenia)* [Laziness in Children and Adolescents (Sources and Cures)] by Leopold Blaustein (1936), an eminent philosopher and psychologist, a disciple of Kazimierz Twardowski, initiator of Polish humanistic psychology and pioneer of the phenomenology of cinema vision and radio play perception. In his view, laziness was starting to become medicalised. Because it was perceived as a biological phenomenon independent of will that needed to be addressed with appropriate reflection and prevention, it was no longer the basis for a straightforward moral evaluation of the child. According to the psychologist, laziness “as a factor that hinders a child’s progress” (Blaustein, 1936: 4), impeding work as an opportunity to “gain knowledge or physical fitness” and as one of the “best means of shaping character” (Blaustein, 1936: 4), was a hitherto under-researched topic. “Knowing the nature of laziness,” Blaustein stated, “is [...] a condition of being able to combat it effectively” (Blaustein, 1936: 4). The philosopher believed that overcoming it on a social level, rather than just an individual one, was the primary task of the modern age, and that activism and creative productivity connected to citizenship were the essence

of this task. "The duty to combat it," he stressed in the pamphlet, "is particularly incumbent on the modern educator, whose educational ideal is an active and creative citizen, whereas laziness is a trait of passive people" (Blaustein, 1936: 4). Laziness as a threat to potential industriousness was to be diagnosed, controlled and treated. It was considered dangerous for young people, whose proper development at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century – in line with the paedocentric tendencies of modernity (Bauman, 1998: 87–103 – was treated as a guarantor of a better future for society, the state or the nation (Savage, 2007: 16–32).

It is interesting to note that the booklet views laziness less as the fault of a child and more as a phenomenon largely influenced by complex factors at a community level that need to be considered and consistently addressed in pedagogy. "Unfavourable material conditions [...]," writes Blaustein,

influence laziness in so far as they indirectly result in poor housing hygiene, poor learning conditions at home, the necessity to do housework, etc. H. Hetzer found that poor parents often demanded that girls stay home 4–10 days a month and not go to school, while only 58 per cent of poor children had a table to use for writing assignments, and others had to constantly move from place to place because they were disturbing their parents everywhere. Out of 100 poor girls surveyed, 17 per cent of girls aged 12–14 had to take care of the entire household apart from cooking, 54 per cent had to help with doing the laundry, etc.1) These circumstances add to the difficulties the child has to overcome, make him or her tired when they go to school and thus become a source of laziness. On the other hand, however, poverty and difficult living conditions develop in many individuals a certain fortitude of will that counteracts laziness (Blaustein, 1936: 23).

Community-level factors, which were becoming the subject of extensive research in the early 20th century that aimed to optimise upbringing processes and examine the biological and social 'quality' of the future population, were also looked at by Janusz Korczak. In contrast to many educators of the time, such as Henryk Rowid emphasising the dire conditions of existence of so-called proletarian children (Rowid, 1936: 24–27), conditions that often lead to their permanent physical, emotional or social impairment, Korczak refused to pathologize the poorest strata as communities that by definition created an inappropriate educational environment. In this regard, he made a clear break from the dominant expert opinion that was represented in Poland by circles that were more or less sympathetic to Western eugenic discourses, which stigmatised the underprivileged as being the ones who needed to be under strict social control (Daszyńska-Golińska, 1927: 256–327). Korczak questioned the analysis of

childhood by contemporary sociologists, which had a strictly modern origin, who identified a “proper upbringing” with the educational practices of bourgeois and later middle-class communities (Maciejewska-Mroczek, 2012: 63–68).

This can be seen well in a review that appeared in the *Robotnik* in 1928, in which Korczak discussed Piotr Zygmunt Dąbrowski’s book *Nauka o dziecku* [Child Studies] (Korczak, 2017b: 140). He stigmatises parts of it as “harsh indictments of poor families”. He also quotes with critical intent its most contentious passages such as: “Parents who are poor in every respect, physically, mentally and morally, stand lower generally than those who are wealthier” (Korczak, 2017b: 140). Interestingly, Dąbrowski, whose argument Korczak describes as “shallow, one-sided, false, and boorish” devoted a lot of attention to the issue of work. His contention was that “as a result of a lowered physical level, children from a poor families shows less intelligence, attention, memory, and reflect less” and, moreover, they think less about the future, and are unable to rationalise their actions by shunning “the immediate satisfaction of their needs” (Korczak, 2017b: 140). Dąbrowski insisted that poor children “abuse pleasure and alcohol”, are incapable of investing in effort for their own education or “waste in one day the earnings of an entire week”: “they do not know how to save, they do not understand hygienic needs, they eat improperly” (Korczak, 2017b: 140). This author shares the view that rationality, reflexivity, and – most importantly – actions motivated by values rather than purely pragmatic needs are traits of communities where people have access to education and social privilege. Needless to say, Dąbrowski sees all these features as negative for the future organisation of work in the poorest communities. Due to the circumstances they are in, their social advancement appears to be impossible.

These claims were sharply opposed by Korczak. “The issue of children,” he stressed, “does not present itself in very gloomy colours in either poor or rich families” (Korczak, 2017b: 141). “The lives of wealthy families,” he argued,

revolve around one concern: staying afloat, getting more, making a career, securing ever more. And with this preoccupation, parents do not have the time to look after their children so they hand them over to strangers, paid, often unprincipled educators. [...] A moral atmosphere no better than that among dogs. Egoism, indifference to social matters, confinement in a tight materialistic circle, with arthritis, diabetes and many other degenerative diseases common among the rich (Korczak, 2017b: 142).

When writing about poor families, Korczak was, of course, far from giving an equally “shallow, false and one-sided” defence. However, he wrote approvingly about their character. According to him, they “most often have a modest budget, moreover, they are hardened in doing without and in inconveniences, they do not tremble before every change of material condition, and they are balanced in their sense of strength” (Korczak, 2017b: 142).

Like Blaustein quoted earlier, Korczak in many texts criticised traditional, moralistic defences of work treating it as a virtue or as an absolute value. This is why he repeatedly stressed that work could serve a variety of purposes that were not always good and, moreover, could be embedded in unjust labour relations and subordinated to ideas that were harmful to both the individual and society. The main objects of Korczak’s critique were the traditional narratives treating work as the inalienable foundation of the human condition and considering laziness – unequivocally identified as the source of all difficulties in work and schooling – as a sin, an evil or a dangerous vice for social life. For example, in *Jak kochać dziecko* [How to Love a Child], he wrote:

The work of poor children is utilitarian, not educational, and does not reckon with a child’s strengths or individual qualities. It would be ridiculous to cite the life of poor children as a model; there is boredom here too, the winter boredom of cramped rooms and the summer boredom of the yard or roadside ditch. It just has a different form. Neither they nor we can fill a child’s day so that a series of them, logically linked, create a colourful content of life, from yesterday through today to tomorrow (Korczak, 2012: 106).

Korczak here reconciled the tradition frequently depicted in textbooks for children of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in which the figure of working poor children – chimney sweeps, newspaper sellers, shepherds – was presented on the one hand as respectable, and on the other hand as a lesson and at the same time a warning to children from privileged backgrounds to value their own opportunity to learn and their exemption from paid work (Landau-Czajka, 2002: 192). As Landau-Czajka writes, “reading about the plight of working, school-deprived children was meant to encourage pupils to learn, to convince them that going to school was not the worst thing that could happen to them” (Landau-Czajka, 2002: 192). Although child labour was increasingly depicted as an injustice or misfortune in children’s textbooks in the early 20th century, Korczak believes that it was still not the subject of enough in-depth criticism. For Korczakian thinking was radical. It was not a question of re-

placing work with school as a right and a duty, in the spirit of the later 1959 Declaration of the Rights of the Child. Nor was it about emphasising the profound difference between adulthood and childhood in terms of the division of labour between those who go to school so that they can later work and those who already work. The foundation of Korczak's concept was to portray a child's development as an organic process rather than something that was self-imposed or determined by biology. The process of work, in his view, should consist of intentional, reflective activities based on children's sense of agency.

Korczak viewed this procedure as a crucial, if not primary, means by which children interact with the social world. Referring to it as work was, in his view, a way to elevate its importance and, by extension, to elevate childhood as a time that need not be accountable in terms of social productivity and creativity. This is why we read in Korczak's writings that "children's play is work" (Korczak, 2012: 106). He wrote about this work as not only an individual effort, but also a group effort: requiring commitment, forethought, collaboration: joint deliberation and decision-making. For example, in *How to Love a Child. Child in Family* we can read:

If four of them are building a hut, digging with a scrap of tin, glass or nails, hammering pegs, tying, covering a roof with branches, padding with moss, working alternately with effort and silence, albeit sluggishly, but designing improvements, making further plans, sharing the results of the insights gained. This is not play, but unskilled work with imperfect tools, inadequate material, therefore not very fruitful, but organised in such a way that each, depending on age, strength and competence, puts in as much effort as they can (Korczak, 2012: 108).

Korczak clearly anticipated contemporary anthropological reflection undertaken by, among others, Christina Toren and Tim Ingold. The latter insists on framing child development as a process of child creativity: a process intentionally created by the individual. Toren refers to this as a microhistory. According to the anthropologist, seeing it in this perspective allows us to see the child as a causal subject: not as an object of psychological and biological developmental processes, but as their creative subject. Every ontogeny, in Toren's view, is *de facto* a process of "self-creation, self-organisation, and self-regulation," which is both historically grounded and socially embedded. This process happens creatively and intentionally through relationships with other subjects (Toren, 2012: 402). Earlier, Ingold took a similar tack, highlighting the fact that these connections are not just about people, but also about things (Ingold, 1986: 173–221). However, none

of them follow Korczak's lead and acknowledge that this procedure constitutes work and, hence, has value that can be socially evaluated and, in some cases, monetised.

It is sufficient to note that Korczak also attributes it to infants in order to grasp how radical his revision of the modern category of work was. Children are consequently rarely credited with action accompanied by self-reflection, understood in the context of values that are consciously realized. "Have you seen," he asks in *How to Love a Child*, "an infant put on and take off a sock or a slipper for a long time, patiently, with an immobile face, a tilted mouth and concentration in its eyes? It is neither play, nor imitation, nor mindless wasting time, but work" (Korczak, 2012: 51). Elsewhere, Korczak wrote explicitly that "Growth is work, the hard work of the system, and life will not sacrifice to it a single school hour or a single factory day" (Korczak, 2012: 123); work that is invisible, unappreciated, neglected. The author emphasised that babies are born ready to engage in the "work of suckling," characterizing this activity as "industrious, calculating, and bold" (Korczak, 2012: 33). Korczak's discourse, which combined the simple activities of the child with philosophical language referring to virtues and values, was no accident.

The custom that Korczak cultivated of paying children 50 grosze for each milk tooth that fell out could be a reverberating effect, albeit a speculative one, of the identification of development with work. It is known that this custom was incomprehensible to staff at the Orphanage. As the bur-sar Ida Merżan, who collaborated with Korczak, recalled this practice: "The Doctor's behaviour seemed bizarre and incomprehensible to me. Buying teeth?" (Merżan, 1987: 89). "We were constantly intrigued," Merżan wrote,

what he was trying to achieve and where he stored them. There were various rumours. One of them was that he was building a house out of them, but a low one so that only children could go inside, not adults. Once, I dared to ask what he actually needed these teeth for. 'I make powder for bricks to make them stronger,' was his reply. At first I believed it, but a sudden glint in his eyes made me realise he was joking again, so I cried out: 'You are kidding me, Doctor!' [...] I thought he wanted the children to have some money of their own. He didn't want to raise beggars, so he bought from them, the only thing they had - their teeth. It was only recently that I became aware of the real reason why he paid out those 50 groszes. One former pupil wrote in an Israeli magazine that Korczak once explained to him that he simply wanted to recreate the tradition of family homes where losing milk teeth does not go unnoticed. It marks a transition in a child's life, a stage of growing up. It is something that parents and child rejoice in. By paying the money, the Doctor wanted to underline that he had noticed this fact, and he wanted to celebrate it (Merżan, 1987: 119).

However, the fact that this celebration involved a payment was, contrary to what Merżan writes, not so much the result of following traditions, but rather of thoroughly revising them.

WORK AS DEVELOPMENT

Korczak did not ignore the labour relations of the time, and he did not neglect to design specific institutional solutions to the problem of children's creative and mundane work as they pursued their own development. The issue of work as an important measure of human endeavour was fundamental to his concept of self-education. But also, let us remember, for the whole of modern Europe. According to Hannah Arendt, who brought this to our attention in *The Human Condition*, *animal laborans* "is a figure of modern, devalued humanity, which makes the measure of individual dignity no longer civic activity on behalf of the political community, but productive activity linked to the principle of effective productivity measured in strictly economic categories" (Arendt, 2020: 408–413). The result of this idea's cultural dominance is the reality of the second half of the 20th century, in which whatever *animal laborans* does is irrelevant to other people and has no meaning to them beyond what is necessary for their own survival and the survival of their immediate family (Arendt, 2020: 400–408).

As early as the second half of the 19th century, work became a subject of interest for doctors concerned with hygiene, who laid the foundations of "occupational hygiene" by reflecting on the relationship between health, body and work – both physical and intellectual – and how to optimise physical and mental effort so that it is used effectively. Human performance and strength, as well as the nature of work and its institutional organisation, free time and recreation, were starting to be considered. Individual occupational hygiene and leisure was beginning to be seen as a social problem and a major task of the state, whose population was beginning to be seen in health terms. As a result of the rapid changes in civilisation, their wellbeing and productivity were to be the subject of academic and political investigation. Korczak's words calling for a model of work in which both components are included and valued are a distant echo of Polish hygiene movements, including those in Warsaw, involving doctors, social scientists, and humanists, calling for a balance between physical and mental effort (Napierała, 2018: 63–90). Korczak also put these demands into practice. Having children empty toilets, wash children's un-

derwear, and cut each other's hair were all part of his extensive educational and self-educational efforts.

The attitude towards Korczak's work was ambivalent and was not rooted in any clear philosophical position or worldview. On the one hand, Korczak praised American society, referencing the bourgeois concept of *homo oeconomicus*, which held that an individual's worth is determined by his or her efforts and achievements rather than by factors beyond his or her control such as race, class, or nationality. However, he was also critical of the mercantilist view of work as something that can be monetised to an extreme. Despite his fascination with Stanisław Brzozowski, who created his own version of Marxism on the ground of Polish philosophy, Korczak clearly avoided considering labour solely in class terms. But at the same time, following Brzozowski, he strongly valued manual labour and emphasised its deeply moral dimension. He also underlined the fact that Marx also emphasised: that the phenomenon of the alienation of productive processes applies to all their forms, including those associated with the intellectual labour of the privileged classes. "People think," wrote Korczak in one of his articles,

that only workers get tired, and factory owners and merchants hardly at all. This is a big mistake. Workers have leisure time at the end of their work, time for themselves; the entrepreneur, it seems, has no leisure time at all. The worker is also robbed of his free time, but in a different way, through fear of old age, unemployment and illness. He has to go to the health care fund, to the union, apply for free school for his children, entailing countless formalities and bureaucracy (Korczak, 2017b: 240).

Korczak, in the same article, acknowledged that work and its fair evaluation were fundamental to the betterment of society. It was not freedom from work – as still dreamt of by 19th century socialists – but giving it dignity by subjecting it to fair evaluation that was to be the guarantor of an egalitarian society. "Gradually [...] we are approaching a historical epoch," argued Korczak in 1936, "in which the work of man and his contribution to society will be judged fairly" (Korczak, 2017b: 240). Although Korczak's ideas draw from a wide range of philosophical sources, they have little to do with cultivating a philosophy of work. Therefore, in the same paragraph, there is a practical suggestion that was implemented and refined over many years both at the Orphanage and at Our Home. "Let us make our reflections concrete" we read: "the work of those who do chores at the Orphanage is a duty, a donation of individual strength and a spiritual effort, it is the active participation of children in educational care, it is the

duty of all those who possess this inner something and can give some part of it to others” (Korczak, 2017b: 240). In other words, Korczak recognised the system of doing chores as a fundamental realisation of his own vision of work as a physical as well as spiritual endeavour.

In *How to Love a Child*, Korczak wrote:

If we stand by the view that a well-worn table is equivalent to a carefully transcribed page, if we care not that the work of children should replace hired labour, but that it should raise them and educate them, then we must not just examine it superficially, but thoroughly, test it, divide it among all of them, and watch over it, and change it, devote much thought to it. One hundred children – one hundred orderly and farm workers, one hundred levels, one hundred degrees of strength, skills, temperaments, character qualities, good will or otherwise. Distributing chores is not the beginning but the end of organisational work; we do not shout at children, but rather we put in several months of work and vigilant creative thought. Above all, you have to know the work and know the children (Korczak, 2013: 163).

Korczak stressed that work as such – if not properly organised has no ennobling value: it should not be treated as an unquestionable, unreflective duty or as a value independent of the conditions under which it is carried out. He also cited the experience of other institutions where “sloppily” organised work was a form of abuse of children and even “demoralised” them, as it taught them to “hate all help” (Korczak, 2013: 164).

It is for this reason that Korczak regarded the organisation of work as a process that required constant, vigilant adjustment that took into account both the life of the institution and the individual predispositions, qualities and talents of children. It was to be administered jointly by children and adults. Children applied to carry out certain chores, which they could swap or negotiate. Because chores were carried out in teams, those who worked poorly, who performed their duties less well, found it difficult to work with their colleagues. Thus, they bore the consequences of their own actions without authoritarian and often arbitrary adult interference. Candidates for chores, a list of which was publicly available, “made numerous arrangements” (Korczak, 2013: 164) which adults were not involved in. “A tenth of this great educational work,” Korczak stressed, “does not come to our notice” (Korczak, 2013: 164). He proudly referred to each chore as holding an “office”, giving it the cachet of a public service. Whether it was shovelling snow, distributing meals or cleaning toilets, each chore had to have its “good and bad” sides: bringing “new and pleasant emotions” but also “difficulties” so that no chore was humiliating or perceived as a punishment. Each also required “consensual co-existence” (Korczak, 2013: 288): with children managing their own work and that of others.

CONCLUSION

Most importantly, however, Korczak shied away from idealising the organisation of work proposed in *How to Love a Child*. Working conditions were described without illusions. "Managing the work of others is an onerous duty; the responsibility is unpleasant" (Korczak, 2013: 289). This is why the organisation of work did not consist of a system of absolute control once and for all set according to rigid rules. "Everyone should check themselves," wrote Korczak, "however, not always and not everything happens in life as it should. Careless, inconsiderate and reckless workers are found in a certain percentage among children as well" (Korczak, 2013: 289). It was to the latter that the author of *How to Love a Child* addresses the words: "someone must not only check them but also teach and help them" (Korczak, 2013: 289). According to his idea, incompetence at work could require intervention in the form of a conversation with an educator, the aim of which, however, was to help and teach. More senior children would summarise what work had been done in "diaries" submitted each evening. If work was associated with "helping others", it could not be regarded as oppression. Korczak also stressed the importance of making sure that children were not discriminated against on the basis of their gender or age when it came to chores and potential "promotions" based on the types of chores and the level of responsibility entrusted (since not all were equally appealing to children). All promotions were to be based on individually acquired maturity and experience. "Complete equality of age and gender is achieved here: the younger, and the diligent, are quickly promoted, the boys listen to the girls" (Korczak, 2013: 289). Korczak also valued care work. Children looked after other children who were younger than themselves. In particular, those who, as a result of their behaviour toward other children, were ordered to "improve" by the Children's Peer Court. The child carers took partial responsibility for making them better behaved. Their work, not only educational but also strictly caring, was appreciated and documented in records they compiled. These notes served to professionalise and recognise this activity. The work produced results, and it also required attention and reflection.

For Korczak, the value placed on organised work did not mean that it was to be a voluntarily provided, unrewarded effort, which was at the same time treated as an obligation of those who received help from the institution. Korczak argued that monetary compensation was the best way to show that work was valued and that it did not represent either institu-

tional coercion or idealised community action. Money management and private property as inalienable means of developing children's agency and autonomy were an important part of Korczakian thought and practice. Already at the opening of the Orphanage in 1912, Korczak insisted, as Anna Bystrzycka reminds us in her text *Janusz Korczak and Money*, that its regulations should explicitly state that its pupils would be paid pocket money on a regular basis (Bystrzycka, 2014: 27). When compared to the care institutions of the first half of the 20th century, it is important to recognise the uniqueness of this fact and the accompanying conviction that children should have their own money.

"Although at the Orphanage only some chores are paid," reads *How to Love a Child*,

I am of the opinion that they should all be paid. In order to produce good citizens, we have no need to create idealists. The Orphanage does no favours by looking after children who have no parents, and by replacing their deceased parents in terms of material care, it has no right to demand anything from the children. Why shouldn't we teach children as early as possible what money is, a wage for work, so that they feel the value of the independence that earning money gives, so that they learn the bad and good sides of ownership. No educator will raise a hundred idealists out of a hundred children; a few will emerge on their own, and woe betide them if they can't count. Because money gives everything but happiness; it gives reason, health and morality. Teach children that it offers unhappiness and illness, that it takes away reason. Let them eat ice cream with the money they earn and let their bellies ache, let them quarrel with friends over a tenner, let them lose, let them mislay their money, let them have it stolen, let them regret that they bought something, let them agree to do a well-paid chore and convince themselves that it was not worth it, let them pay for damage they cause (Korczak, 2013: 166).

Monetary remuneration, in this view, was not only a tangible, useful reward for the work done and the effort put into it. It was a means which, when used in various ways by children, was intended to teach them that any means, including money, can be used for a variety of good and bad purposes, to the benefit or detriment of themselves or others. As a result, child labour became an activity that was to be evaluated from an ethical perspective. At the same time, however, labour, like money, was not perceived as absolutely good or bad. Korczak emphasised that these are relative values that can be applied to various projects, better or worse, in their own lives that require decisions, reflection and courage. An individual with agency – which in Korczak's view are children working in the broad sense of the word and, above all, in fair conditions over which they have influence and can negotiate – learns to take responsibility. This means that

Korczak did not so much reject the modern figure of the child-worker as deeply revise it.

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