The 'Religion of the Child': Korczak's Road to Radical Humanism

Marc Silverman

Hebrew University, Jerusalem

Opening

This paper traces the biographical and cultural sources inspiring the decision of the accomplished Polish-Jewish pediatrician and celebrated author, Janusz Korczak (1878-1942), at the age of thirty four (34) to make the center-piece of his life's work and vocation the education of young children from dysfunctional families. It proposes that the decisive source of this decision is the radical inclusive - trans-national, trans-ethnic and trans-religious – version of the humanism Korczak embraced and practiced.

The core of this radical humanism and the main feature that distinguishes it from other versions of humanism is the population to whom Korczak decided to devote his humanist ethos of unqualified respect, tireless support, care, and love: The neglected and in his understanding, the very ignored and oppressed social class of children. Two additional features of Korczak's humanism lend it uniqueness: Radical inclusiveness – his humanist conception was infinite in character and included “every suffering being” (Korczak, 1998:357). Korczak was endowed with as well as developed an infinite capacity to offer respect and love to real persons in their respective concrete, physical, and mental particularities including ‘the–person-coughing–next-to-you-on-a-bus’ (Dostoyevsky); and Radical consistency between preaching and practice in his indefatigable effort to improve the world.

Adducing evidence from his voluminous writings and decisive life-events, the paper argues that due to the integration of the following three influences the road of radical humanism on which Korczak travelled met and chose him as much as he met and chose it:

- From his childhood onward throughout his life Korczak experienced a powerful sense of mission to serve humanity and the world coupled with feelings of the painfulness of existence, and of compassion for "for all that lives, wanders and suffers in the world" (Korczak, 1998:357).
- Korczak found the world outlook and ethos of the humanist, progressive, positivist sector of the Polish intelligentsia whom he encountered during his student years in Warsaw university's school of medicine (1896-1904) very compelling, adopted them, and actively participated in this circle's ameliorative social practices.
The importance of a 'caring community' for the flourishing of the individual inherent in the 'habitus' of Jewish communal life on one hand and as a Jewish Pole, his consciousness of being at once 'a part of' and 'apart' from Polish society, on the other hand play a decisive role in determining the unique features of his version of humanism, especially the first feature mentioned above.

After exploring the weight each of these three influences exercised on the unique features of Korczak's humanism, the paper proposes that these can be best understood in terms of the hybridity of his cultural identity in general and of the in-built tensions produced in the in-between between his identity as a Pole, a Jew and a Cosmopolitan in particular. It argues that it is precisely his Jewish existential situatedness of being 'a part of' and 'apart from' that impelled Korczak to go beyond Polish humanism and create a universal religion of children in which ethnic, national, religious, physical distinctions are celebrated and, do not generate prejudice, intolerance and violence. The paper ends by raising the possibility that by devoting his creative powers and endless efforts to building a safe and secure home for the world's children and their flourishing, Korczak also sought to build such a home for himself.

i. A Profound Sense of Mission and Compassion for Sentient Beings

Korczak's sense of mission to serve humanity and the world and to make a significant contribution to improving things, coupled with Weltschmerz, feeling the painfulness of existence, and compassion for suffering - "for all that lives, wanders and suffers in the world" (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 Diary, 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)
Proceeding now from his early childhood to his adolescence, in Korczak’s semi-autobiographical work *Confessions of a Butterfly* (1999:13), similar themes echo in its adolescent hero’s reflections on the direction he wants his life to take:

To explore nature, to be of service to humanity, to bring honor to your people – this is a noble life-task...only lately has a spiritual aspiration to a sublime idea, to higher motivations awakened in me... I sense that providence has inspired me to perform a great deed that always will be remembered. If death does not suddenly end my life, I’ll become famous. Will I ?!” (Ibid)

In 1921 Korczak composed and published a prayer book he entitled *Alone with One’s God: Prayers of Those Who Do Not Pray* (1921/2; Korczak, 1996a). A passage from the next to last prayer of this work, a dedicatory prayer to his parents, shows the persistence of Korczak’s sense of mission as a man in his early forties:

Mother, father, from all the fossilized longings, trials and tribulations of our forebears, mine and of yours, I seek to construct a singular, tall and majestic tower for the sake of humanity.” (1996b:33).

Some twenty years later, at the age of sixty-three or sixty-four, Korczak articulated the same themes in his Ghetto Diary:

*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).

And also

*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).

His feeling of mission always included compassion, accompanied by gloomy thoughts about the suffering of others: sorrowful compassion, a constant motif in Korczak’s life

---

1 Scholars of Korczak’s legacy assume that the reflections and feelings of the fictional teenage hero of this work, nicknamed the ’Butterfly’ are constructed in the light of the thoughts and feelings Korczak experienced as an adolescent.
and writing. For example, in his *Confessions of a Butterfly* (1914), apparently a rewriting of Korczak's diary from his adolescence, he describes saving the life of an insect as a precedent for saving a human life:

> 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 straitening its tiny wings in my hand. We won’t meet again - Fly away and be happy!” (Korczak, 1999: 189)

In his Ghetto Diary, written forty years later, he describes the following event and the thoughts it provoked:

> It is half past six. In the dormitory someone shouts: “Boys, time for a bath, get up!” I put away my pen. Should I or should I not get up? It is a long time since I have had a bath. Yesterday I caught on myself and killed without turning a hair—with one dexterous squeeze of the nail—a louse. If I have the time, I shall write a eulogy to a louse. For our attitude toward this fine insect is unjust and unfitting. An embittered Russian peasant once declared: “A louse is not like a man, it will not suck up every last drop of blood.”

> I have written a short tale about sparrows which I have been feeding for twenty years. I had set for myself the task of exonerating the little thieves. But who will explore the persecution of the louse? Who if not I? Who will come forward, who will have the courage to come forward in its defense?  
(http://arvindguptatoys.com/arvindgupta/ghettodiary.pdf:19)

Both passages show Korczac's compassion even for insects, though the second is a bit ironic.
ii. **Polish Dimensions of Korczak’s Humanism**

Korczak fully identified fully with the Polish language and culture and occasionally found it necessary to display his Polishness, without indicating his Jewish origins. In this Korczak was typical of the third generation of assimilated Polish Jews, who were uncomfortably aware that they were not regarded as “pure” Poles. Conversely, their solidarity for other Jews aroused doubts among the Poles as to their loyalty to Poland. Korczak’s attitude toward the world did not derive from any ideology or basic assumption, but his intellectual position regarding the emancipation of the Jews and toward modern anti-Semitism reverberates with a liberal, socialist, intellectual outlook. He never lost his belief that a progressive Polish state could be established, one which would grant full equality to all its citizens. Korczak did not accept the Zionist solution to anti-Semitism, namely auto-emancipation and Jewish sovereignty. He believed that education and legislation based on human reason could end anti-Semitism, as is shown both in his conduct and in his writing. While it would be wrong to take a dichotomous view of his national identity, either Polish or Jewish, clearly the Polish dimensions of his identity outweighed the Jewish components, and in his mind his Polish identity was closely connected to his universal humanistic values, and in this he was also similar to his parents.

These last points leads us directly to the profound influence exerted by the members of the progressive Polish liberal or socialist positivist intelligentsia whom he met and worked with during his eight years of medical school at Warsaw University. In Korczak's writings in general, especially in his autobiographical reflections and in specific life-decisions he made, there is ample evidence that these people had a very strong impact on his intellectual development and the spirit and substance of his humanism. In a section of the curriculum vitae Korczak was called upon to compose, he lists the following names of persons whom he sees as his educators in public - social-cultural-educational -work: Nalkowski, Straszewicz, Dawid, Dygasinski, Prust, Asnyk, Konopnicka. (See Wollins, 1967: 29-32). Each of these seven people was among the leading progressive Polish positivists. Korczak saw them at once as his intellectual-cultural mentors and as living models of devotion to the public interest and radical social responsibility.

Between 1863 and 1883, many members of the Polish intelligentsia developed a new form of national resistance in advocating an ethos of organic work that would be expressed in constructive daily action. They arrived at this approach after the failure of the romantic revolutionary movements to liberate Poland and in awareness that, in addition to national oppression, there was also social oppression of millions of Poles.
Many members of the intelligentsia believed that this oppression was caused by excessively rapid modernization, urbanization, and capitalist industrialization.

They believed that Polish national liberation was dependent on the social emancipation of the masses, and that the Polish nation could be rebuilt as an egalitarian democracy only if the masses were freed from poverty, malnutrition, substandard housing, poor health services, and ignorance. Their primary mission was to improve the conditions of life of the poor. Among their achievements were the establishment of neighborhood centers for food distribution, social assistance, and educational advice, and projects were initiated in social welfare, employment, and housing. Their ethos was founded on hard, persistent work, patience, and tolerance – the opposite of bombastic talk. In time some of them joined socialist groups, in reaction against revolutionary radicalism and its attendant violence.

The mottoes of this circle's members, freely expressed, were as follows: we are what we give to our fellow man; to live is to give, and to give is to live; our actions and not our theories are what define and establish us; a person should value his fellow's uniqueness; a person should base his or her interpersonal relations on democracy, equality and dialogue; a person should contribute with all his or her power to assure the security and welfare of others, especially the poor and oppressed; a person should work hard to achieve these aims; the litmus test for a person's humanity is the moral force that he actualizes in his relations with others; the religious, ideological, and cultural sources from which a person draws are not criteria for testing his humanity; authenticity, sincerity, and integrity are the main criteria for judging a person's humanity.

Both Korczak's original decision to become a medical doctor and his final decision to become an educator of children are closely linked to these progressive positivist conceptions of the authentic social activist and reformer. During his student days in Warsaw University's Medical School he once confided to his friend in this period, Leon Rygier, that his decision to study medicine did not conflict in any way with his profound interest in literature. To know and understand human reality it is crucial to know the workings of the human body. In Korczak's own words: "Being a doctor didn't interfere with Chekhov's becoming a great writer. It deepened his creative work. To write anything of value, one has to be a diagnostician. Medicine will give me insight into human personality, even into the nature of children's play." (Wspomnienia O Januszu Korczaku, Warsaw, 1981).

Periodically, in the later years of his medical practice in the Bersohn and Bauman children's hospital in Warsaw (1905-12), Korczak would express his frustration about medicine's inability to cure social disease to his colleagues, saying: "When the devil will we stop prescribing aspirin for poverty, exploitation, lawlessness and crime" (Lifton:
1988:47). As the important Korczak scholar Shimon Frost remarked in an unpublished lecture:

*Korczak did not come to education through the traditional teacher training route. He came to education – perhaps I should say he chanced upon education - because of his interest in human beings and in society at large. Education was to him a form of social engineering. The reform of education was therefore nothing less than the restructuring of the world to more humane values. Consequently, in his eyes, the improvement of education – its reformation – was no less than reorienting the world to a humanistic ethos. ... It is my contention that Korczak's brand of humanism is directly traceable to his engagement with this circle of progressive Polish positivists.”* (‘Humanism: A Korczakian Leit-Motif’, unpublished lecture, undated, p. 5).

Two remarks by Korczak himself support Frost's thesis: "The repair of education, is the repair of society" (Perlis, 1986:18); "One of the worst blunders is to think that pedagogy is the science of the child; no! It is the science of man." (Wollins, 1967:204)

Korczak indeed accepted the basic conceptions and practices of the Polish intelligentsia, but in his own way. More specifically there are three crucial differences between Korczak's humanism and that of this circle's members.

In the order of importance, these differences are:

- The population to whom Korczak decided to devote his humanist ethos of tireless assistance, concern, care, and love was the all too often neglected and oppressed social class of children!

- Radical inclusiveness – his humanist conception was infinite in character and included “every suffering being” (Korczak, 1998: 357); Korczak's infinite capacity to offer respect and love to real people, irrespective of their ethnicity, as well as to the natural world.

- Radical integrity, consistency and correlation between preaching and practice in his indefatigable effort to improve the world.

**Target Population of Children**

In the spirit of the Polish intelligentsia, Korczak believed that Polish nationalism must be inextricably linked with progressivism, assistance to the poor and oppressed, and tolerance. Hence he was drawn to the social-democratic party and its internationalist approach and kept his distance from the political dogmatism of the extreme left. He never joined any party but
adopted the ethos of persistent, constructive work on behalf of the poor, and he regarded children as the most oppressed and deprived social group. He believed that children were entitled to basic human rights – the right to: keep a secret; personal belongings; be loved; and full human respect. The right to full human respect entails these 3 rights:

1. To live in the present (in this day and at this age);
2. To be oneself
3. To one’s own death (to take risks, to explore the world, to receive presupposed response-ability for discovering new and challenging situations (Oser, 2015)

The League of Nation’s "Declaration of the Rights of the Child" issued in the conference it held in Geneva, 1924 (later adapted in an extended form by the United Nation in 1959) was directly influenced by Korczak's definition of these rights. Korczak himself participated in the conference that declared these rights, and his signature appears on the declaration.

At the age of thirty-four he decided to act upon this belief and devote his life to the education of children, especially to deprived children and those who showed signs of anti-social behavior. The unique indeed radical nature of Korczak's discovery of children as an oppressed social class and decision to devote his life to actively promoting and advancing their wellbeing are expressed powerfully in these words of Shimon Frost: "We have many educational philosophers, some more original and more brilliant than Korczak - the "Old Doctor" from Krochmalna street. But, few are the philosophers who came to see the world through the prism of humankind's weakest: The child. Few too were those who sought to rebuild the world by beginning with the improvement of the child's lot" ('Humanism: A Korczakian Leit-Motif', unpublished lecture, undated, p.7).

**Radical Inclusiveness**

The radical inclusiveness of Korczak's humanism is directly connected to his commitment to improving the world and his lifelong feelings of compassion for all sentient beings. The inclusiveness of his humanism also entails respect for the other and an ethos of absolute egalitarianism.

**Absolute Egalitarianism and Radical Integrity**

One of the last entries in his ghetto diary is entitled, “Why I Clear the Table,” and there he says that as much honor must be given to the doing of physical chores as to intellectual work:

*My aim is that in the Children’s Home there should be no soft work or crude work, no clever or stupid work, no clean or dirty work. No work for nice young ladies or for the mob. In the Children’s Home, there should be no purely physical
and no purely mental workers. ... I respect honest workers. To me their hands are clean and I hold their opinions in high esteem. ... The collector of money, a rude woman, is a nobody to me. Mr. Lejzor is a fine fellow though he digs in the filth of the sewage pipes and canals. Miss Nacia would deserve respect from me if she peeled potatoes instead of being a typist. ... Whoever says, “Physical work is dirty work,” is lying. Worse still the hypocrite who says, “No one should be ashamed of any work,” but picks for himself only clean work, avoids what is described as dirty work and thinks that he should keep out of the way of dirty work. (http://arvindguptatoys.com/arvindgupta/ghettodiary.pdf:74-75)

Korczak practiced what he preached. Brooms, mops, and the like were kept in open cabinets in a central place in the orphanage, and the cleaners were invited to attend staff meetings. He was strongly opposed to a dichotomous view of life in general and to human life in particular. He believed that the distinctions between the physical and the spiritual, between body and soul, between life and death, between growth and decline, and the like, were distortions. All the dimensions of life – emotional, behavioral, intellectual, and spiritual – were interconnected, interdependent, and nourished one another, forming a single organic whole and leaving no place for inequality or hierarchy.

The uniqueness of Korczak's world view is expressed in the interpretation and application of his cultural and educational vision. He considered every detail and educational context, planned with diligence and followed things through to the very end in the effort to implement his aspirations and intentions in educational practice. (Cohen, 1994:88-137). Korczak himself was characterized by originality, sincerity, integrity, and straightforwardness. When he encountered arrogant, pretentious people, they repelled him. He also eschewed world-embracing programs and rigid principles. His devotion, as shown in the long hours he put into his work as the director of the Jewish orphanage and the pedagogical director of the Polish orphanage was extraordinary. He asked for no praise for his devotion to his educational work, because he said his life was not especially altruistic, and he was no less selfish than others. He said he did what he did because he enjoyed it. His humanism was of a special kind: It was Korczakian.

Polish culture in its progressive liberal-socialist positivist as well as modernist expressions and practices significantly contributed to the basic nature and substance of Korczak's humanism. His Polish identity was at once a primary source of his humanism and tempered and refined by it. For Korczak and the circle of the Polish progressive intelligentsia with whom he deeply identified, Polish nationalism and Humanism went hand in hand. Any forms of chauvinistic, myopic, exclusivist, racist Polish nationalism were totally unacceptable.
At the same time, there was a dark side to the Polish dimensions of Korczak's humanism, though paradoxically it generated the unique features of his humanism. He realized that many Poles were unwilling to recognize Jews as full-fledged members of the Polish Nation. This rejection of Jews engendered feelings of alienation in him. As we suggest in the next section of this paper, Korczak's deep-seated sense of being at once a part of and apart from Polish society may be one of the main sources of his choice to make children the primary beneficiaries of his humanism.

iii. Jewish Dimensions of Korczak's Humanism

Korczak's humanism led him to cast his lot with that of the Jewish community into which he was born and to make its fate his personal mission. This humanism entailed authenticity, self-knowledge, loyalty to oneself, to one's origins, to one's family, and to one's community, as well as truthfulness and integrity – the constant effort to practice what one preaches. It also included respect, love, and empathy for all sentient beings, especially poor and oppressed fellow humans. Finally, it was marked by strong faith in the possibility of increasing goodness in the world despite the strong and prevalent presence of evil in it.

With the one exception of reluctantly agreeing to use the pseudonym of the 'Old Doctor' to conceal his Jewish origins so that he could publicize his educational views to the general public in Poland on Polish national radio, Korczak never denied his Jewish origins, and related to this dimension of his identity with honor and pride. The separation of Jewish and Catholic children upset him, but he adapted to the political and social situation, although it forced him to reduce his humanistic educational activity significantly. Given his deep humanism, one can understand his great sensitivity for the suffering of the community in which he had been born, and with which he had identified all his life. His boundless compassion, which impelled him to offer active support to his primary community in ordinary times, naturally motivated him to continue doing so in a time of cruel distress.

The intensification of anti-Semitism in Poland during the 1930s, and especially in the last three years of that decade, brought Korczak closer to his Jewish origins and to the Jewish community of Warsaw. In essence, he found himself driven back to the progressive and socialist Jewish segments of society, where there were many young Jews who belonged to the Zionist youth movements and intended to emigrate to Palestine. Because of his awareness of his origins, his long acquaintance with the Jews of Warsaw and their children, and the humanistic values, which he implemented in daily work, he made the return to his people a matter of choice rather than a necessity, bravely protesting against Nazi racism. He refused to obey the order to wear a white band on his arm with a Jewish star. He
designed a white flag with a blue star of David for the pupils of his orphanage and waved it proudly. He insisted on using Yiddish, the language of the masses in the ghetto, in the cultural evenings and concerts given at the orphanage. He organized a Passover Seder and High Holiday services at the orphanage. Finally, he organized the proud march of the children and staff of the orphanage, including himself, to the Umschlagplatz. This silent march was a thunderously silent protest against the wicked cruelty of the Nazis (Lifton, 1988: 183 – 345).

No one can fail to be impressed by the depth of Korczak's humanity, as expressed in these protests, and by his unequivocal solidarity with his Jewish brethren. However, in my opinion it is an error to interpret these acts as expressions of Jewish or Zionist national identity. Nor did his quiet spiritual resistance to the Nazis derive from his Jewish consciousness. Attributing specifically Jewish significance to acts that do not fit under that rubric is a slight to Korczak's humanism and detracts from the pride a Jew may feel because this extraordinary world-class humanist came from Jewish origins.

The two interrelated positive features of Korczak's Jewish identity are his refusal either to undergo radical assimilation by conversion to Catholicism or to join radical atheist Marxist-communist movements (in which Judaism as an ethnic and/or religious culture was negated). In Korczak's eyes such negation, such total rejection of one's primordial origins was undignified and unacceptable. The concomitant of this was the demonstration of solidarity with the poor, uneducated, and unmodernized members of his extended Jewish family. This too is a ramification of Korczak's humanism, in which there is no room for selectiveness. If one is called upon to assist everyone who cries out for help, how can one deny one's downtrodden Jewish brothers and sisters? This indeed is the underlying explanation of Korczak's resolve to stay with his Jewish orphans, no matter what fate awaited them in the Warsaw ghetto.

Thus we arrive at a paradoxical conclusion: Korczak's humanism, not his Jewish identity, underlies and inspires his identification with his Jewish origins and his solidarity with his fellow Jews. This conclusion in turn, naturally leads us to approach the issue from the opposite direction: To what extent, if to any, did his Jewishness impact on the nature and substance of his humanism?

As we have seen, Korczak's humanism differed from that of the Polish humanists in that it was focused on children, radically inclusive, and characterized by radical integrity. In my view these three points, especially the first, can be traced to the Jewish component of his identity. More specifically, it can be traced to his existential situatedness as a Jew living in Polish society and creating in the Polish language, not to his involvement in Judaism and Jewish culture. According to my understanding, Korczak
was a non-Jewish Jew, and his non-Jewish Jewishness inspired his radical, Korczakian humanism.

The term “non-Jewish Jew” was coined by Isaac Deutscher, a Polish Marxist theoretician and historian of Jewish origins in a 1958 essay entitled: "The non-Jewish Jew." In this essay Deutscher refers to Elisha Ben Abuya, the enigmatic (and paradigmatic) heretic in ancient rabbinical literature, known as “Akher,” the other. Deutscher writes:

*The Jewish heretic who transcends Jewry belongs to a Jewish tradition. You may, if you like, view Akher as a prototype of those great revolutionaries of modern thought... [who] went beyond the boundaries of Jewry. They all—Spinoza, Heine, Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, Trotsky, and Freud—found Jewry too narrow, too archaic, and too constricting. They all looked for ideals and fulfilment beyond it, and they represent the sum and substance of much that is greatest in modern thought, the sum and substance of the most profound upheavals that have taken place in philosophy, sociology, economics, and politics in the last three centuries.... They had in themselves something of the quintessence of Jewish life and of the Jewish intellect. They were a priori exceptional in that as Jews they dwelt on the borderlines of various civilizations, religions, and national cultures.... They lived on the margins or in the nooks and crannies of their respective nations. They were each in society and yet not in it, of it and yet not of it. It was this that enabled them to rise in thought above their societies, above their nations, above their times and generations, and to strike out mentally into wide new horizons and far into the future.* (1968: 25-27)

Like the figures Deutscher mentions, Korczak was born to upper middle-class highly Polanised acculturated Jews who defined themselves as Poles of Jewish origins. Like them, he underwent acculturation in the high culture of the country where he lived. Their life's work was located both in the country's culture and society and in a new universal culture of their construction, which transcends existing cultures. Very often their achievements are innovative and also transcend national boundaries. While Korczak worked in Warsaw, Poland, his target group was children everywhere, and his message was universal. Finally, they were not active members of any official Jewish institutions, and so it was with Korczak, who never joined a synagogue or any of the diverse modernizing Jewish movements in Warsaw. Nor did he know Yiddish or Hebrew.

The attitude of non-Jewish Jews to their origins and their fellow Jews ranges from extreme self-hatred and rejection of other Jews, through indifference, to acknowledgement of their Jewish roots and solidarity with other Jews. Korczak clearly chose solidarity.
Three main factors and the inter-play among them account for the emergence and proliferation of non-Jewish Jews since the eighteenth century. These are:

One – The central role of the intellect in Jewish life, the centrality of literacy, the study of Torah (*Talmud Tora*), and the ‘Wise-Learner’ (the *Talmid chacham*) as the Jewish cultural ideal. As a minority the Jews had to develop sharp skills of argument and negotiation to gain privileges of domicile, work and Jewish communal autonomy, and more.

Two - As the most oppressed people within European Christian civilization, Jews had the most to gain from emancipation, enlightenment, rationalism, liberalism and democracy. Consequently, they were the group in European society most highly motivated to take advantage of the freedom and equality these political and cultural movements afforded them; and due the intellectual tools they developed in the course of their history, they were highly equipped, perhaps the best equipped to reap the benefits of modernizing liberal societies.

Three – As Deutscher states these Non-Jewish Jews were "in society yet not in it, of it and not yet of it," at once a part of and apart from the majority society of their countries. Although they were active members, even leaders in the majority national culture, they were conscious of their Jewish origins and, more importantly, frequently made conscious of their Jewish roots by hostile sectors of the majority population. Hence, they were able to scrutinize and criticize the majority culture from more objective perspectives than those who were completely at home in it. All three of these factors are present and articulated in Korczak's life story. However, it is clearly the last, which is most at play in his ultra-humanism, the new universal religion of children and their human rights, which he sought to establish.

It is precisely his Jewish existential situatedness that motivated and afforded Korczak the ability to go beyond Polish humanism and create an innovative universal religion or kingdom of children. In this kingdom there would be no room for ethnic, national, religious, physical distinctions; and living in it would provide significant compensation and consolation to all those who were persecuted and oppressed because of their distinctiveness. In a very deep, perhaps hidden way, by devoting endless energy, creative power and effort to building a safe and life-constructing home for the world's children, Korczak also built such a home for himself.
Bibliography


(1978) *Writings-Volume 3 – The religion of childhood* (*Ketavim 5-Dat Ha’Yeled*), Z. Adar & D. Sadan (trans.), Tel-Aviv: Beit Lochemai Ha’getaot and Ha’Kibbutz Ha’meuchad (in Hebrew)

(1976) *Writings-Volume 2 – A childhood of respect* (*Ketavim 2 - Yaldut shel Kavod*), D. Sadan and S. Meltzer (trans.), Tel-Aviv: Beit Lochemai Ha’getaot and Ha’Kibbutz Ha’meuchad (in Hebrew)

(1974) *Writings-Volume 1 – With a child* (*Ketavim 1 - Im Ha’Yeled*), Z. Adar (trans.), Tel-Aviv: Beit Lochemai Ha’getaot and Ha’Kibbutz Ha’meuchad (in Hebrew)

(1972) *Writings-Volume 4 – From the Ghetto* (*Ketavim 4 - Min Ha’getto*), Z. Adar (trans.), Tel-Aviv: Beit Lochemai Ha’getaot and Ha’Kibbutz Ha’meuchad (in Hebrew)


Perlis, Y. (1986) *A Jewish man from Poland* (*Ish Yehudi me’Polin*), Tel-Aviv: Beit Lochemai Ha’getaot and Ha’Kibbutz Ha’meuchad (in Hebrew)
Sartre, J.P. (1988) *Existentialism is Humanism* (*Existentialism hu Humanism, Y.*
Golomb, trans.) Jerusalem: Carmel press (in Hebrew)
Silverman, Marc (2011) "Janusz Korczak’s life and legacy for Jewish education",
International handbook of Jewish education – Vol 1, L. Grant, H. Miller & A. Pomson (eds),
p. 143-162
approach and its relevance to education today”, *Studies in Jewish Education – Vol. XI*,
Jerusalem: Magnes press, p. 289-324
(2005) “Korczak’s anti-theory of education” (*Ha’anti teoria chinuchit shel janush korczak*) Educational deliberations – A collection of research papers in honor of
Shlomo Fox (*Ma’aseh be’chinuch: kovetz mechkarim le’chvod Shlomo Fox*) Jerusalem: Bialik
institute and Mandel institute for leadership, p. 210-229 (In Hebrew)
und Praxis*, Gutersloh: Gutersloher Verlagshaus, p. 45-67 (in German)
(1999) “How to lend respect to human others?: Janush Korczak’s humanist
pedagogy, *Be’shvilei Ha’zikaron* (Down the paths of memory) – No. 32, April-May/ Nis-san-Iyaar, p. 23-28 (in Hebrew)