

Why do we need fairy tales?

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Our society has been built on developing and changing, with the objective of increasing welfare and with the Nordic welfare states as our examples. Therefore, it is perhaps surprising to perceive that we increasingly hear thoughts from welfare states that cast a doubt on welfare as the so-called supreme and ultimate objective. Welfare is important, however, it does not equate to a person's happiness and inner sense of satisfaction. Perhaps in our world, which is oriented towards the external/visible, we have neglected the fact that man is first and foremost a spiritual being? A person's happiness is, to a large extent, determined by their mental health, which is an invisible quality, so to speak. Paradoxically, it is precisely in welfare states, where we see increasing problems with depression and lifestyle diseases (obesity, alcoholism, narcotics dependency).

One of the problems with welfare, which also has a lot of positive aspects, is that from a welfare theory standpoint, a person is led by biological aspects: a person, who is seeking a sense of satisfaction and wellbeing in this approach is no different from all other animals. This approach has gotten a lot of criticism from Nordic thinkers in particular, for example, the Finnish cultural critic Jari Ernrooth. The Norwegian philosopher Lars F.H. Svendsen has also written in his book *A Philosophy of Boredom* that only satisfying external welfare and (biological) needs leads a person to suffering boredom. Svendsen notes/ To paraphrase Svendsen, "The problem is that we try to overcome that boredom by piling up newer and stronger experiences, instead of leaving ourselves time to experience things. [...] All novelty quickly becomes a routine, which is followed by being "bored of the news, bored of experiences, which are always one and the same, and behind the false differences of thoughts everything is so intolerably one and the same"."

What is the problem? It seems that we have forgotten that man is first and foremost a spiritual being. That is what makes a man different from animals (from a biological existence) as well as artificial intelligence, which is better than a man in a lot of technical aspects – a person needs the chance to develop mentally, spiritually. Why doesn't AI laugh just for fun? Because joking and laughter are useless activities, if you consider rational and indicators of optimal performance. This is because machines are not equipped with conscience, psychology, and a need for mental development. Man, however, needs conceptualising, developing, new challenges. Unlike machines, man also needs a sense of security, meaningfulness and value systems.

Although AI and machines that are taking over jobs are necessary (and already a reality), especially in Estonia, where we hope to relieve labour force shortcomings with their help, interpretation done by humans is still needed.

Machines (AI) do not have a system of values, which regulates human society. This continues to be the realm of humans. In addition, at least for now, machines are not capable of creative thought. Humans give them creative input. Therefore, global trends on the labour market increasingly value creativeness. In leading industry, scientists are expected to exhibit more creativity and ideas than practical solutions. "Why does science mean more to society today than ever before?" asks Peter Lee, one of the leaders of Microsoft Research, and goes on to answer, "Because research based on curiosity is a long-term investment. Practical applications do not always have to be the drivers of vision. Instead, the task of science should be to extend the sphere of knowledge, so that new and useful products could sprout on that extended ground."

Creativity presents at its best, when a person's intellectual development has been fostered and consistent, if it has been taken into account from the beginning that a person's basic skills are connected to their mental development, which is in turn dependent on the humanities. In an

economically centred world of research, however, the role of humanities has become increasingly marginal, however, that is where the keys to success are hidden. Also, language has a determining role in fully realising the potential of creativity. For example, the mental development of a child is measured precisely by their linguistic capability. In addition, a person who is adept in their native language is incomparably more capable of abstract thought and verbalising their ideas than a person with limited linguistic ability. Another remarkably important factor is reading (literature). Estonian schools have shown outstanding results in functional reading skills, where students are asked to connect ideas and use creative thought in interpreting the works. All the same, despite this, there have been several occasions, where school libraries have been replaced by drone building classes. Although one doesn't rule out the other, replacing one with the other is a step in the wrong direction.

Humanities, especially literature, have an remarkably important role in developing empathy, in being able to connect ideas, and in developing concentration skills.

Abstract thought helps a person make connections and draw conclusions. This is a thought process that a person needs on a daily basis, from simply setting in place the logistics of a daily plan to more complicated decisions, such as which party to elect or which profession to choose. Abstract thought helps a person imagine what will happen if they decide to behave in one way or another. It helps understand processes in a person's life and in the society that surrounds them, form an opinion of them, and thereby also influence them. The less we have the kinds of people, who are capable of imagining the consequences of their decisions, processes and actions, the greater the mass of those, who are easy to manipulate. The easier it is to manipulate the masses, the less a society needs new ideas and noble thought. The more that society moves towards the primitive, regresses, deteriorates.

Literature means storytelling, which helps a person perceive narrativity. The identity of each person is composed of stories. A person is the sum of all the memories and characteristics, through which they determine their selves. A person without memory seemingly doesn't exist. Stories create identity for individuals as well as whole civilisations. The human need to tell stories and listen is ancient. This need has not been generated artificially – it is there all by itself and it will continue to exist, despite external changes in the world. Reading and storytelling also involves vocabulary, whose richness is impacted to a large extent by how wide a person's view of the world is.

From time to time, it is useful to recall the words of Neil Gaiman, who said, "I was once in New York, and I listened to a talk about the building of private prisons – a huge growth industry in America. The prison industry needs to plan its future growth – how many cells are they going to need? How many prisoners are there going to be, 15 years from now? And they found they could predict it very easily, using a pretty simple algorithm, based on asking what percentage of 10 and 11-year-olds couldn't read. And certainly couldn't read for pleasure."

Neuroscience research studies have shown that reading literature develops a person's empathy, imagination, and it is related to their social capability, or in other words, skills for coping in life. Literature is unique because the process of reading allows a person to create a completely unique *umwelt* or a world of their own, to inhabit the characters in a way that is not offered by any other branch of the arts. Yes, we do feel for film characters, we are emotionally touched by music and the arts. However, nothing can quite live up to the impact of reading and literature. Let us also recall Einstein, who, when asked about how to raise kids to be intelligent, replied, "If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales."

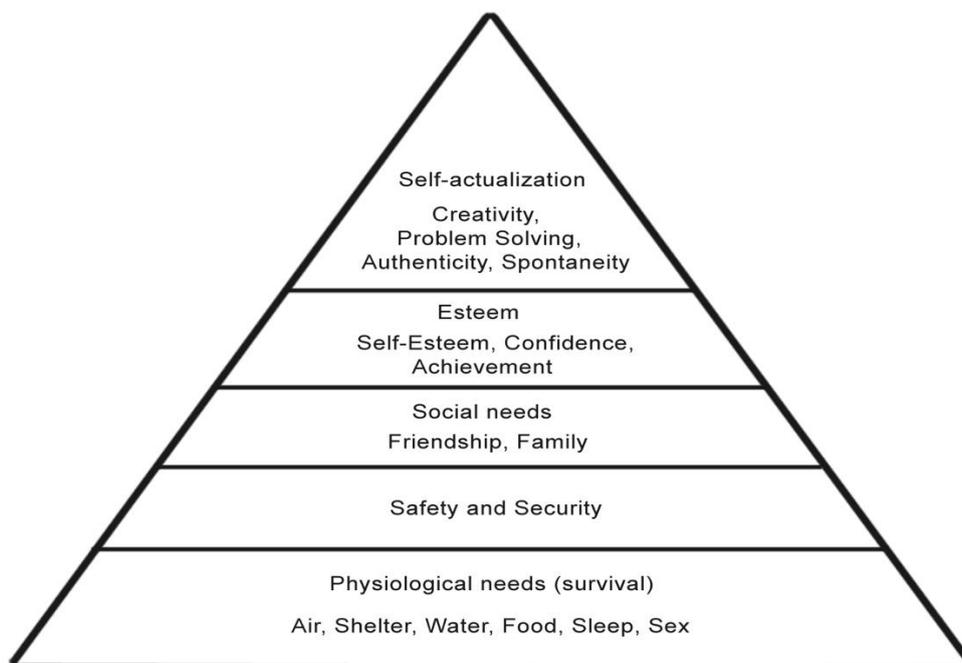
Therefore, when reforming the school systems, we should be very conservative especially when it comes to literature courses and other humanities – the ability to concentrate, read pithy text, analyse and interpret it, and create connections – these skills are the best

foundation for entering higher education, being successful in life and being capable of participating in lifelong learning – in mental self-development.

Education can't necessarily prepare people for concrete, real life work tasks. However, when it happens on a fertile ground of knowledge, creation, curiosity and a good work ethic, it can help raise the kinds of people, who will be masters and the *avant guard*. These are the people, who will invent something new, can find new solutions, and manage various tasks that require mental independence.

When we focus most of our attention on physical wellbeing (functioning as comfortably as possible), we reduce humans to machines. When a person becomes a machine, they develop automatic reactions. As Tammsaare wrote already in 1915, "In inventing and building machines, man has become a machine himself, has taken on the soul, morals and religion of a machine. That could usher in a serious new era, because then we wouldn't be looking for man in life, art and religion, but only the machine. Science and literature then would be like a rotary printing press. The pains of labour would then be rolled onto the wheels of machines, and many a man would painstakingly muse over how to invent a human machine, because the smell of a nursery is off-putting to a woman. Man would then be a little, minute slave, who would listen only to the words of machines on land and on sea, below land and sea, and above in the air. A human being cannot become a cogwheel in a society machine. Hence the conflicts between the leaders and the led. Because a leader hasn't risen yet, who would stop the vicious cycle of technology, which also chisels away at man, making him nothing more than a cogwheel. Quite the opposite: all leaders have tried using machines to make a man into a machine. Whole peoples are chiselled into one large machine. Is this really man's salvation?"

The answer, of course, is no. A man's so-called salvation lies in their wish to develop, to find mental challenges and wellbeing, as well as harmony in their soul. In this, a person's sense of security plays an important role. In Maslow's famous pyramid of needs, it places second, right after the fulfilment of physiological needs.



The need for self-actualisation, which has been set atop the pyramid, has turned out to be closely connected to that sense of security below. Security, in turn, is connected to identity. People with a strong cultural identity are happier than people, who don't know who they are, where they come from and where they belong. A strong sense of identity comes, of course, foremost from the family, but also to a significant extent from the surrounding cultural environment.

Here, I would like to paraphrase psychotherapist Tommy Hellsten, who for years has had to treat people with broken souls. To paraphrase him, "for decades, we have severed the connecting threads of close relationships from around a person. People have moved from the countryside to cities. Old village societies no longer exist. Ties between generations and relatives have become very loose. Families have become smaller consumer units and homes have become accommodation. Daily communication means have become technical in nature and they have become a performance of a kind. In a wider perspective, the institution of marriage is being demolished. Long-term couple relationships are rare. The number of single mothers and fathers is increasing, there are no viable small communities, what's left is the smallest possible unit: the individual. In our world, that individual has to be able to create his or her own identity, grow roots, and find a meaning for their life. At the same time, a person has to learn how to manage in our multifaceted world all on his or her own. That is an impossible task. [---] We are building a society that no longer serves to help humanity win. We are acting like fools: with great noise we are building a culture into which we no longer fit ourselves."

So that people wouldn't be uprooted from their homes, we have to look at humans differently than functions. The most important skills for a person are being humane and emphatic, and that develops hand-in-hand with a person's mental development. In a lot of ways, the educational landscape is the key that, to a great extent, determines which kinds of children later transition into adult life and what kinds of residents we will have in our counties, cities, and villages.