



What Do You Hold Dear? A Little Book About Values and Philosophy

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non-fiction

Age: 5+

What does a deference of life really mean? What words describe your friendship the best? What are the similarities and differences between genders? Why can't a society function without care and solidarity? What would world look like if everyone would be and feel exactly the same? What makes a homeland and a mothers tongue so precious to a person?

These themes are explained in stories through everyday situations, followed by questions meant to help contemplation and a short philosophical essay for grown-ups.







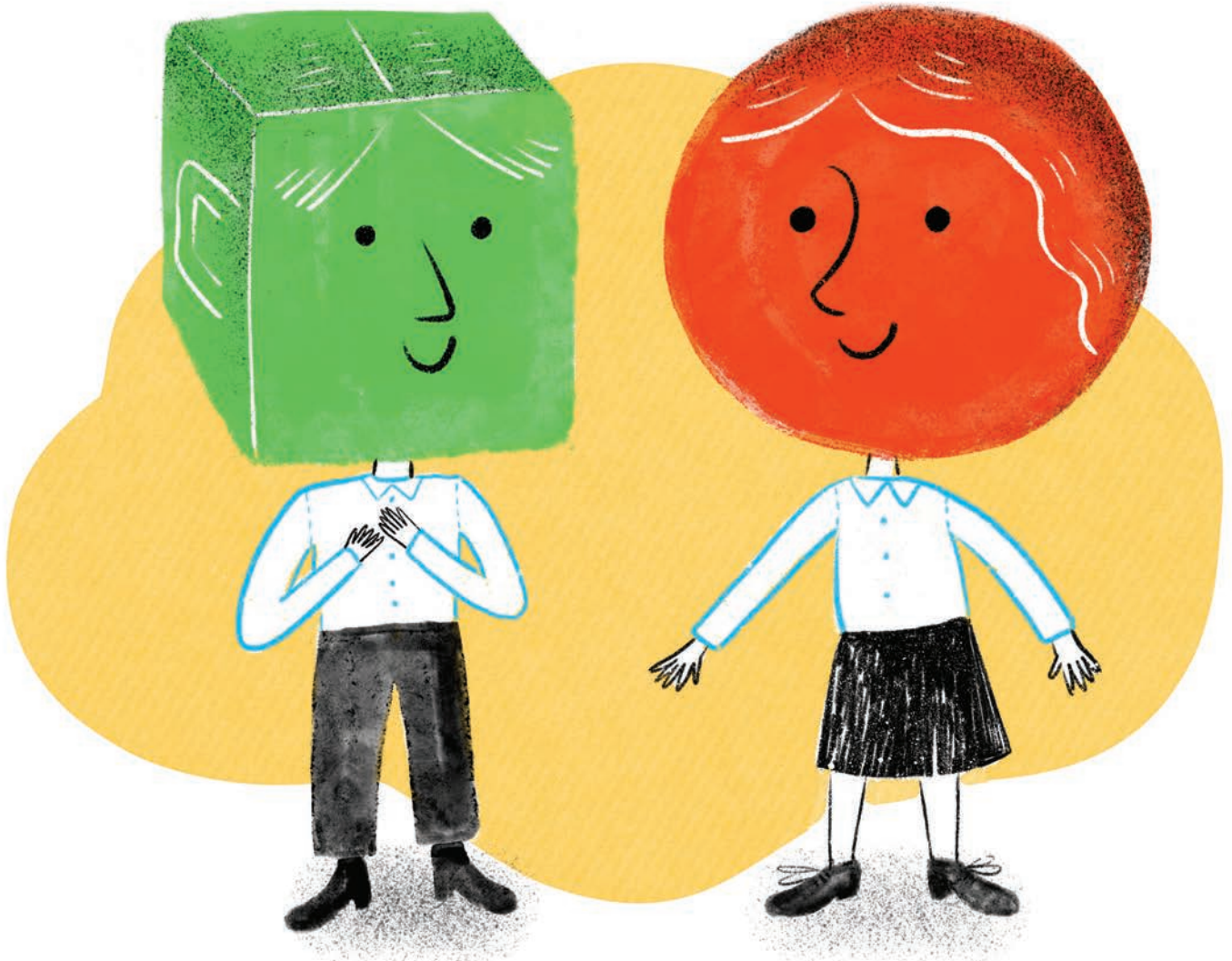
An Invisible Treasure

Sphere was excited. It was her first day of first grade! She would be going to school with other little spheres, cubes, and interesting shapes. She'd learn how to read and write and would make new friends!

Waiting in front of the classroom was their teacher Ms. Cone, who warmly shook the hand of every student as they entered.

"Welcome to school!" she said. "Come on in, little Sphere!"





The room was already buzzing with young shapes. Then, Sphere spotted a funny kid who was all straight lines. He had green eyes, a buzz cut, and big ears.

“Hi! What’s your name?” she asked curiously. “I’m Sphere!”

“Um . . . hi. I’m Cube,” he answered shyly. He looked very glad to have someone to talk to. When Cube smiled, his whole face lit up. Sphere had a

funny feeling like they'd known each other for ages.

"Do you want to be my friend?" she asked eagerly.

Cube's cheeks turned pink.

"I sure do," he replied softly.

"Then you and I will share a desk. We'll be bench-mates!"

Sphere and Cube were like two peas in a pod from the very first day. They walked to school together in the morning and walked back together after class. Whenever Cube forgot his pencil at home, Sphere would lend her own. Whenever Sphere was sad after getting into an argument with her mom, Cube would tell funny stories to cheer his friend up. Although they also played and did projects with other students, Cube and Sphere knew they could always count on each other.



The school year flew by, and summer arrived. Sphere went to spend the months with her grandma and grandpa in the countryside. Cube and his parents went on a trip abroad.



Finally, autumn arrived. The rowan berries were turning red. Birds perched on the electrical wires and practiced long flights every day, readying to migrate south. One beautiful morning, Sphere set off towards school, wearing a brand-new backpack. She was thrilled to be a second-grader and see Cube and all her classmates again!



The sun was shining and the school door was standing wide open. Crowded together, the second-grade students were chatting happily. Each couldn't wait to tell the others all the amazing things they'd done over the summer.

As Sphere joined the bunch, Prism skipped over to her.

"Wow, what a cool backpack you've got!" Prism said.

"Yeah, my aunt brought it back for me when she went traveling!" Sphere explained.

"That's such a sweet dog on it. Dogs are my favorite!" Prism exclaimed.

Suddenly, she proposed: "How 'bout being my bench-mate this year?"

Sphere really liked the idea. Then, she noticed Cube coming over.

“Hi, Cube!” Sphere squeaked. “How was your summer? Hey, so, Prisma is going to be my bench-mate this year. Don’t let it get you down – we’ll sit together again next year!”

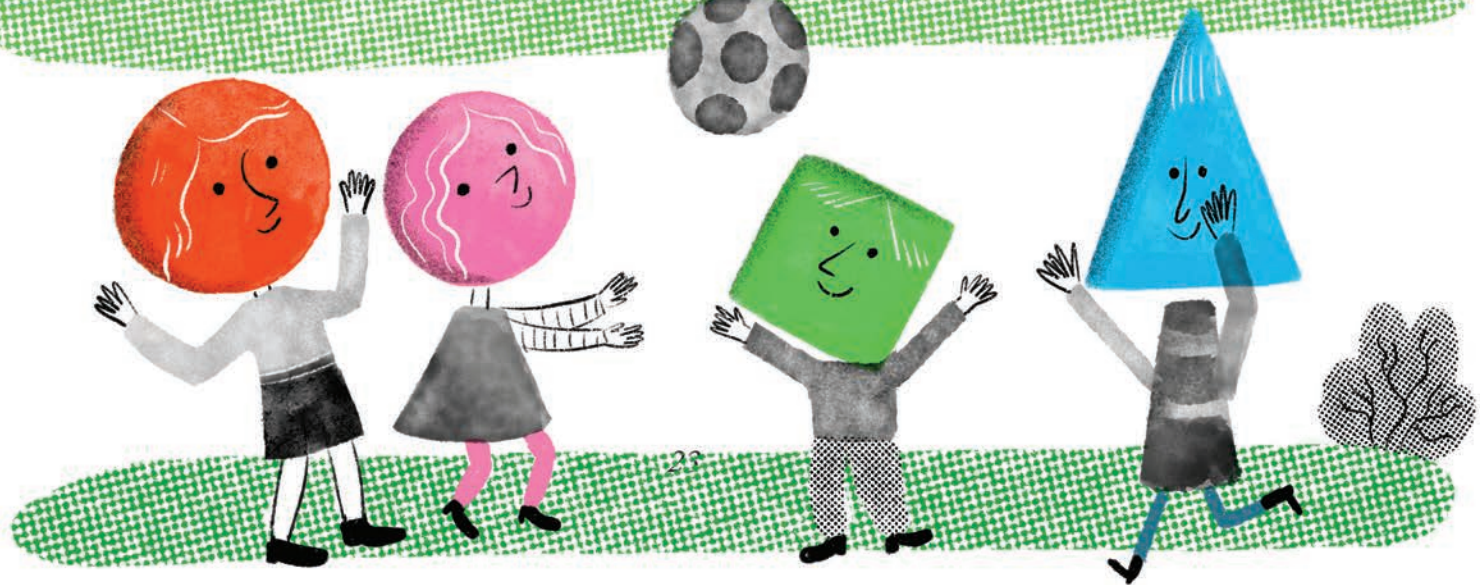
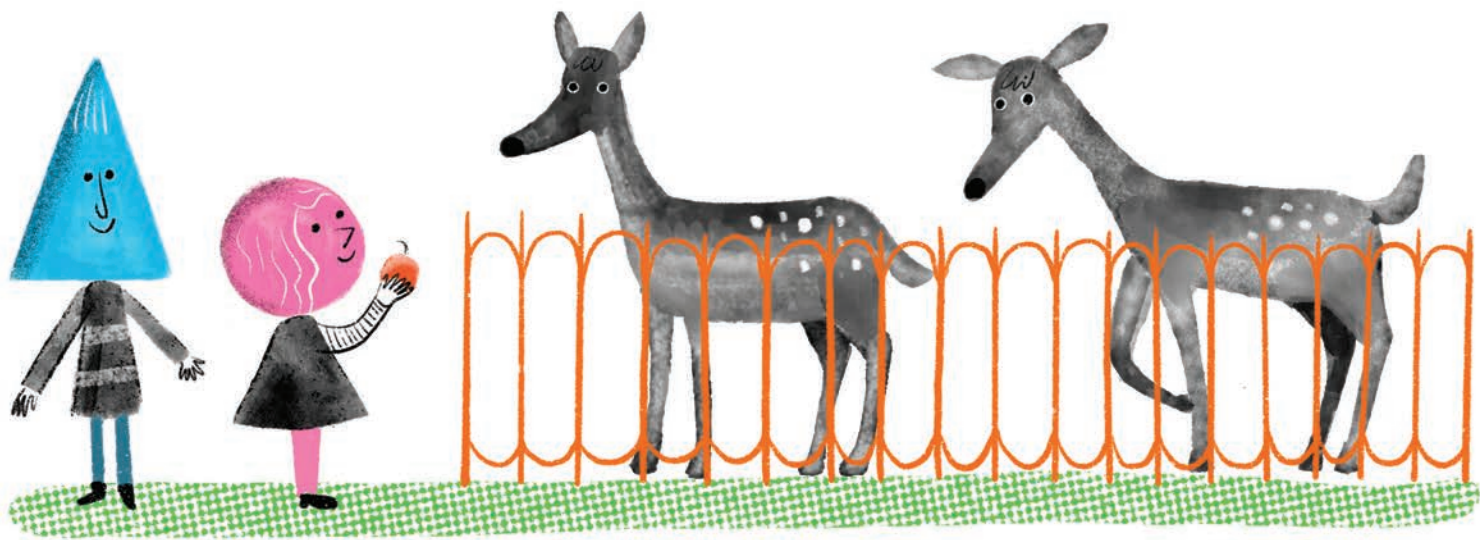
Sphere waved and turned back to Prisma to share her summer stories. She didn’t see Cube freeze in place and slump, his mouth hanging open. Second grade passed almost as quickly as the first year. Cube found himself a new bench-mate, too—Cylinder.

Every day, the students learned new and fascinating things. Ms. Cone took them on field trips to the zoo and to go hiking, and they played ball outside during every recess. Before they knew it, summer came and long-awaited school break was at hand.

Third grade awaited after all the fun-packed warm and sunny days were over. The rowan berries were reddening again, and gigantic flocks of birds were preparing to travel south.

Sphere felt a little nervous on the first day of school. She’d promised Cube that they would be bench-mates again and was very glad she had! Sitting next to Prism wasn’t actually as wonderful as she’d hoped. Prism was way too braggy. Over the school year, they’d found less and less to talk about and occasionally got into arguments.

She quickened her pace. How fantastic it’d be to sit next to Cube again!



He was her very best friend, after all!

As Sphere spotted her classmates, all a little taller and tanned by the summer sunshine, her heart was filled with happiness.

“Hey there, Cube!” she shouted to her friend, who was standing by Cylinder and chatting about something. “We’re back to being bench-mates again!” Cube glanced at her and shook his head.

“But Sphere, I already have a bench-mate,” he said, stepping closer to Cylinder. “Prism is your bench-mate now.”

Do you know what it feels like to realize you’ve lost something dear to you?

Sphere spun around so he wouldn’t see her wipe a tear from the corner of her eye, and went to join her bench-mate Prism.



What Do You Think?

1. What was the treasure that Sphere lost?
2. Why did Cube slump when Sphere told him she'd found a new bench-mate?
3. What should you do to be a good friend?
4. Are you someone's very good friend right now?
5. Choose the words that you think best describe friendship

loyalty

caring

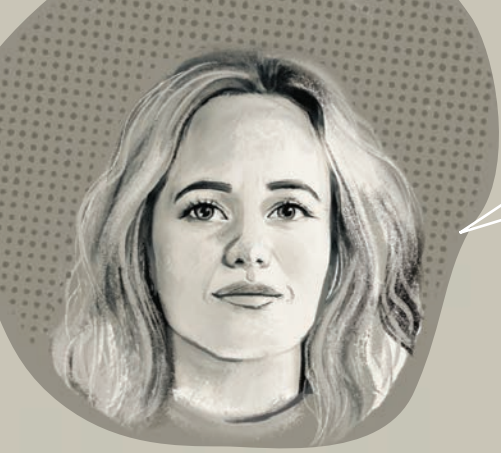
indifference

understanding

superficiality

specialness

Why did you choose those words? What other words would you use to describe friendship?



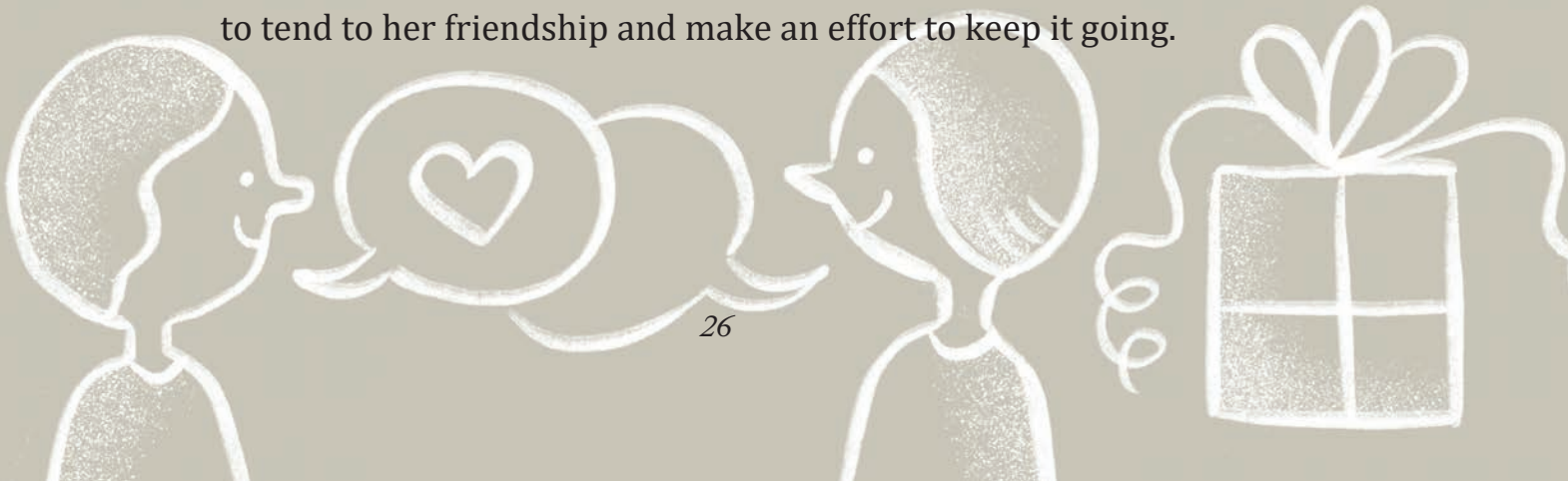
*A Philosopher's
Comment*

Friendship

Friendship is one of the most important values there are. It's been a favorite subject of storytellers, singers, and poets for millennia.

More than two thousand years ago, the ancient Roman thinker and politician Cicero wrote that friendship improves happiness and abates misery because it doubles joys and divides grief. One old Estonian folk saying has more or less the same message: "A shared problem is half a problem; shared happiness is double."

Friendship means being honest and respectful. It means appreciating your friend, caring for them, and being loyal. Although friends can have many differences, they're not more important than the friendship itself. Friends can be different ages, have different statuses, and be at different levels of income, but they're still equal in their friendship. Whereas love can be one-sided, friendship must be mutual. In the story about Sphere and Cube, Sphere realized too late that she needed to tend to her friendship and make an effort to keep it going.



Friendship cannot be bought. Nor can you buy the right friends. Even if one tries, they'll soon find out it's an oxymoron, i.e. something at odds with itself.

We're able to pick our friends. One may place more expectations upon a friend, but there are also more responsibilities compared with simple acquaintances or relatives. You do not betray friends, do not lie to them, and do not act carelessly towards them. You expect a friend to make time to spend together and hope they will show understanding, emotional support, and honest feedback. The time we spend with friends and the shared experiences we have bind us together through memories.





The Crane Operator, the Baker, and the Gentleman

“Let’s pretend I’m a crane operator! What are you going to be?”

Pille and Tom were sitting on a rug and surrounded by a whole city made of blocks.

“Girls can’t work cranes!” Tom argued. “Ladies, either!”

“Ha!” Pille snorted. “So, who can girls and ladies be, then?”

Tom thought for a moment.

“Well . . . kindergarten teachers, for one. Cashiers. Hair stylists.”

Tom and his mom had recently gone to a hair salon, where he’d seen several stylists skillfully snipping scissors and using hair dryers. All of them were women.



“But I don’t want to play hair stylist,” Pille argued. “Or cashier! I want to build buildings with a crane! I think that’s cool.”

“Fine,” Tom agreed as he handed her his big, impressive toy crane.

“And you know what? My uncle Alar is a hair stylist, even though he’s a man and has lots of tattoos!”

The kids made their city even bigger. Pille used the crane to lift blocks while Tom pretended to drive a concrete truck.

“Every city should have a café!” Tom suddenly exclaimed. “I’m going to build one and then, we can pretend I’m a baker who makes lots of tasty pastries.”

Now, it was Pille’s turn to think for a moment.

“My daddy never makes pastries at home,” she said doubtfully.

“Well, my daddy knows how to bake cakes and makes us pancakes every Sunday morning,” Tom announced proudly. “I’ve got no problem making cinnamon rolls for the café.”

Pille realized it could be a very fun game – this way, she would be the customer!

They set a couple of chairs across from each other to make a counter. Tom went to the kitchen to fetch two cups and two saucers, which he used to serve raisin buns he found in the breadbox.

“Hi!” Pille said. “I’d like one cinnamon roll, please. And also, one big cup of coffee with cream!”



“Here you go!” Tom said, pretending to fill Pille’s cup. “These buns are very tasty – I baked them myself! Two euros, please.”

Pille pretended to pay for the coffee and the raisin bun.

Both were having fun playing café. Pille took a turn behind the counter, selling Tom a pastry and a glass of lemonade.

At that moment, Tom’s coal-black cat Kiisu padded into the room. Pille came up with a new idea.

“Let’s play house!” she suggested. “I’ll be the mom, you’ll be the dad, and your cat Kiisu will be our baby.”

So, they played house for a while.

“Whose turn is it to change the baby’s diaper?” Tom asked.





“Your turn, daddy! I’ve got to go rest for a little while because the baby was up all night crying.”

Tom tried pretending to put diapers on Kiisu, but the cat squirmed free and scampered into the kitchen.

“What do you say we go see a play tonight, Daddy?” Pille asked.

“Nah, let’s go to a rock concert instead,” Tom proposed. He went and brought Pille’s coat from the entryway.

“I can put it on myself,” Pille protested when he tried to rest it onto her shoulders.

“Sure you can!” Tom said cheerfully. “But I’m just being polite. My daddy always helps my mommy put her coat on. Because he’s a . . . um . . . gen-tle-man. A gentleman, yeah. And he carries all the heavy grocery bags because he’s bigger and stronger than Mommy!”

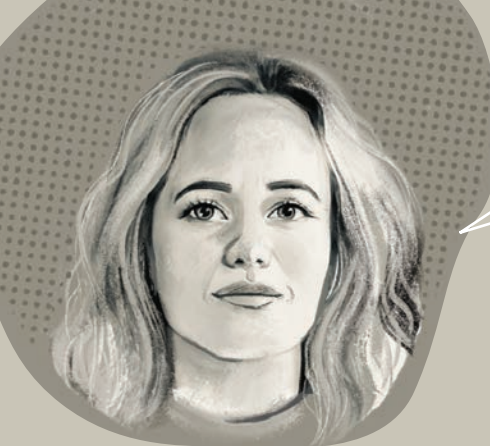
Pille liked that Tom was a gentleman. She let him help her put her coat on, smiled, and gave him a little peck on the cheek.



The page features several large, watercolor-style speech bubbles in shades of pink, red, and blue, scattered around the text. The bubbles have soft, textured edges and small tails pointing towards the text.

What Do You Think?

1. Do you think women might be better at some jobs or careers? Which ones, and why?
2. Do you think some jobs or careers are better fit for men? Which ones, and why?
3. Can boys cry? Can girls play football? Why do you think so?
4. What do boys and girls have in common?



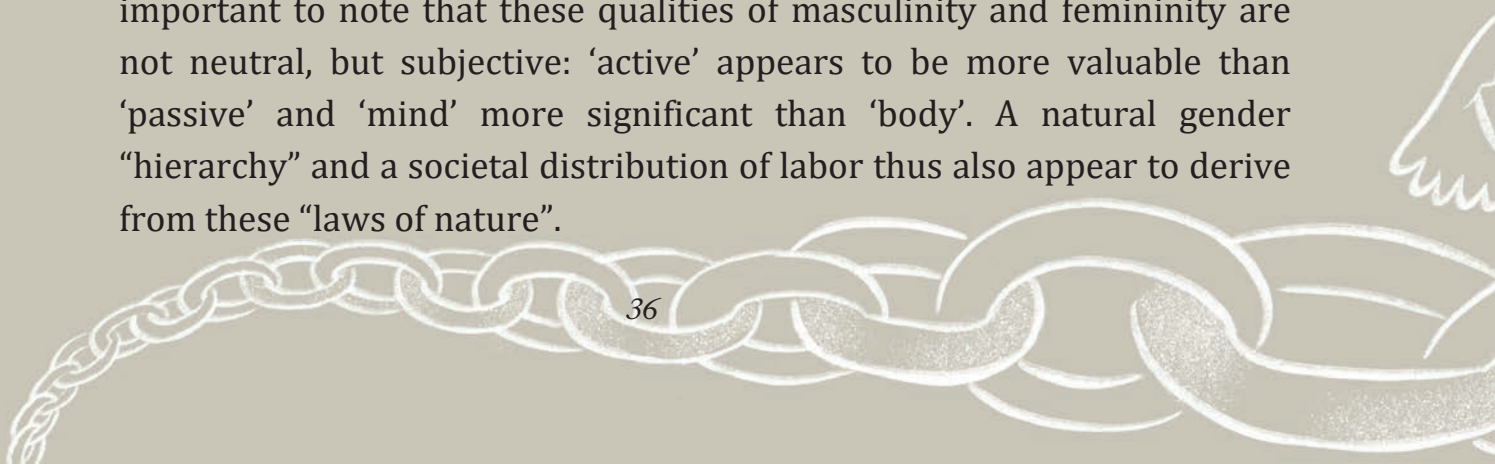
*A Philosopher's
Comment*

Gender Equality

Gender roles bind biological gender (i.e. whether one is born male or female) and the behavioral standards for men and women that are widespread in a society. The engenderment of gender roles is influenced by biological differences such as women's ability to give birth and men's greater physical strength. However, societal norms, such as those that derive from culture or religion, are also very important as they determine which jobs and behaviors are more "fitting" for men and for women.

Several millennia ago, ancient Greek philosophers recorded their understandings of the nature of men and women. These remain the foundation of Western culture and worldviews and influence us to this day. For example: Aristoteles associated men and masculinity to intelligence, activity, and motion, but linked women and femininity to sensuality, passivity, and physicality.

At the time, such classifications seemed natural and to emerge from the laws of the natural world itself: both genders had a "predetermined" trajectory, along which they developed and progressed. However, it is important to note that these qualities of masculinity and femininity are not neutral, but subjective: 'active' appears to be more valuable than 'passive' and 'mind' more significant than 'body'. A natural gender "hierarchy" and a societal distribution of labor thus also appear to derive from these "laws of nature".



If you take a quick glance around the world, however, it turns out that biological dissimilarities are often interpreted differently from culture to culture. Chinese, Nigerian, Canadian, and Maori peoples believe that men and women are biologically quite similar, for instance. At the same time, their notions of masculinity and femininity – as well as the jobs “suited” for one gender or another – are very different.

Presently, we enjoy a great deal of freedom while acting in our gender roles and choosing careers, all thanks to a mindset that upholds individual liberties. Here in Estonia, we believe that Pille can make her own decision whether to become a crane operator or not.

If it is our conviction that social norms have a powerful impact on gender roles, then it is possible to see them as dynamic – that they change and can be changed; they are not preordained. Parental leave is one good example. Whereas only women used to stay at home with their babies, the Estonian system now allows the father to also take time off work and raise his infant. And dads pushing strollers around themselves has become an ordinary sight on local sidewalks! Just as refreshing as it is to see female doctors, politicians, and police officers, not to mention the growing number of male nurses and kindergarten teachers.

