Tell me! The right of the child to information
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A thesis is a story, or to use a modern word: a narrative. As is the case with all narratives, it is told within a certain context: the academic world. This context, like all others, makes demands on the narrative, which result in limitations on what can be told and how it is told. However, these limitations also qualify the narrative, because it can be retold and be verified by the academic audience.

An article about children's rights gave rise to the theme of this thesis. It provoked indignation and old feelings of injustice experienced as a child and analysed during the study of law. The article contained different aspects of children’s rights and the slow or incomplete recognition of children as human beings in almost every domain of social life. These images developed into a story which preceded the work on this thesis. Therefore, the story should have its rightful place as a prologue.

A child was born and grew up. He looked at his parents, his family and friends. He saw the many things that were bought to comfort his life. He thought of his games, adventures and the things he had discovered. He knew that there were children who were not able to play, who did not have comfort, because they were ill, lived in poor circumstances, or were separated from their family by war. Even in his own neighbourhood, he noticed the differences in the way certain children and their families were treated. He himself experienced difficulties because of his appearance. He also discovered that even when people were affluent they would inevitably get ill, once and a while, and ultimately grow old and die. Of all the many questions that were floating around in his mind, there was one that came directly from his heart: Why am I living? He pondered on the purpose of living in these changing and inequitable circumstances. This question was so all-pervading that he felt that if he did not get a satisfying answer he might as well stop living. He intended to ask this question to every human being he met. But, as he wanted to be sure to get an honest answer, he invoked the help of a judge to have his case and question decided before a court. And so a judicial proceeding began in which he accused his parents of having brought him into this world, without a clear aim. All kinds of other people were also called to court and had to be present in order to defend themselves for being alive, to explain the purpose of life. Life itself was taken to court.

His parents were quite desperate to answer his question. They did not want to lose their child. They explained how they really had longed to have him and were proud that he was their child, bearing their name and belonging to their family. They were trying hard to give him all the opportunities to develop himself, so that he would get a good job and have a better life than they had. Hopefully he would

later find a partner for life and have a family himself. So they tried to set a good example for him in order to prepare him for his later role as partner and parent. Although life was sometimes difficult, it was worth living because caring for each other and taking care of their child enabled them to overcome life's difficulties.

The teacher was quite surprised at the unusual question of the child, but noted the intensely serious eyes of the child and realised the depth of it. So he said that life was interesting. There were so many things to know. He would teach, for example, about people in different times, as explained in history, or about people in other countries, one might travel to. The child could learn to write in his native language and to speak in other languages. It was useful learning to count, so he could start his own business later on, or become an architect, creating houses and buildings. There were so many things to find out about life, that his school-time was not enough. However, the child would be able to teach himself, by buying books, going to the library or attending interesting courses. Life was so full of interesting things, nobody would ever get tired of asking questions about it.

The politician hardly ever had contact with children in his professional life. A question posed by a child made the politician shy. But, he remembered his own childhood and the dream he had about being a powerful man. So he explained how important life was, as one could do so many good things for others. He could help people to get good housing, or good public transport or a clean and attractive environment. Yet, one needed, first of all, power before problems could be resolved. Therefore, it was important in life to strive for relations with many people, especially those who were already in power or were working for the media. By serving the powerful, one could serve the powerless and become well-known.

The businessman did not have much difficulty in answering the child's question about the meaning of life. He found it a challenge to buy at a low price and to sell at a higher price. Business life was an adventure, finding new products and selling them, with all kinds of means, to an ever broader public. The most interesting point was that this business was no longer limited to just one country. He had to travel a lot to build up new business or to establish new connections. Nevertheless, the ultimate aim was to make profit. The more profit gained, the better life was.

A programme-maker was quick in making clear the purpose of life. For him, it was important to laugh. The task was to have time to relax and have fun. Maybe to learn something too, but without effort and in an attractive form. As there were so many boring and sad things, or things that provoked aggression, it was a good thing to have a possibility to let things go, to escape from the difficulties and problems, which always arose. Considering life in this way, life was amusing.

The priest was very happy about the child’s question. It was precisely the core of his life to explain to others how to live and to act, in order to lead a good life and be judged by a supreme being, who had in fact given life to every human being. The purpose of life was to follow precepts, to study holy texts and to be merciful to one’s fellow men. Yet, some others could not restrain themselves. According to some of them, there was no supreme being, but only self-responsibility. A human being should live in accordance with the universe, and follow the rhythm of nature. One of them said that the purpose of one’s life was to extinguish it.

The sick and handicapped man was called upon to speak. For him, life meant
health. The most important thing was to live healthy, by doing sports or jogging, eating healthy food and using the right medicines. He himself had not been lucky and was unhealthy. He sometimes wondered whether it was because of a sin or a genetic disease. But, he had found out that it was best to accept things as they are. Nevertheless, he looked for the doctor who could find a satisfying treatment to relief his suffering.

The dying man was willing to take up the question of the child. He recognised in it something of his own pondering during the last days. All his life he had been busy, he had worked very hard and gained much success. Although he was not an easy person, he was beloved by his few friends. Life seemed to be over; it was no use to look for wealth and success. Life was worthwhile if, at your deathbed you had a friend to share the precious hours and help you to bear the fear of letting go of all that had been so valuable.

The lawyer spoke easily as he felt at home in the court-room. As there was much suffering in the lives of people, it was important to do justice. To act righteously was not easy as there were always conflicts of interests, but one could be guided by the law. Law was intended to do justice, especially to protect those who needed it. So the main purpose was to create public order in society. Those who challenged this order were judged righteously and condemned if necessary. As a barrister, he would nevertheless do his utmost to find loopholes to defend his client. The defence of justice made life valuable.

After so many voices, it fell silent in the court-room. The child looked at the judge who remained silent, as if thinking for himself. People had given so many different responses to the questions: Why am I living? What is the purpose of life? They all had given their own story. The only clear answer the child had received was, that he had to find out for himself. This seemed to be the solution everyone else had found thus far. They had grown up and somehow found a way of life. These grown-ups did not give him much comfort. How would he become a grown-up, how could he find out about it and how would he know that he had not been betrayed? The judge saw his distress and said: ‘In spite of all these witnesses, your question remains; there is little I can do, but as a human being you are protected and sustained by human rights. Therefore, wherever you seek, you will be supported: you have a right to information.’