



Deeper Magic: Re-engaging the Virtues in School and Parish¹

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ABSTRACT

This essay argues that modern society lacks a vision of the common good, which prevents education from having an adequate *telos* or goal. It calls for a restoration of the language of virtue and the ethical tradition of Aristotle and Aquinas. The Anglican parish and the church primary or elementary school are examined as sites where virtue ethics is still active: particularly in the intercessory work of parish prayer, and in the mimetic approach to learning employed with younger children. The article then addresses ways in which these institutions depend upon what C.S. Lewis called 'deeper magic' of a transcendent reality, and ways in which the school especially might develop further a pedagogy of the virtues using J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter stories as exemplars. Finally, it argues for a dimension of the beautiful in a recovery of an education in Christian virtue.

KEYWORDS: virtue, virtue ethics, education, parish, church school, J.K. Rowling, Harry Potter

This essay is a small response to a great problem, which is evident in many aspects of our public life today: that is, how can we have values in our common life? Indeed, it speaks to an even deeper question: how can we have any common life at all? We live, as we are all aware, in societies dominated by neo-liberal markets, all-powerful and disdaining any

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moral claims save the value of freedom, a freedom that inheres in the market mechanism itself while enslaving those who work within it, such as those in Britain, for example, who work on zero-hours contracts. And we have in the United Kingdom as elsewhere a government that is also somewhat value-free, in that it offers itself as administrative and procedural rather than as a holder of the common good. The 'Big Society' ideal that the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition claimed to aim at in its early days has long disappeared, and although the Labour opposition is using Disraeli's language of 'one nation' this is somehow to be achieved without disturbing the freedom of the market.³

In Britain there is also something of a crisis in our education system, which has similarly been opened to the market, although it is constantly looked to for an answer to social inequalities, economic failures and familial breakdown. At the school level, wave upon wave of government changes in examination and assessment, inspection and organization pass over the heads of weary teachers. These forces tend towards the very thing they seek to avoid – a lowering of standards in so far as what is sought in examination is very limited, targeted pieces of information, and a skills base that is transferrable, so that content is lessened at the same time as analysis and originality. At the university level academics find real difficulty in introducing well-qualified students to the idea of reading a whole book, let alone making arguments from their own reading. And academics too are equally pressured in the direction of the commodification of education by their own administration and by market forces.

It is my contention that one important and common factor behind these realities is a loss of the language of virtue and character from educational and public discourse. As Alasdair MacIntyre argued in *After Virtue*:

The best type of human life, that in which the tradition of the virtues is most adequately embodied, is lived by those engaged in constructing and sustaining forms of community directed towards the shared achievement of those common goods without which the ultimate human good cannot be achieved. Liberal political societies are characteristically committed to denying any place for a determinative conception of the human good in their public discourse, let alone allowing that their common life should be grounded in such a conception.⁴

3. Ed Miliband's 'One Nation' speech of 9 July 2013 is available at <http://www.labour.org.uk/one-nation-politics-speech> (accessed 30 January 2014).

4. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Bloomsbury, 3rd edn, 2007), p. xv.

It is true that the shiny new academies of Britain are often decorated with banners of moral truism: 'be the best that you can be!' for example, but it is noticeable how general such mottos tend to be. The best what, one might ask? Success and achievement are words used frequently but apart from examination grades, they lack any thick reality. For in order to offer a vision to students – a *telos* to use the language of Aristotle – there has to be some idea of the content of such an aim, as well as an aim that has inherent authority in itself: an excellence intrinsic to it. But how are we in our relativist multicultural society to find such authority? Are we not now just competing interest groups?

Perhaps the democratic system itself is our authority? How much real choice does the democratic system offer us, when government itself serves the market as a priest serves his idol? It can call out the language of morality, as when politicians have recourse to a call for 'fairness', but who is to decide what is fair? How does that fairness relate to distributive or commutative models of justice? How can democracy as such be our ultimate authority since it is possible for a majority of people to choose a bad leader?

Historically, as MacIntyre has made us aware, ethical systems depended on traditions, common narratives of what the good life consisted in, and how one conducted one's own life within this story. They were not monolithic, static structures: 'when an institution – a university, say, or a farm, or a hospital – is the bearer of a tradition of practice or practices, its common life will be partly, but in a centrally important way, constituted by a continuous argument as to what a university is and ought to be or what good farming is or what good medicine is'.⁵ Such questioning may be by means of the practices themselves rather than public debate but in either case there is an opening to a concept of a shared excellence. There has to be some concept of a common good for there to be a virtue ethic at all. The loss of such a shared good was made plain in the 2013 battle over President Obama's reforms in the field of public medicine in the American House of Representatives, both in the content of the disagreement and its mode of tactics, by which certain Republicans sought to shut down public services by refusing to pass the government budget. It was ironic that the religious Tea Party group used these tactics because the concept of the common good was very much a Christian idea, invoked as early as the fourth century by John Chrysostom, and which became central to mediaeval Thomism and later the revival of Catholic Social Teaching in

5. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 221.

the twentieth century.⁶ With a common root in Aristotle and Plato, it has versions in Islam, in Judaism, and also in eastern faiths such as Buddhism and Hinduism. It was used in the intercession of the Anglican Alternative Service Book of 1980, where people are directed to 'honour one another and seek the common good'.⁷

The reason for the decline of the common good as an aim in our public life is threefold. First, the language of virtue and intentionality is denied to the market. The Middle Ages had the concept of a just price but a value is now whatever someone is prepared to pay, a tendency increasing since the deregulation of the financial markets. Secondly, as was indicated above, our governments see their role as primarily managerial and instrumental, ironically increasing their control and bureaucratic reach at the same time as they claim to be limiting themselves. They too have been increasingly 'marketized' and thus have withdrawn from using the language of virtue. Thirdly, in the twenty-first century governments consider themselves as secular, and are for this reason uneasy at making moral claims.

The idea of the common good is one which depends upon there being something beyond us which constrains and directs our desires and will, for a *telos* is cause as well as aim. For Aristotle it is 'that for the sake of which everything else is done'.⁸ Indeed, without some external source of value we can too easily name our own desires *as* the good and baptize greed as morality. And without a working model of a shared good a state really has no legitimacy and can become tyrannical. It needs – to use the language of the title of this essay – to realize that there is a deeper magic than its own power, or else it will end up resembling the tyrannical Queen Jadis of C.S. Lewis's Narnia, whose will is her good – 'we [queens such as she] must be freed from all rules' – and for whom rule is pure power: 'They were all *my* people. What else were they there for but to do my will?'⁹

6. See David Hollenbach, *The Common Good and Christian Ethics* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) and Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2004), Part 1, Chapter 4, 1/ 2, at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html (accessed 12 November 2013).

7. *The Alternative Service Book 1980: Services Authorized for us in the Church of England in conjunction with The Book of Common Prayer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 125.

8. Aristotle, *The Ethics of Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics* (trans. J.A.K. Thomson, rev. Hugh Tredennick, intro. Jonathan Barnes; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), 1097a, p. 73.

9. C.S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew* (London: Collins, 1980 [1955]), p. 61.

This deeper magic acknowledges that there is something beyond us, which can be religious and theistic but must be at least existent: that is, it is real in the sense of moral realism. Without believing that there is truth to be found, we would never embark on a scientific experiment, or argue that murder is wrong and not a matter of taste. Angus Ritchie in *From Goodness to God*, a brilliantly concise shorter version of his book, *From Morality to Metaphysics*, demonstrates how militant atheism paradoxically shares this moral realism in stating its own belief in rationality. He argues further, however, that only theism is able to make sense of this truth, which suggests that there is some commensurability between the truth and our own mind's ability to perceive it.¹⁰ Natural selection is unable to account alone for how we take moral positions which do not maximize our own survival as individuals or as a species. What he demonstrates forcefully is our basic need, in order to think at all and certainly to think morally, for some concept of the objective truth and that our mind is so constructed as to be commensurate with truth: it makes us free and helps us realize our full potential.

In this context we need as a society exactly those institutions which are most reviled as out of date, but which carry some of this 'deeper magic', which does not obfuscate power relations but shows the basis upon which we can find authority. The upper, revising house of the British Parliament, the House of Lords, for example, is an appointed chamber, and thus has a quite different mode of authority from that of the House of Commons. It is the authority of age, experience and expertise. Its authority might be improved by adding representatives of all trades, professions, faiths and practices but the fact of appointment and the revising role gives a deeper and thicker value to debates, which derives from the givenness of appointment. Even old hacks of the party system take on a more independent and truth-seeking mode of argumentation in the Upper House.

Similarly, the British monarchy, limited as its powers are, owes its legitimacy to a deeper understanding of the country as divinely grounded, with the monarch anointed and then vested at the coronation in a *colobium sindonis* (shroud tunic), a vestment of humility which shows her servanthood to her people.¹¹ It is interesting that the countries of Europe which still preserve a monarchical system are

10. Angus Ritchie, *From Goodness to God: Why Religion Makes Sense of our Moral Commitments* (London: Theos, 2012), p. 37.

11. Cox argues that the vesture also symbolizes the derivation of authority from the people, but this in no way precludes the divine. See N. Cox, 'The Coronation Robes of the Sovereign', *Arma* 5.1 (1999), pp. 271–80.

among the most liberal in culture and in some cases, the most egalitarian. There is no easy parallel between monarchy and elitism but much evidence that such an institution aids justice by locating authority beyond the merely human, which is a quite different claim from that of the divine right of kings.

More ordinary institutions can also aid society in seeking the common good, although I would argue that they share something with these more elevated bodies. The two I wish to foreground are the parish and the school. Each of these communities is based in a *habitus* – a mode of life – which is both highly practical and also aimed at a communality which is beyond that of the group itself: a common good. In the case of the parish, it is a community that is locally earthed, even if as in the suburb, there is an elective element in the make-up of the congregation. Some may attend because they like low-church worship and biblical preaching but their lunch club serves the neighbourhood elderly, their baptism, wedding and funeral families are local and their title as parish church itself opens to the area and is constitutionally open. The theology behind such a church is incarnational, in that for Christians, the Word's clothing himself in human flesh as an individual person gives a new significance not just to the material but to particularity itself. This particularity, however, opens out to the universal mediated through deanery and bishop in such a way as these mediations are themselves valued and not seen as getting in the way of the Good: rather they reveal its form to use the language of Von Balthasar, where the Aristotelian idea of form is allied to a dynamic *gestalt*. The ecclesiastical parish is now separated from the civil in Britain, even though in many places the geographical area is the same. Its reach into every part of the country of England therefore offers a vision of a reality beyond the temporal and political, but on which they are grounded. The parish system both affirms an area as having worth but points beyond the merely local, just as it orients the human to the transcendent.¹²

At the heart of the *habitus* of the parish church is intercessory prayer. In intercession local and worldwide church, nation, world, town, individuals in need and the departed are brought together as united in being ordered and directed to their true end. This prayer assumes that these many groups are not in conflict but that there is a common good in which justice may be distributed fairly among them. It is the prayer of Jesus, which is one prayer, in which we unite to share. As Kelly

12. These ideas are explored further in Andrew Davison and Alison Milbank, *For the Parish: A Critique of Fresh Expressions* (London: SCM Press, 2010), pp. 144–69.

Johnson writes, it is 'the act of the Church united with Christ and therefore committed to bearing each other's burdens. So crucial is this unity that Cyprian claimed that failure in it displeases God and makes prayer fruitless.'¹³ This need for unity in prayer necessitates 'people to know what that good is and to ally themselves with it'.¹⁴ It is increasingly the case that the wholly gathered ecclesiology of Free Pentecostal Churches is being changed by this kind of prayer into something much more open to social and even political action and service. There is now quite a growing body of scholarship by evangelicals and the emerging church too of a need for commonality, whether of local social and political involvement or of liturgical formation.

Intercession is a practice that has the aim of the common good and is learnt through the exercise of a key Aristotelian virtue, practical wisdom or *phronesis* (in Latin *prudencia*): '[moral] virtue ensures the correctness of the end at which we aim, and prudence that of the means towards it'.¹⁵ It demands that the one praying must work out what might be good for Syria, London, the family, the unemployed, the sick and so on. This should not mean telling God what to do but really engaging in the act of holding together the goods/virtues of peace, justice and so on with particular circumstances. For Christians, following the theological virtues, this means directing justice or fortitude by charity/*caritas*, the divinely infused virtue which directs our energies to their end in God. Now most people interceding well do not know that they are following Thomas Aquinas here, who wrote that 'the ultimate goal of man is to enjoy God, and to this charity directs him'.¹⁶ However, this way of thinking has just become part of them, which is what virtue ethics is all about. It is an ethics about making virtue such a habit that it becomes free and natural to us. What most people called to lead intercession do feel is an enormous yearning for the world to be more peaceful, just and loving; they see the gap between the Good and the world as it is and through faith, hope and love they seek to bring it all together, having the incarnate love of the Son as their *telos*. That putting together is the exercise of the virtue of prudence, but it is energized by courage, moderated by temperance and willed by justice. So all four cardinal virtues common to Greece and Rome are directed by all three theological virtues.

13. Kelly S. Johnson, 'Praying: Poverty', in Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 225–36 (232).

14. Johnson, 'Praying: Poverty', p. 232.

15. Aristotle, *Ethics*, p. 222.

16. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 2a2ae, Q. 23, art. 7.

Furthermore, what will have influenced the intercessor is the tradition of prayer he or she will have experienced: intercessors copy what others have done, so that they learn the shape and movement of public prayer, and in the Anglican Church there is a liturgical shape informing each individual act. They learn also from Scripture, from Christ's own prayer, the Our Father, and the beatitudes. Much of what I have said here refers also to other free or catholic local churches. But the fact of establishment and the parish system gives the English Anglican parish a particularly open, public and symbolic role, which is reflected also in its leading Remembrance Day and other public worship, and even in the particularly detailed way it goes about its work of intercession. Long experience of Anglican worship in the United States, for example, where there is no equivalent parish system, revealed a more cautious and less globally engaged intercessory prayer. Where there were exceptions, this tended to be in churches operating in poor areas, and those closely involved with their local community in a manner much closer to the English parish.

Among schools it is the primary or elementary school that most witnesses to the common good. In the primary school as in the church, children learn by imitation: to sing, to take turns, to read, to tie their shoelaces. They play games like 'Simon Says' or 'Grandmother's Footsteps' in which they practise the ethics of mimesis. Each of the things they learn to do is an excellence in itself, and has an actual content. We all know what a properly tied bow looks like and we also know what a properly ordered queue looks like. A bow correctly tied is useful because it keeps your shoe on securely and stops you tripping over but it is also inherently beautiful, with equal bows and a certain symmetry. It participates in the good and the beautiful as well as the unity of being. Similarly the learning to join a queue for lunch involves one in the common good itself in which each has a share. It is no accident that despite all their problems in dealing with many languages, and children whose family lives lack order and security, primary schools in challenging circumstances have an air of purpose and calm direction. Increasingly, in my own university highly intelligent students are choosing primary school teaching over secondary because it gives a greater freedom to teach deeply and to connect with the whole child. Primary schools also tend to allow others from the community in to help with reading, teach road safety and so on, so that they have a secure place in the affections and aims of the local community as a whole. Focused on maturation, with children who will leave to study further, the primary school is naturally oriented beyond itself.

Higher mathematics is certainly just as participatory in the good, the true and the beautiful but the culture and ethos of the secondary or high school does not help to render this apparent, whereas the primary school begins arithmetic and introduces number, and often uses the whole body – actions and songs – in learning. Number still streams with magic in the primary school, as the child playing marbles or with a paper fortune-telling game will realize. It has magic in a deeper sense, however, in that number – counting shares in a cake, for example – is linked to ethics at the primary level. Moral and intellectual virtues have not yet separated, nor have making and doing. At the beginning of the second book of his *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle discriminates between moral virtues, which are learnt through practice and habit and intellectual virtues, which are inculcated through instruction.¹⁷ In his system they work together, however, so the moral virtue allows us to discern the right end for an action and the intellectual the best way in which to realize it. Practical wisdom is the intellectual virtue which makes ethical action intelligently focused.

Our education system has tended to retain vestiges of the virtues at the primary level, when learning is through habit and mimesis but abandoned the moral virtues at the senior level. Young children, as educational psychology tells us, only gradually learn to think abstractly at what Piaget called the formal operational stage, which begins at the age of 12 or so.¹⁸ This then makes them ready for the comprehension of the intellectual virtues of deduction and induction, scientific knowledge and contemplation. What has happened, however, is that we have instrumentalized these virtues and cut them off from their moral end in wisdom: *Sophia*. Without a robust moral realism in which there really is a Good for us to discover, our knowledge has no goal apart from examination and economic success. Liberal education, in which knowledge was an end in itself, worked as such when that was a true wisdom, and the excellence within the subject related to it.

Critiques of contemporary education as having become commodified come from left and right in politics but they are unable to offer a substantive alternative model. This is due to the fact that they have no content to the vision of equality or education. They use the language of values rather than virtues. Values are qualities that an individual or group espouses but they have an inherent relativism. Indeed the word ‘value’ was originally a term about economic worth, so that what

17. Aristotle, *Ethics*, Book 2, p. 91.

18. Jean Piaget and Bärbel Inhelder, *The Early Growth of Logical Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence* (New York: Basic Books; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958).

someone is willing to pay shadows its meaning.¹⁹ My values may be different from yours and values are not to be imposed on others. The British Parliament in 1999 passed a local government Act in which educational activities (outside teaching as yet) had to be economic, efficient and effective, providing 'best value'.²⁰ There is nothing in this legislation to give the interior excellence and direction of a virtue – indeed, the economic seems the main driver.

It is here that Church schools can be a social resource. For they do, by contrast, have a specific ethos, as the Church of England website demonstrates:

Church schools are rooted in the Christian tradition and are committed to providing an education system that seeks to build character and enable students to develop as whole, rounded, spiritual human beings. The ethos provides a framework for the kind of character we want our children to develop so that our schools can draw out the full potential of each child. A vital part of that ethos comes through understanding the person and teachings of Jesus Christ who is at the heart of our faith and who also provides an example to aspire to.²¹

The use of the word 'character' and 'ethos' suggests something stronger than values (although that word is used later in the section) and the fact of Christ as exemplar is important. It is a pity that the piece rather loses its nerve when it comes to this point and instead of suggesting the students 'copy' or 'follow' Jesus it gives us inelegantly and vaguely 'an example to aspire to', while it avoids the definite article in favour of the bland 'an' example!

There is a warrant here for a more explicit exploration of moral and spiritual development by means of the virtues in Anglican schools. This does not mean a pious and boring allegorizing that many associate with statuary on Victorian Town Halls but an embrace of mimetic education. Every primary church school should, for example, use something like the 'Open the Book' project, which has now been embraced by the Bible Society.²² It provides over thirty

19. See the entry on 'value', *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn, OED online, Oxford University Press, available at: <http://dictionary.oed.com> (accessed 13 November 2013).

20. See <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1999/27/contents/enacted> for the 'best value' section of this legislation.

21. <http://www.churchofengland.org/education/faqs-about-church-schools.aspx> (accessed 21 October 2013).

22. More information can be found at <http://www.openthebook.net/home.php> (accessed 30 January 2014).

assemblies per year in which a Bible story is dramatized and in which the children participate. It does so not in an evangelistic way but objectively: telling the story straight. The children share in the drama and become part of the action. Back in class they can then explore the characters of those they meet and judge their actions. In such a context, gradually the vocabulary of the cardinal and theological virtues can be introduced. As the Mr Men series of stories indicates, children are very aware of virtues and vices. Among the Miss and Men series are greedy, fussy, mean, bouncy, cheeky, chatterbox, fussy, uppity, small, happy, busy, brave and topsy-turvy.²³ It is significant that it is the actions and even habits which render the vice or virtue visible. Their humour lies in the embodiment of actions and traits which are not so normally viewed singly. Such simple books are a good way of introducing virtues, vices and the Aristotelian mean: what does good generosity look like? Can you be too brave?

Story-telling is central to primary school education and children's imaginative play alike and a perfect opportunity for learning through the virtues. The reasons why the Harry Potter stories are so successful is not just the wonderful names and creativity of conception but also because they offer a thoroughgoing moral education in the manner of a traditional school story. The sorting-hat which determines the house to which the character of each child is suited inherently recognizes their personal virtues not just in terms of their natural disposition but the goods at which they aim. So Neville Longbottom, for example, is chosen for Gryffindor, home of 'the brave at heart' even though his courage will not fully emerge until the last volume.²⁴ When the four houses are united, even the cunning of Slytherin can be directed to the Good, as the hat's song implies, when it can be directed by the 'just and loyal' Hufflepuff as well as the intelligence and wit of Ravenclaw.²⁵ Indeed, in one particular song, the Hat openly laments the loss of a shared vision of the Good among the four houses:

The Founders of our noble school
Thought never to be parted:
United by a common goal,

23. Mr Men and Little Miss series were written by Roger Hargreaves, and published by Egremont from 1971 onwards.

24. J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), p. 117.

25. J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), p. 157.

They had the selfsame yearning
 To make the world's best magic school
 And pass along their learning.²⁶

When Harry questions his own right to be in Gryffindor, as he asked the hat only to avoid putting him in Slytherin, the headmaster, Dumbledore, replies, 'It is our choices, Harry, that show us who we truly are, far more than our abilities'.²⁷ It is the manner in which Harry deals with the role that circumstances and his mother's sacrifice have put him in – his moral luck – that constitutes his journey into knowledge of the Good, a journey which grows in complexity and difficulty as he matures through the series.

So the world that Harry inhabits is very close to that of his child readers, with the kind of moral dilemmas about being friends, breaking rules and fighting that any schoolchild might face. Its seven books, each marking a new school year, could be mapped onto actual school year groups or even a year ahead, so that top primary children read the first volume, and the lower sixth (year twelve) the last. Where the universe of the novels differs from our own is that the world of Hogwarts is literally enchanted in that for a wizard magic is just a natural expression of one's abilities, although being an intellectual as well as a moral skill it requires instruction. It is just real, although the Muggles' world – our own – is unaware of this fact, apart from those who give birth to wizard children, or the Muggle prime minister, who receives a visit from the minister of magic upon his accession to office. In that sense, the adventures of Harry and his friends are a way of alerting children to the mysterious depth of existence, which is not easily apparent in a secular society. For the school life is so realistically described that the reading experience tends to bring the reader right into the Hogwarts world as the real, and magic as the way things really are. That deeper magic that allows a child to elevate a broomstick or converse with snakes is not magic in Tolkien's definition of the deliberate exercise of power but rather enchantment, since it takes all the intellectual and many of the moral virtues to learn to do the spells.²⁸ School lessons like chemistry become transformed into potions and with more ethical concern than in

26. J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), p. 206.

27. J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), p. 245.

28. J.R.R. Tolkien discriminates between the dominatory use of magic as instrument of power and the enchantment of the elves both in his own fiction and in his essay 'On Fairy-stories', where magic is defined as 'not art but a technique; its

an ordinary school science lab, since one can do more harm with magical abilities. School lessons actually become schools of virtue in the sense of the Latin word, *virtus*, meaning power. These scenes show the significance of actions and the need for practice, as well as the joy of a well-executed spell when it becomes no longer a careful exercise but free and natural.

In an interesting article in *Anvil*, Andrew Goddard argues that the Harry Potter stories also show a growth in understanding of the nature of happiness.²⁹ In the first volume, Harry discovers the Mirror of Erised and is transfixed by the sight of his dead parents, who are waving as if alive and smiling at him. What he sees is his own inner yearning and goal, and for the orphan that is his lost family. But that image is a static one in which he is not active at all, and happiness, for Aristotle, is the full exercise of all one's faculties just as in the Westminster Confession, where our goal is 'to glorify God and enjoy him for ever', which implies an active participation.³⁰ Paradoxically, what will bring Harry happiness in the last volume, when he faces the evil Voldemort alone, is to have seen his dead relatives and friends as they accompanied him to this act of self-sacrifice, when he stands unarmed by wand before Voldemort, believing that only if he himself dies, having a part of Voldemort's soul in him, will his evil be defeated. This act calls out all his courage and his sense of justice but it is greater than this: it is an act of hope, faith and love, which he makes freely and naturally, as the result of all the choices he has made hitherto. Now the lost family becomes the tradition by which he himself can act freely and independently. Rowling is a Christian, and her story is constructed as a meditation on the verse, 'the last enemy to be destroyed is death' from 1 Cor. 15.26. In the end, it is the supernatural virtues which direct Harry and which take him beyond death to an eternal reality. What Voldemort calls the 'old magic' of self-sacrificial love directs both mother and son.

Stories, as Plato saw long ago in *The Republic*, are the beginning of an education in virtue. For children, play is another way to explore moral choice and moral good and not just play with other children but alone. For the child alone is able to encounter the world as itself, and to gain

(Footnote continued)

desire is *power* in this world, domination of things and wills.' *Tree and Leaf* (London: HarperCollins, 2012), p. 39.

29. Andrew Goddard, 'Harry Potter and the Quest for Virtue', *Anvil* 18.3 (2001), pp. 181-93.

30. Aristotle, *Ethics*, Book 1, pp. 82-84; for the Shorter Catechism see <http://www.reformed.org/documents/WSC.html> (accessed 13 November 2013).

what Jacques Maritain calls an 'intuition of being', that is, to be aware that there is an Is.³¹ In playing with sand, or picking up leaves or banging saucepan lids children are brought to see the reality of the objects as apart from themselves, as participating in being as they do but as other. We can all remember how as children the world seemed supercharged with significance: as if it were waving at us. As G.K. Chesterton pointed out, children have a stronger grasp on reality than adults do, and it is to help us relearn this intuition of being that we need to regain the sense of the supernatural basis of the natural so that we may learn to share a horizon of meaning that can enable us to act justly.³² Talking to children about the treasures they collect can be a first step to recovering that giftedness of life on which our common humanity depends.

To intuit being is to see the radiance of things and opens the question of the role of beauty in the pursuit of the Good. Virtue ethics is about desire. One can see the beauty one wishes to become and that desire shapes one's living. It provokes the question: 'Who do I truly want to be?' In church and church school, Christ offers the promise of happiness, and is the source of the beauty we desire in word, encounter and gesture. He is not an object: we do not know how he walked or what he looked like; but we trace the curve of his activity and are drawn within its charm. In his self-sacrificial love we learn to understand what true happiness looks like and true humanity. Christianity is a form of life not a set of rules. This means that we can offer Christ as the way, the truth and the life to others in such a way that we do not override their own beliefs but offer a vision, a mode of knowledge in which Christ is the illumination through which we understand ourselves: 'distinct from [the objects of the intellect] is the light by which the soul is illumined, in order that it may see and truly understand everything, either in itself or in the light. For the light is God himself.'³³ This last statement from Augustine is wholly christological and is central to his theology of illumination but it offers also a way in for using Christ as exemplar of the virtues in a context such as a school, where the pupils will be of other faith traditions or none. There are attempts in America to use a non-denominational virtue ethics approach to teach morality in schools

31. Jacques Maritain, *Existence and the Existent* (trans. Lewis Galantière and Gerald Phelan; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1948), p. 20.

32. G.K. Chesterton, *Thomas Aquinas* (London: Hodder, 1933), pp. 198–99.

33. Augustine of Hippo, *Literal Commentary on Genesis*, 12; St Augustine, *De Genesi ad Litteram*, Bk 12 (trans. J.H. Taylor, SJ; St Louis University Dissertation, 1948), p. 139.

and councils but proponents come up against the problem that virtues are tradition dependent. There is no abstract system of virtues, since they always have a *telos* which directs their action and which is their cause, and a narrative which renders those actions intelligible. So we cannot take the Christ out of Christian ethics but we can present him as beautiful – a beauty that calls us into imitation and communion – and as a light: an episteme by which we understand the world.

School and church are already practising the virtues of Christ, and my suggestion is that we aid them in different ways to become aware of what they do. A simple instructed Eucharist with a commentary can show a parish what virtues it models in its service of Holy Communion. More emphasis on Christ as revealing our true humanity and its goal is needed in the school. We could inaugurate a curriculum involving a thorough drenching in the riches of our tradition, so that parishioners and students alike can be resources for the public life of our nation. A holistic educational programme, based on the virtues could help to restore a sense of the common good and of education as itself a good in our schools. The ‘fragmented and individualistic “I”’ dominated by the social controls that hedge it about with laws, ‘unable to become a free subject of action, is the victim desired by every bureaucratic power’ writes Livio Melina.³⁴ The virtue ethics tradition assumes we are social beings, woven together by bonds of shared virtues and oriented beyond ourselves to the Good, which can by definition only be common. No wonder that the Dionysian loss of identity in drunkenness and the anonymity of clubbing and oblivion is the chosen social activity of our atomized selves, who are hemmed in by regulation. We have denied the very possibility of a common good but only that truth will set us free.

34. Livio Melina, *Sharing in Christ’s Virtues: For a Renewal of Moral Theology in the Light of ‘Veritatis Splendor’* (trans. William May; Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), p. 19.