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Heroes Always Win: Virtue, Flourishing, and Moral Education

Karen Stohr

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Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues

University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 2TT United Kingdom

T: +44 (0) 121 414 3602 F: +44 (0) 121 414 4875

E: jubileecentre@contacts.bham.ac.uk W: www.jubileecentre.ac.uk

In most books and films aimed at children, it is not hard to recognize the heroes. Nor are we generally in much suspense about how things will end up for them. The story's heroes will face challenges, always external and often internal, but they will persevere and succeed in the end. In more sophisticated versions of this storyline, the heroes experience genuine, often tragic losses along the way. Friends, loved ones, and compatriots will die, valuable ends will be thwarted, and enemies will gain ground. Victory may not look quite like what we originally anticipated. And yet, we still expect that the heroes will prevail in the end, that good will win out over evil, and that all will be well.

The fact that this narrative structure is so familiar to all of us is not, I take it, an accident. This is a kind of storyline that many of us want children to take up and appreciate as part of their moral education. Presumably the hope is that through these stories, they will come to see certain sorts of people as moral exemplars and moreover, certain sorts of outcomes as successes. That children will develop this kind of moral outlook is not something we can take for granted, especially since real life presents us with many apparent counterexamples. Heroes do not always seem to vanquish or convert their enemies; suffering and sacrifice are not always manifestly redeemed.

Indeed, books and movies about superheroes and wizards may seem to be about a different, more perfect and more neatly packaged kind of moral universe than the one we actually inhabit. Given this, it is not unreasonable to wonder whether children can learn any

useful moral lessons from heroic narratives at all, or even whether we are doing them a disservice to suggest that if only one acts courageously, compassionately, and justly, all will be well in the end. If we want children to be virtuous, it may seem that we are best off focusing on the internal rewards of acting well, rather than encouraging them to hope for implausibly happy endings.

In this paper, I will be taking the view that narratives about heroes do have value, that they form a crucial part of the moral education of young children. Their value lies in their ability to make salient to children both what counts as virtue and also what counts as success. In order for children to understand what makes it true that a virtuous life is a good life, they must come to see certain pursuits and outcomes as choiceworthy and others as lacking in value. To put it slightly differently, they must take up a hero's moral vision. This moral vision is not separable from the traits that make someone a hero. To be virtuous is to have correct moral perception. Likewise, to be vicious is to have a warped view of the moral world. The implication is that what counts as success through the eyes of a hero will appear as failure to a villain, and vice versa. In this sense, flourishing is in the eyes of the beholder. My suggestion in this paper is that a crucial part of a child's moral education is teaching them to see success and failure through the lens of virtue and that moreover, literature and film are an especially effective way to do this.

My argument for this claim will rest on a largely Aristotelian picture of virtue and flourishing, as well as the relationship between them. I will begin with an explanation of that picture, and then turn to the question of how heroic stories fit into it. Heroic narratives are an important way of expressing our shared understanding of what virtuous people are like and what counts as a flourishing life. Because of this, such narratives play a crucial role in communicating that shared understanding to young children, as well as enriching and reinforcing it as they grow

older. Narratives enable children to become immersed in the worldviews of various protagonists, seeing their actions and choices through their eyes. Whether those protagonists are heroes or villains, their perspectives present a normatively laden vision of the world. When a child watching a film or reading a book identifies with Captain America or Hermione Granger or the Black Panther, she adopts that hero's worldview. From within that worldview, she can eventually come to understand what Thanos, Draco Malfoy, and Erik Killmonger get wrong. She can see the value of what the heroes pursue and why they take the risks that they do. She can also see the futility of other pursuits, such as the acquisition of power for its own sake or the satisfaction of a desire for destructive vengeance. Such knowledge shapes her normative outlook in ways that enable her to grasp the relationship between virtue and flourishing. In this way, I shall endeavor to show, heroic narratives foster a child's moral growth and expand her moral capacities.

Let me start with an explanation of the Aristotelian picture of virtue and flourishing that I have thus far been presupposing. I grant from the beginning that this picture is far from self-evidently true or philosophically unproblematic. And yet, I take it that there are aspects of it that resonate deeply with many contemporary readers. Aristotle made plenty of mistakes about virtue and flourishing, especially when it comes to the question of which human beings have the requisite capacities. Even so, his sensitivity to the developmental aspects of virtue and the various forces that influence the shape of person's moral outlook make his account of moral education well worth taking seriously. Aristotle's moral psychology is obviously outdated in key respects, but many of his insights remain philosophically compelling.

I should note that any discussion of Aristotle's picture of flourishing is complicated by the fact that he seems to have more than one account of it. In particular, the *Nicomachean Ethics* notoriously appears to contain two accounts (one in Book I and one in Book X) that are

importantly different in certain respects. There is scholarly debate over whether they actually conflict, but I will set this aside and simply take the Book I account as his view. This is both because I find it more plausible and also because it is more commonly employed in contemporary versions of his ethical theory.

That account in Book I presents flourishing (*eudaimonia* in Greek) as constituted both by virtue and by what are usually called external goods. I will say more about both of these shortly, but first, it is worth exploring how Aristotle sets up the question of how flourishing should be understood. At the beginning of Book I, Aristotle suggests that getting clear on the highest good for human beings is a crucial practical endeavor, given its importance for how we structure our lives. He notes that nearly everyone agrees that flourishing is the highest good, but that there is significant disagreement about what flourishing means. Employing the empiricist methodology he made famous, Aristotle tackles that disagreement by considering prevailing views, supposing that there is some truth to each of them and more truth in some of them.

In Book I, Chapter 5, he considers three popular candidates for a flourishing life (four if we count, as Aristotle does not, the life of moneymaking as a plausible candidate). The first is the life of pleasure, which he rejects as fitting for grazing animals, not rational animals like human beings. The second is the life of honor, which Aristotle rejects on the grounds that the person seeking honor is in fact seeking to be honored for the right things and by the right people. This shows, for Aristotle, that there is something that the honor-seeking person values beyond honor, which means that honor cannot be the highest good. Aristotle then considers whether the person who seeks honor really values virtue as the end, but then says that virtue cannot be the whole of flourishing on the grounds that flourishing requires both activity and good fortune. The

third and final life is the life of study, or contemplation, about which Aristotle says little except to promise that he will return to it later.

As I noted above, Aristotle does think that there is some truth to each of these pictures of a flourishing life. Although a life seeking base physical pleasures is not, on Aristotle's view, a fitting life for a human being, he later gives a more sophisticated account of pleasure on which it will make sense to think of the virtuous life as a pleasant life. As for the second life, virtue, understood as excellent rational activity, will prove to be the crucial (though not sole) component of flourishing. And because contemplation is itself a rational activity, excellence in contemplative pursuits will be important to a good life for a rational animal.

Aristotle's methodology in developing an account of flourishing is significant because it takes as its starting point what we might called a shared social understanding of what a good human life is like. Of course Aristotle thinks that the truth about flourishing is tied to biological and social facts about human beings, and of course he also thinks that we should attend more to the opinions of the wise than the opinions of the many. The question about what really constitutes flourishing will not be settled by majority vote. But on Aristotle's view, a plausible account of flourishing ought to reflect our considered intuitions about what a good life is like and also what kinds of things can throw it into disarray.

In order to illustrate the latter, Aristotle turns to a character from a story. The story is the story of the Trojan War and its aftermath, and the character is Priam, the ill-fated King of Troy. I should say that I don't know whether Aristotle regarded the fall of Troy as a fictional narrative or a truthful one, but it doesn't matter for my purposes. What matters is that his audience knows enough about Priam and what he suffered in order for his point to take hold. The seemingly widely accepted picture of Priam is that he was a generally virtuous man and a good ruler, who

could reasonably have been said to have flourished for the better part of his life. But as every one of Aristotle's contemporaries knew perfectly well, Priam's life took a disastrous turn in his later years. His kingdom was destroyed, his wife and children were killed, and he himself was stabbed to death at his own family altar.

Aristotle has two points to make about Priam in Book I. The first is that we cannot make a judgment about whether a person is flourishing until we see how their story turns out. Such an assessment "needs a complete life because life includes many reversals of fortune, good and bad, and the most prosperous person may fall into a terrible disaster in old age, as the Trojan stories tell us about Priam."[1] The second point, which is the more important one for my purposes, is that while virtue protects us against complete misery, it is not sufficient to compensate for the kinds of tragedies that befell Priam.

Aristotle's conclusion in Book I is that flourishing is a kind of composite, comprised of virtue and what he calls external goods:

> Nonetheless, [flourishing] evidently needs external goods to be added…since we cannot, or cannot easily do fine actions if we lack the resources. For, first of all, in many actions we use friends, wealth, and political power just as we use instruments. Further, deprivation of certain [externals]—for instance, good birth, good children, beauty—mars our blessedness. For we do not altogether have the character of [flourishing] if we look utterly repulsive or are ill-born, solitary, or childless; and we have it even less, presumably, if our children or friends are totally bad, or were good but have died. And so, as we have said, [flourishing] would seem to need this sort of prosperity added also.[2]

Setting aside both scholarly debates about the relationship between flourishing and blessedness and the dubious status of some of the external goods on Aristotle's list, we can see quite plainly that for Aristotle, the concept of flourishing cannot be fully captured in terms of virtuous activity alone. In order to understand why, it is useful to consider the view that he is rejecting.

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[1] *Nicomachean Ethics* 1100a6-8
[2] NE 1099a28-1099b7

In Plato's *Apology,* Socrates famously insists that those who brought him to trial are only harming themselves and moreover, that they are incapable of harming him. They cannot harm Socrates because, on his view, imprisonment and death do not count as harms. The only true harms are harms to the soul, and those harms are self-inflicted. We harm our souls through acting unjustly, as his accusers are doing. So long as Socrates acts justly, he cannot be harmed, regardless of what happens to his body. Aristotle rejects the dualism implicit in this picture, but he also seems to think that it defies common sense. Of a virtuous person who suffers "the worst evils and misfortunes," he says, "no one would count him *eudaimon*, except to defend a philosopher's paradox."[3] As far as Aristotle is concerned, the harms that befall Priam are genuine harms, with a major impact on his flourishing. His life would have gone better had the Trojan War never happened.

Aristotle is driven to this position not simply by common sense, but also by his claim that the highest good must be both complete and self-sufficient. To say that it is complete is to say that it is the end for which all other things are chosen. To say that it is self-sufficient is to say that it is lacking in nothing. It is the self-sufficiency condition that, for Aristotle, makes the Socratic position untenable. In order for a life to count as flourishing, it must include all that we rightly regard as essential. Crucially, Aristotle understands this to include not just what is essential for us as individuals, but for those to whom we are closely connected:

> What we count as self-sufficient is not what suffices for a solitary person by himself, living an isolated life, but what suffices also for parents, children, wife, and in general, for friends and fellow citizens, since a human being is a naturally political [animal].[4]

[3] NE 1096a1-3
[4] NE 1097b9-12

Priam's flourishing is negatively affected not just by the circumstances of his own death, but by the loss of his family and his subjects. To deny this is, for Aristotle, to misunderstand what flourishing means.

But this is not to say that Aristotle rejects the Socratic view entirely. It is also clear that while he thinks virtue is insufficient for flourishing, he nevertheless thinks that it is necessary. Virtue, for Aristotle, consists in excellent rational activity, and we can never be worse off for engaging in excellent rational activity. Insofar as we act virtuously, we flourish. As Aristotle sees it, virtue provides stability to our flourishing, even in the most difficult circumstances. Like a skilled sailor, the virtuous person will be able to navigate as smoothly as possible through rough waters. "For a truly good and prudent person, we suppose, will bear strokes of fortune suitably, and from his resources at any time will do the finest actions."[5] Handed poor quality leather, a good shoemaker will be able to make better shoes than a bad shoemaker can manage. On Aristotle's view, virtue is always to our advantage on the grounds that it always contributes to our flourishing. This is true even when circumstances make it impossible for us to flourish fully. The life of virtue is choiceworthy in any case.

This claim is essential to Aristotle's picture of the relationship between virtue and flourishing. And yet it is a claim that may ring false in the ears of people who look around them and see that "the wicked may flourish like the green bay tree," as Rosalind Hursthouse puts it.[6] In order to see its truth, one has to consider the matter from the right perspective. The right

[5] NE 1101a1-3. See also Pol 1332a19.
[6] Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) p. 172.

perspective is one on which Priam, despite his tragic downfall, was nevertheless better off for being virtuous. And in order to have that perspective on Priam (or anyone else), one has to see him and his life through a certain lens. We acquire this lens by cultivating the virtues ourselves. It is, on Aristotle's view, virtue that enables us to see the world properly. The perspective of virtue is necessary in order to understand how it is that virtue contributes to our flourishing, even in the face of adversity and loss. This is because virtue is necessary in order to know is worthwhile and hence, what makes for a flourishing life.

We can see Aristotle making this point in his discussion of the doctrine of the mean. According to the doctrine of the mean, virtue lies somewhere on a spectrum between two vices, one representing an excess of action or feeling and the other representing a deficiency. Aristotle is careful to note that the mean is not an arithmetic one, in part because many virtues are closer to one extreme than the other. Bravery, for instance, is closer to rashness (the vice of deficient fear) than to cowardice (the vice of excess fear). But the rash person is not brave, and one indication of this is that to the rash person, the brave person will at least sometimes appear to be a coward. Likewise, to the coward, the brave person will appear rash. The hallmark of bravery is the ability to perceive correctly what is worth sacrificing in the circumstances. The hallmarks of the associated vices of rashness and cowardice are the inability to perceive that correctly. The rash person is too ready to risk her life or safety; the cowardly person is insufficiently ready to risk his. Neither of them is capable of correct judgment about what is worth doing, which is why to both of them, the truly brave person will appear to be making a mistake.

This capacity for correct judgment is at the center of Aristotle's account of virtue. He divides the virtues into two categories – moral and intellectual. Moral virtues, such as bravery, generosity, and appropriate anger, are acquired through habituation in childhood. This

habituation consist of the repeated performance of certain actions under the tutelage of a parent or teacher, who employs pleasure and pain in ways that lead the child to find virtuous actions pleasant and vicious actions unpleasant. But crucially for Aristotle, full virtue requires something more. Specifically, it requires the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom (*phronesis* in Greek). Aristotle's explanation of practical wisdom is unfortunately brief and rather opaque, but he describes it "a state grasping the truth, involving reason, concerned with action about things that are good or bad for a human being."[7] Put more colloquially, practical wisdom is excellence in making judgments about what is genuinely worthwhile in human life and skill in implementing those judgments in action.

Aristotle does not think that practical wisdom can be taught. It must be acquired through experience. This is why, as Aristotle and many of his later commentators point out, children are not capable of fully virtuous action. They lack the experience necessary to make correct judgments about what is worthwhile. Although Aristotle never explicitly how we can cultivate practical wisdom through experience, it is clear that he expects it to be an active process. Because he thinks we become virtuous through performing virtuous actions, it is presumably through such actions that we acquire practical wisdom. Here the model of a skill is helpful. One learns to play the flute or throw a pot properly through doing the activity, making the inevitable mistakes, and correcting those mistakes. It is not possible to become an expert in such activities by reading a book or listening carefully to lectures on the subject. We learn by doing.

And yet, it cannot be entirely through doing that we develop the virtues. As Aristotle himself points out, playing the lyre badly only creates bad lyre players. We cannot develop excellence in anything without correction, and correction requires that we take up a reflective

[7] NE 1140b5-8.

stance on our own activities. The reflective stance is one in which we assess our activities in reference to some standard. But when we start out, we are unclear about what the standard is, which is why we need a teacher to tell us what it is. As we become more skilled at the activity, we become more able to understand and articulate the standard for ourselves. The person who is practically wise knows the standard.

Aristotle claims that we cannot have practical wisdom fully unless we have the moral virtues, and moreover, that we cannot have the moral virtues fully unless we have practical wisdom.[8] The moral virtues require practical wisdom because practical wisdom is necessary to make correct judgments. Bravery is not just about getting the better of one's fear; it is also about knowing what one *should* fear. The brave person's fear is properly oriented, reflecting her correct assessment of the risks facing her and the goods at stake. This is why it is impossible to have the moral virtue of bravery fully without also having the correct judgment characteristic of practical wisdom. On the other side, practical wisdom requires moral virtue for its exercise because the moral virtues are what shape our attachments to things and direct our attention properly. In her deliberations, the brave person places the correct weight on her physical safety. She neither overvalues it nor undervalues it. But such judgments require an appropriate affective stance. If we are too attached to, say, our material possessions, we will not be able to judge what generosity requires of us. Those mistaken attachments will warp our perceptions and distort our judgments. This is why we need to have the right attachments, which we develop through the moral virtues, in order to make correct judgments. We might say that it is through the moral virtues that we come to love the right sorts of things in the right ways.

[8] NE 1144b30-32.

Indeed, Aristotle's story of habituation into the moral virtues could well be read as a story about learning what to love. In Book I. Chapter 4, he insists on the importance of upbringing in the study of ethics. Upbringing matters because it is through upbringing that we cultivate the starting points of that inquiry. Those starting points consist in true beliefs about what is worth doing. In the absence of those true beliefs, the inquiry cannot take hold. In Aristotle's language, we need to know the 'that' before we can learn the 'because.' We must know *that* a given action is generous before we can develop an understanding of what makes it generous. But as Myles Burnyeat points out, knowing the 'that' is not simply a matter of knowing a particular proposition.[9] It is not enough to be able to pick out generous actions. There is an affective dimension to the knowledge. One does not just know which actions are generous; one also loves generosity. This affective orientation toward what is genuinely good makes it possible for us to know what makes them good. To put it slightly differently, we have to love the good before we can understand it.

On this picture, then, Aristotelian moral education is very much about teaching children to love the good. We begin the process by instilling in them habits of good action, backed by the judicious use of pleasure and pain. This is how children come to find certain ways of acting appealing and certain ways of life attractive. They must develop attachments to those ways of acting and living in order for the knowledge to take hold. This means that in order to become brave, a child must learn to love what the brave person loves. It is through loving what the brave person loves that the child learns to see the world in the way that the brave person sees the world. Learning to see the world this way, in turn, contributes to the cultivation of the child's understanding of what makes bravery choiceworthy. This understanding is what is characteristic

[9] See Burnyeat's influential essay, "Aristotle on Learning to Be Good" in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics,* ed. Amelie Rorty (Berkeley: University Press of California Press, 1980).

of practical wisdom. The practically wise person knows what is worth pursuing, but she could not have come to know that unless she already had the requisite affective stance toward those objects of pursuit.

And this, I suggest, is where heroic narratives have a role to play. Narratives encourage empathetic, imaginative identification with their characters. They plunge us into the worlds of those characters, enabling us to see and feel as they do. The narratives invite us to take up the standpoints of the characters, and to do so in an affectively laden way. By that I mean that we care about what they care about, and value what they value. In the context of heroic narratives, this means taking up the affective stance of a hero, caring about what she cares about and valuing what she values.

A child immersed in a hero's story sees her choices through her eyes. The child may not fully understand the hero's reasons for those choices, but his imaginative identification with her point of view enables him to see how she characterizes her options and the value she places on various things in her deliberations. He thus gains access to her knowledge of what is worth choosing, even if he does not yet appreciate why those things are worth choosing. But because the perspective is an affectively laden one, it encourages him to care about what she does and value what she finds worthwhile. He understands what she regards as success or failure and comes to see those outcomes in the same way that she does. By adopting her perspective, he can come to understand that within the narrative, some apparent victories are not victories at all and moreover, that sometimes genuine victory can be obtained only at great cost. When the truths accessible to the child through the narrative match our shared social understanding of truths about our real human lives, the child's moral capacities are correspondingly expanded.

They are expanded, I suggest, because of the way in which narratives engage our affects. Of course we do not always identify with the protagonist of a story and it is possible to become immersed in a character's perspective without also valuing what that character values. It is also possible to identify too strongly with a story's villains. For narratives to be an effective tool for the moral education of children, they must encourage a deliberate and carefully structured form of imaginative identification. The hero must be someone whose normative outlook is accessible to the child and that points the child in the direction of what we take to be truths about virtue and flourishing. But when the narrative can accomplish this task, it can help cultivate a child's understanding of what is worth choosing in human life and why. This understanding in turn shapes the child's conception of what constitutes a good human life.

In the last section of this paper, I will illustrate this claim by way of application to a specific heroic narrative. For the sake of what I expect is widespread familiarity, I will use J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series as my primary example. Rowling's novels are written in the third person limited perspective, with Harry's standpoint as the one taken up by the reader. We see the world more or less as Harry does, and his perspective deepens and changes as the novels progress. When the novels begin, Harry is not quite eleven years old. At the end of the last novel, he is seventeen—not yet an adult, but also considerably wiser than he was when the novels began.

For reasons that are mysterious by Aristotelian lights, young Harry has the right starting points for the cultivation of virtue. I say this is mysterious because the aunt and uncle who raised him were certainly in no position to provide him with those starting points. Lacking virtue themselves and neglectful of Harry, the Dursleys would not have been able to help Harry recognize virtuous actions, much less come to love them. Regardless, somehow or other, Harry

has managed to acquire the foundations of virtue. Even at the age of eleven, he seems to know the ‘that.’ He knows which actions are worth doing in the sense that he is attached to the right kinds of things and in the right way. This becomes apparent early in the first novel, when Harry meets his fellow student and nemesis, Draco Malfoy, upon arriving at Hogwarts. By the time he encounters Draco, Harry has already befriended Ron Weasley. Even a very young reader is able to tell that Ron is part of a kind and loving family. Ron’s mother and older brothers helped Harry get himself and his belongings on the train, and Ron himself is humble and likeable. We have also learned that the Weasleys (unlike Harry himself) do not have much spare money. So when Draco attempts to win Harry’s favor by insulting Ron and his family, we are primed to react as Harry does, which is to become angry at Draco and develop a deep dislike for him. Because Harry recognizes and rejects Draco’s elitist and snobbish approach to friendships and because we have already learned to identify with Harry, his decision to stand by Ron appears to us as the right one. Harry and Ron are the good guys; Draco is not. Of course we see the event through Harry’s eyes, not Draco’s, but the third person perspective encourages us to think that Harry’s point of view represents the truth.[10] That, of course, is intentional, since Harry’s point of view will eventually take us to the truths the novels hope to convey.

For instance, Harry is wise enough to know that family wealth does not track moral virtue, and his knowledge of this becomes part of the reader’s perspective. The Malfoy family is wealthy and influential, but those supposed advantages are worthless in light of their shallow and self-interested approach to their own lives and to the lives of other people. It is the compassionate and generous Weasleys who understand what is genuinely worth pursuing. Harry realizes this well enough to know that he should throw his lot in with the Weasleys, but he does

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[10] Rowling turns this upside down in the sixth book, following the lead of Jane Austen in *Emma.*

not fully understand why their way of life has the value that it does. He knows the 'that' without yet knowing the 'because.' But because Harry knows the 'that' and because the reader has Harry's perspective on the matter, the reader knows the 'that' too. Harry's affection for the Weasleys and dislike for the Malfoys is taken up by the reader. Like Harry, the reader chooses a side. Choosing the side of the Weasleys shapes how both Harry and the reader see everything else that happens. It turns out that to love the Weasleys is to love the good. But Harry does not yet know this. It is something he has to learn, and he learns it through becoming a de facto member of the Weasley family.

Ron has a clear Aristotelian advantage over Harry in that he is being raised by virtuous people who are more than capable of giving their children the right starting points. But Ron also struggles with understandable shame over his family's comparative poverty. In this respect, Harry is more clear-sighted than Ron. Harry is not especially attached to material possessions himself, and having been deprived of a loving family for most of his childhood, he can see Ron's good fortune when Ron himself cannot. This is especially apparent at the beginning of the second novel, when Harry first visits the Burrow, the Weasley family home. The house is shabby in appearance and chaotic in atmosphere. Ron apologetically says to Harry that it isn't much. Harry's response is that the house is perfect. Later, after Ron again apologizes for his tiny, noisy room, Harry says, "This is the best house I've ever been in."[11]

Harry is right that the Weasley house is the best house anywhere in the novels, despite its being dilapidated and overflowing with people and activity. But he does not yet know why it is the best house. He correctly sees that the shabby furnishings do not detract from its comfort and that the large, loving family who lives there provide it with warmth and hospitality. But what

[11] *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets,* Chapter 3.

Harry (and so also the reader) gradually come to understand is that the Burrow is more than just an especially welcoming building. It is, in many ways, the moral center of the novel. The things that Harry finds appealing about the Burrow are a direct reflection of the values and priorities of the Weasleys themselves. We might say that the house expresses their virtuous characters. The Weasleys value integrity and justice over wealth and power. Arthur Weasley uses his position at the Ministry of Magic to protect the vulnerable and fight corruption, even when it comes at a professional cost. They exercise generous and expansive hospitality, taking in those in need of love, comfort, or simply a good meal. Molly Weasley's open heart and fierce courage draw people toward her for both guidance and safety. As the novels progress, it becomes clear that the Burrow is a refuge where the virtuous people of the novel gather and gain strength for the battles that lie ahead. Harry does not know any of this when he first sets foot in the place. But he (and the reader that he takes along with him) know enough to love the house from the beginning. Harry's attachment to the Weasley house is a starting point from which he can come to appreciate the moral wisdom of the people who own it.

Harry's moral growth in the novels follows an Aristotelian trajectory. From his luckily correct starting points, he cultivates moral virtue and practical wisdom through activity. He makes mistakes, and would have made many more if it weren't for his friends. But the path he follows is a path toward practical wisdom. Because the novels are written from Harry's perspective, the reader follows the same path that Harry does. By the end of the first book, Harry knows the most fundamental fact about the wizarding universe, which is that the most powerful force in the magical world is ordinary, non-magical sacrificial love. At first, he does not fully believe that love could be so powerful and it isn't until the end of the series that he understands how this is true. But he does know from the beginning that love is worth choosing, even if he

does not exactly know why. He knows this well enough to consistently choose to act from love, a habit that shapes his normative outlook and eventually enables him to understand the 'because' behind it.

The lesson is a challenging one. As Harry learns the hard way, love comes with exposure risk and loss. Indeed, the Weasley family's brave and generous love costs them dearly. But what Harry comes to see is that it is also what makes everything they are doing worthwhile. In order to understand this truth, he has to live the life that embodies it. It is through living among people who love this way, like the Weasleys, that Harry is able to appreciate the value of sacrificial love. And it is through watching Harry come to this appreciate that the young reader comes to appreciate it as well. That young reader knows *that* the Weasleys are worth living among before she knows why. By taking up Harry's perspective on the Weasleys, their house, and their activities, she comes to understand the value of their way of life as well.

The reader also comes to understand that knowledge of this value is unavailable to the main villain of the story, Lord Voldemort. Although Harry and Voldemort share a great deal, they do not share a normative outlook. They occupy separate moral worlds, worlds in which success and failure appear very different. Where Voldemort sees a stupid waste of potential, Harry sees a noble sacrifice. What Voldemort regards as weakness, Harry understands as strength. It is of course Harry's normative outlook that the reader takes up and moreover, that prevails in the end. As Harry and the reader both come to realize, it is not possible for Voldemort to win. There is an important sense in which his normative outlook is self-defeating. The only path to flourishing is the one that Harry takes. The reader sees this only by traveling with him along that path.

When children (or adults!) read the Harry Potter novels, they immerse themselves in a particular normative outlook, one in which virtue prevails and the enemy is defeated by love. But that outcome will be apparent only to one who has adopted that normative outlook. It is only through the lens of virtue that the full extent of Voldemort's defeat will be apparent. Within the narrative only the virtuous are capable of appreciating just how thoroughly Voldemort's world view has been refuted. Because the reader's perspective is the perspective of virtue, the reader can appreciate that truth as well.

In this paper, I have aimed to show how heroic narratives are capable of shaping a child's moral character. They do so by enabling him to take up the hero's perspective, which is the perspective of virtue. From that perspective, the child is able to see the world through the hero's eyes, and just as importantly, love what the hero loves. It is through loving what is genuinely good that we come to understand what is genuinely good and so what it means to flourish. Insofar as heroic narratives help us love what is genuinely good, they help us understand what it means to flourish and how virtuous actions contribute to our flourishing. Perhaps just as importantly, they encourage us to have faith in the possibility that heroes might in fact always win.