

David Aldridge

How ought war to be remembered in schools?

Aldridge, D A, (2014) How ought war to be remembered in schools?, *Impact*, (2014), pp. 1-45.

DOI: 10.1111/2048-416X.2014.12001.x

This version is available: <https://radar.brookes.ac.uk/radar/items/0c1e967c-f76f-42ee-bc39-035685b82f40/1/>

Available on RADAR: 07.10.2016

Copyright © and Moral Rights are retained by the author(s) and/ or other copyright owners. A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge. This item cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the copyright holder(s). The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

This document is the postprint version. Some differences between the published version and this version may remain and you are advised to consult the published version if you wish to cite from it.

# How ought war to be remembered in schools?

## Overview

- Each year a national day of commemoration of the war dead is celebrated on or around November 11<sup>th</sup> in the United Kingdom. There has been no significant discussion of the role that schools should play in this event.
- There are a number of legitimate open questions around remembrance on which consensus has not been reached. Our educational duty, therefore, is to approach remembrance in such a way that these questions remain open and are not foreclosed on behalf of our students.
- During remembrance, we encourage students to remember events, persons or other objects that they *ought* to remember. The 'ought' carries an ethical sense.
- Whatever else war is, it is always horrific.
- We ought to remember the horror of war so that we continue to make every effort to avoid or at least condemn unnecessary conflict in the future. We are therefore educationally justified in seeking to remind the younger generation of the horror of war.
- We are not, however, justified in encouraging the sentiment of gratitude to the war dead, as it is not clear that gratitude is in fact owed.
- We cannot justify remembrance of the war dead on the grounds that it will strengthen children's adherence to a set of shared values. This justification is ultimately susceptible to political exploitation.
- We ought to limit the involvement in schools of charitable bodies with an interest in remembrance: the ubiquity of charitable slogans and images undermines the educationally justifiable aim of conveying the horror of war. Other charitable causes, furthermore, are more worthy of nationwide exposure.
- Educational institutions should consider whether the rituals and practices they engage in around remembrance successfully communicate the horror of war. Educators should consider, for example, replacing associations with bright red flowers, pristine stone memorials, and elderly men wearing medals, with images or narratives of children killed or wounded in war.

## Contents

1. Introduction
2. The Public Debate
3. What does Remembrance mean?
4. Horror
5. Gratitude
6. Shared Values
7. The involvement of Charities
8. Conclusion – Remembrance in schools

### 1. Introduction

Each year a national day of commemoration of the war dead is celebrated on or around November 11<sup>th</sup> in the United Kingdom, including a Remembrance Sunday service, the observation of a period of silence, and the widespread wearing of poppies. In the absence of any policy or guidance on

schools' participation in these events, state-funded schools address remembrance in a variety of ways, including encouraging the wearing of poppies, aligning curriculum content with the sentiments of the season, conducting their own collective events of remembrance, and observing two minutes' silence. Curriculum resources are often provided by charities that have a significant interest in the commemorations.

There is widespread ambiguity and confusion around what is to be remembered on this occasion and why. Considerable public controversy surrounds the meaning and purpose of these events, and indeed whether the occasion should be marked at all. It is thus somewhat surprising that there has been no significant public debate around the role that state-funded schools, in particular, ought to play in these events. This pamphlet attempts to encourage that debate, as well as offer positive guidance for educators on how war should be remembered in schools.

I will argue that there is only one viable justification for the involvement of schools in the event of remembrance. This is that we ought to remind children of the horror of war so that they make every effort to avoid or at least condemn unnecessary conflict in the future. I will reject the claims that we ought to encourage children to feel grateful to the war dead, or that remembrance should encourage children to feel bound to uphold the values for which those who died gave their lives. I will also argue for restricting the involvement in schools of charities with an interest in remembrance.

## **2. The Public Debate**

In the build-up to the annual November commemorations in the UK, critical voices are raised in the public sphere. Questions are asked about the extent to which the military pomp of the ceremonies conducted at the Cenotaph in fact sentimentalise, celebrate or even glorify war rather than reminding us of its harsh realities (see, for example, Harrison 2012). Media figures are condemned for omitting or refusing to wear poppies when filmed or photographed in public. Politicians and campaigners are accused of opportunism as they are photographed solemnly laying wreaths. Debates abound in the popular media about whether certain depictions of the war have adequately captured the historical reality of conflict: life in the trenches, say, or the relationship between officers and the rank and file soldier in World War I. Emotions run high amongst groups that feel marginalised or excluded at a time of supposedly national participation. In 2010, for example, a group of Muslim protestors burned a poppy while refusing to observe the period of silence on Remembrance Day. The campaign, named 'Hell for Heroes', was vilified in the popular press and campaigners were photographed carrying banners with slogans such as 'British Soldiers Burn in Hell' and 'Afghanistan, the Graveyard of Empires'. Speaking in defence of further planned demonstrations in 2011, spokesman Anjem Choudary offered the following justification:

'It's one thing to remember the dead from the First World War and subsequent wars but it's quite another when they say we need to remember the dead from Afghanistan and Iraq. It's become a political football and if they are going to use Remembrance Day for that purpose it's only right that we have a counter protest, which we say is for Muslims. The Army is currently at war with Muslims in Muslim countries.' (Daily Mail 2011)

I do not necessarily defend the manner in which these protests were conducted or the claims made about the intentions or transgressions of contemporary military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan. But this instance highlights that it is possible at least for certain groups to interpret the commemorative events around November 11th not as a moment of politically neutral national unity but as a moment of political opportunism, and even indoctrination, that requires a response. Although their reaction might normally be less extreme, undoubtedly a number of school children across the country, exposed to these and similar stories in the national media, wrestle each year

with concerns that they themselves or wider groups with whom they identify globally or historically are somehow excluded or even victimised as part of the event of remembrance. This demonstrates a pressing need for educational institutions to question and consider their participation in these publicly contested events.

The ongoing public debates take on a new significance this year since in 2012 in an address at the Imperial War Museum the Prime Minister announced a plan of national events to mark the First World War, beginning with the centenary of its outbreak on 4<sup>th</sup> August 2014 and culminating in a remembrance of Armistice Day, 100 years on in November 2018 (Cameron 2012). In the address the Prime Minister celebrated the value of the Imperial War Museum as a place to come 'to learn about a defining part of our history and to remember the sacrifice of all those who gave their lives for us, from the First World War to the present day.'

Regarding the planned commemorations, his stated concern was 'to make sure we really do this properly as a country', and he offered three reasons why this matters so much even in a time of national austerity. The first reason offered is 'the sheer scale of the sacrifice'. The Prime Minister detailed how most of those who went off to war in the earliest months thought that it would be a relatively minor conflict, with no idea of the 'trauma that was going to unfold'. He cited Major V J Bates, of the Royal Army Medical Corp, recalling the moments when 'the real horror of it came home to us.' The Prime Minister described the conflict in terms such as 'inexplicable' and 'never-ending slaughter'. He concluded that, 'It was a sacrifice they made for us, and it is right that we should remember them'.

The second reason offered was to acknowledge 'the impact that the war had on the development of Britain and, indeed, the world as it is today'. The Prime Minister referred to 'the values we hold dear' and listed resilience, courage, friendship, loyalty and 'what the Australians would call "mateship"'. 'And the lessons we learned', he continued, 'they changed our nation and they helped make us who we are today'. The Prime Minister acknowledged that it is equally important to recognise 'hugely significant developments in this period, which, frankly, darkened our world for much of the following century'.

The final justification offered was that the First World War is 'a fundamental part of our national consciousness'. He referred to the 'captivating' and 'incredible' stories of courage, toil and sacrifice to which he felt 'a very strong emotional connection'. He referred to 'that mixture of horror and courage, suffering and hope' that has 'permeated our culture' and its literature and poetry. 'Current generations', he argued, 'are still absolutely transfixed by what happened in the Great War and what it meant'. He acknowledged that 'individually and as a country, we keep coming back to it, and I think that it will go on. This is not just a matter of the heart for us in Britain. It is a matter for the heart for the whole of Europe and beyond.' He then cited a monument erected by the Turks at Gallipoli as an 'absolutely beautiful' example of 'what this is all about. That from such war and hatred can come unity and peace, a confidence and a determination never to go back'.

The Prime Minister's educational ambitions were clear in his stated desire for 'a commemoration that captures our national spirit, in every corner of the country, from our schools to our workplaces, to our town halls and local communities'. He continued that 'The centenary will also provide the foundations upon which to build an enduring cultural and educational legacy, to put young people front and centre in our commemoration and to ensure that the sacrifice and service of a hundred years ago is still remembered in a hundred years' time'. £5 million pounds of funding (from a total of over 50 million devoted to the project) have thus been allocated to a 'centenary education programme' that will 'include the opportunity for pupils and teachers from every state school to research the people who served in the Great War, and for groups of them, crucially, to follow their journey to the First World War battlefields'. Other funding sources will ensure that we 'make this centenary a truly national moment, but also something that actually means something in every locality in our country'.

He closed with an edited quotation from 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Eric Lever Townsend, who wrote, 'But for this war, I and all the others would have passed into oblivion like the countless myriads before

us...But we shall live for ever in the results of our efforts,' before summing up, 'Our duty towards these commemorations is clear: to honour those who served, to remember those who died, a to ensure the lessons learnt live with us forever.'

A year later, the National Campaign 'No Glory in War' was launched in direct response to the Prime Minister's proposal, with the publication of an open letter signed by media figures, actors, poets, musicians and artists (No Glory 2013). The letter stressed that rather than being a 'victory for democracy', the First World War was a 'military disaster and a human catastrophe' and criticised the Prime Minister's intention to 'stress our "national spirit"' in an event to match the Diamond Jubilee celebrations. The letter argued that it was significant that the event was being organised 'at least in part by former generals and ex-defence secretaries' and emphasised that 'this was a war driven by big powers' competition for influence around the globe'. The signatories argued that educational activities should mark the 'almost unimaginable devastation caused' and 'promote peace and international co-operation'.

An article posted on the campaign's website (Carr 2014) asks what 'lessons' are intended to be drawn from the festival of remembrance, drawing attention to the 'new age of mass industrialised slaughter' that the war inaugurated. The writer cites how one Lieutenant Colonel, having taken possession of a machine gun post, was able to recall that he 'fired at them and watched them fall, chuckling with joy at the technical efficiency of the machine'. Carr recalls the 'unprecedented slaughter' and a death toll which included 'tens of thousands' of German civilians who starved as a result of economic blockades. The legacy of the war, in Carr's view, includes further mass slaughter of civilians at Guernica, the strategic bombing campaigns of the Second World War, and ultimately the invention of the atomic bomb. Carr claims that the coalition government's intention in promoting remembrance is to 're-militarize British society and present the armed forces as the embodiment of national virtue'. The stirring language of sacrifice, freedom, patriotism and heroism, as well as the sanctified and sanitized version of the war that will be presented (complete with 'pretty displays of red poppies' and 'gung ho battlefield tours') participates in and promotes 'a fantasy of virtuous war that was as false then as it is today'.

Carr acknowledges that 'World War 1 is a momentous and terrible event that is worthy of remembrance and debate, from which a variety of lessons can indeed be drawn' – not least of these, in Carr's view, the lesson that western government's attempts to promote 'perfect bloodless and "humanitarian" wars, waged by remote controlled machines' is a seductive fantasy that ought to be resisted. Rather than being a cause for celebration akin to the Diamond Jubilee, remembrance should mark the 'horrific and disgusting tragedy' that World War I actually was.

My intention is not to endorse a particular controversial stance on war, or any specific war, as either 'virtuous', for example, or 'disgusting'. The Prime Minister's address already acknowledges that there is considerable ambiguity and complexity in the nation's relationship with these events. Neither is it important that we endorse Carr's ascription of intention to the coalition government or to western governments in general. It is sufficient to note, as Carr argues, that the event of remembrance is an occasion for significant public debate.

The intention of this pamphlet is to develop an educational perspective on the event of remembrance. Such an account cannot endorse a specific 'pro-war' or 'anti-war' stance or a particular historical evaluation of war's significance. Rather, it must seek to acknowledge and do justice to the subtlety and variety of reasonable stances that compete in the public sphere and the fact that the significance or 'meaning' of particular wars, or war in general, remains contested. The reality of the public debate around remembrance is that there exist a number of legitimate open questions on which consensus has not been reached. Our educational duty, therefore, is to approach our thinking about remembrance in such a way that legitimate questions remain open and are not foreclosed on behalf of our students. Our educational stance on remembrance needs to take into account and accommodate legitimately opposing views rather than assume certain perspectives or principles that are reasonably contested in the public sphere. I will argue in what

follows that this is a pitfall not easily avoided, given the nature of the rhetoric that is likely to be attached to remembrance in educational contexts.

### 3. What does Remembrance mean?

War is addressed in various ways during the school experience of children, not least through the explicit curriculum. The new Key Stage 3 History programme of study (DfE 2013) recommends both the first and second world wars as (non-statutory) content, and these also feature prominently on GCSE and A Level syllabi. Local agreed syllabuses for Religious Education will commonly recommend addressing religious approaches to the ethics of war and again the ethics of war and the philosophy of just war feature on GCSE and A level syllabi. All students sit GCSE English Literature and exam board poetry anthologies commonly feature representative selections from the poetry of the First World War as well as other poetry addressing conflict. What's more, there is no reason to doubt that war can be addressed in these areas of the explicit curriculum through a critical lens. With sensitive handling by confident teachers, students can be encouraged to explore and evaluate the specific political justifications for particular conflicts, wrestle critically with the question of war more generally and the extent to which a war could be considered 'just' or morally justified, and engage with nuanced questions of historical interpretation, such as whether popular depictions of World War One (like the one offered in successful TV comedy *Blackadder*) are correct in presenting it as a 'misbegotten shambles' in which 'a series of catastrophic mistakes' were 'perpetrated by an out-of-touch elite' (Gove 2014).

However, the primary focus of this pamphlet is not the treatment of war in the explicit curriculum; it is not a thesis on the proper pedagogy of history or religious education, so much as an exploration of the participation of educational institutions in a particular event or national moment that we tend to call 'remembrance'. Before we consider the specific cultural meanings that might be attached to events labelled as 'Remembrance Sunday' or 'festivals of remembrance', it is worth spending a little time considering how difficult it is to talk about remembrance, and its cognate term, 'remembering', in general terms.

Shakespeare is famously able in his 30<sup>th</sup> sonnet to 'summon up remembrance of things past'. We can mean different things by 'remembrance', and there can be different sorts of 'things past' or objects of memory. We can remember people, events, or propositions, for example, and the relevant forms of remembering in each case, while related, are significantly different in nature. We have other words that we might use to be more specific about the type of remembering we have in mind: recollecting or recalling, for example, reminiscing, commemorating and so on. There can be different kinds of agents of memory, so that remembering can designate a private mental act or a large scale social event. In addition to this distinction between the individual and the communal, remembering can also occur more or less actively or passively: that is, remembering is something we can choose to do and it can also be something that befalls us without our consciously choosing and even in some cases against our will. To take a tour through our ways of thinking about memory is to be launched into a variety of conflicting metaphors and tensions, such as that between remembering as an act of knowing or a transforming event, as a moment of creation or a moment of discovery.

Remembrance can be motivated or incited in various different ways. There is pleasure to be taken in the act of reminiscence: deliberately summoning up stories of the good old days. Reminiscence can be coloured with wistfulness of regret, or can overlap with the more painful longing that is at the root of our word nostalgia, the 'sickness for home'. Other memories of distressing events can cause us pain, or can even themselves be manifestations of psychological trauma. This is a kind of remembrance that we might seek to eradicate through therapeutic interventions, since it overtakes us despite our better wishes and hampers our possibilities for flourishing existence. Remembering can sometimes be a surprising achievement, such as when we

recall or retrieve some fact from the 'storehouse' of memory that we had given up hope of having deposited. We have all felt frustration when a sought-for fact eludes us, and admonished ourselves for forgetting when we ought to remember.

We might be reproached by our teachers or our elders for failing to remember some principle or procedure that would have been of benefit to us. We try to remember our loved one's birthdays, and feel a sense of shame when we forget to send a Christmas card to someone who 'remembered' us last year. Another reason for reproach is when we fail to remember some person, event or story in our cultural past that we might be held to have a duty to recall.

It is this final sense that gets us close to the meaning of remembrance implied in the 'season of remembrance' or the gathered ceremonies of remembrance that occur around November 11<sup>th</sup>. One important element to note is that increasingly this remembrance is of events which were not experienced first-hand. No-one now survives, for example, who fought in the First World War. Remembrance of these events then takes the form of a collective responsibility. If these events are to be 'remembered', memory must be engendered, transmitted or passed on. This is captured in David Cameron's assertion that, 'We should hold on to this heritage and pass it down the generations' (Cameron 2012). Any sense of duty to remember would need to be instilled or habituated in the young. Remembrance therefore, inasmuch as it implies a particular relationship between those who have been habituated into the duty to remember and those who have not, is distinctively educational in nature.

Remembrance, viewed from the educator's perspective, is better understood as a *purposeful reminding*. We encourage students to remember events, persons or other objects that they *ought* to remember. The 'ought' carries an ethical sense. It is not simply that things will go better for students if they remember (such as when we encourage students to remember to look both ways before they cross a road). The 'ought' also carries a moral obligation, perhaps to the dead, or our living contemporaries, or even unborn future generations.

It could be argued that there is no clean distinction between the teaching of history and this educational process of remembrance. Certainly, the scope of what I want to argue more specifically about the events surrounding November 11<sup>th</sup> could be extended to encompass the justification of a specific history curriculum. Some historical events are selected for study while others are neglected. These moments are determined by a particular and contestable view of the 'heritage' that is to be passed down the generations. However, elements of the manifestation in schools of the phenomenon that is specifically called 'Remembrance' make it worthy of special attention. This phenomenon is often manifested through specific non-curricular or extra-curricular practices such as rituals or ceremonies, observations of periods of silence, and the adoption of specific habits of dress or decoration that are exceptional in the school calendar. The season of Remembrance is not necessarily addressed in the explicit curriculum, although in some cases curricular material might be deliberately aligned with national events and thus become commingled, for good or ill, with the national mood or the prevailing sentiments of the season. Rather than being a curriculum debate, remembrance has more in common with other debates about the *implicit curriculum*: the extent to which schools should participate in public confessional activities such as corporate worship, for example, or should actively promote particular confessional perspectives or moral attitudes by establishing and communicating an overall ethos.

This said, the philosophical questions to be addressed here are analogous to a set of normative questions that educational thinkers are used to asking about the curriculum. Rather than unquestioningly propagating a particular curriculum, we accept that we should consider and justify what ought to be studied, why it ought to be studied, and the proper method or pedagogy by which this subject matter should be taught. Similarly, when considering the nature of a school's participation in the event of remembrance, we ought to ask what is to be remembered, why it ought to be remembered, and what form this remembrance should take. If instilling a sense of duty involves fostering certain sentiments towards those who are remembered or towards the content of

remembrance, which sentiments are they and what constitutes an acceptable procedure for fostering these sentiments?

It is hard to unravel the *meaning* and *object* of remembrance from the *purposes* we might have for encouraging students to remember. What follows in the next three sections is an attempt to separate out and analyse three separate possible purposes for the event of remembrance, as well as their attendant objects and meanings. There may be more. This is a somewhat artificial exercise, as we will often find these purposes intermingled in an account of why remembrance ought to go on in educational contexts. Yet this is really part of the point of my argument, since I hope to show that these separable purposes will find themselves coming into conflict in schools. It is therefore vital that we try to untangle these various threads of justification. It is my further contention that only one of them stands up to scrutiny.

Before I continue, it is important to clarify my reference to a 'we' that is remembering in the coming sections. A planned commemorative installation surrounding the Tower of London will eventually boast 882, 246 ceramic poppies – one for each of the British and colonial serviceman that died in World War 1. One of the questions that sees intense public debate during the season of remembrance concerns whether the dead to be commemorated are those who died on all sides in war or just those on 'our' own side. There is also the question of whether we commemorate all of the war dead or specifically servicemen and women. Then there is the matter of whether we specifically commemorate certain conflicts - i.e. the two great wars of the twentieth century - or all wars past and present. The 'we' that remembers is closely connected to the 'who' that is remembered. Some 'we' is always implied in remembrance, then, but the scope and breadth of that 'we' depends on the nature and purpose of remembrance. If remembrance is connected to a particular, local group of war dead, then when 'we' remember, we do not do so alongside those who have a different historical connection to the events commemorated.

For now, then, the scope of the 'we' will remain an open question. That said, it should become clear that some understandings of the 'we' that remembers are flatly incompatible with two of the justifications of remembrance that follow. If we honour the war dead on account of certain principles or privileges that they have defended, then we do not owe a similar debt of gratitude for the sacrifice of those on the opposing side whose principles were defeated. We do not, then (according to certain justifications of the event of remembrance) remember alongside, or in a similar way to, the inhabitants of losing nations who wish to remember their own war dead. Ultimately I will go on to reject those accounts of remembrance that do not allow for the universal or global commemoration of all war dead.

#### 4. Horror

***We ought to remember the horror of war so that we continue to make every effort to avoid or at least condemn unnecessary conflict in the future.***

I have taken great pains over the formulation of this justification as I will contend that it is the only one, of the three that I will outline, that can ultimately be defended. This justification is intended to be non-committal on a range of contentious questions. So it does not require that we subscribe to any particular beliefs about the necessity of armed conflict or its moral defensibility. The thesis does not require assent to any more controversial propositions such as, 'War can never be morally justified', simply the much less controversial recognition that it is possible that in certain situations war is not a necessary path for a nation to take, or - in certain situations where it seems that war is 'inevitable' on a national stage - that it might nevertheless sometimes be reasonable for an individual to withhold their moral support for a particular conflict. This formulation also makes no assumptions connected to the *scale* of modern warfare. It does not necessarily commit us to the belief (although it might be relatively uncontroversial) that conflicts on the *scale* of the world wars of

the twentieth century are to be avoided - only to the belief that the scale of a war must be proportionate to its necessity.

The most controversial aspect of the way I have expressed this justification is perhaps my choice of the word 'horror'. This is a word commonly linked to remembrance of the genocidal atrocities of the holocaust, but less often to remembrance of the deaths of armed servicemen (although the opposing perspectives I presented in my opening section do both use this term). I struggle to find a more fitting word than this, which captures both the object to be remembered and the sentiments that a teacher, in his or her 'purposeful reminding', would be aiming to nurture or encourage in relation to it. Perhaps 'grief' might constitute an acceptable alternative. But the word 'horror', although it may not immediately spring to mind, captures not only the sadness and regret, but also the moral repugnance that we might expect a student to feel when reminded of the reality of the suffering and death that accompanies any armed conflict. Although this is a word that we might associate with the mass production of death that is a feature of modern, mechanised conflict, the horror of war is not dependent on scale. One contribution of the twentieth century war poets who wrote from the front lines was to emphasise the filth, indignity, and mutilation of a conflict that was liable to be glorified at home in terms of the nobility of the 'ultimate sacrifice'.

Perhaps the term 'horror' can be justified through consideration of what it *does not* say. If we designate a conflict 'meaningless', for example, this rather crowds out the possibility that elements of the same conflict might afford possibilities for the exhibition of nobility, or dignity, or courage, or other virtues that depend for their real existence on their being directed to some meaningful end. War might be futile, or meaningless, but this justification of remembrance does not demand it.

It does demand that horror is an inescapable element of warfare. That whatever else there is, there will always be horror. Aside from the civilian 'collateral damage' we in the twenty-first century are so much more familiar with than were the war poets of WW1, there is the bare fact that every dead serviceman is a mother's son. However revisionist we may be about the real conditions of the trenches in the 'Great War', each corpse collected from no-man's land is one more body broken or destroyed by deliberate human action. Each single death, regardless of scale, is worthy of the sentiment of horror. Yet the important thing to note is that all war can be horrific without this sentiment then encompassing our attitudes to war. War can be other things alongside. This is perhaps best illustrated in a poem by Siegfried Sassoon, named 'The Redeemer,' which he identifies as his 'first front-line poem' (Sassoon 1983: 5). In it, the poet follows a soldier who is carrying a heavy load through a 'mire' in heavy rain. In a flash of lightning, the soldier is transfigured, and appears to the poet as Christ:

...His eyes on mine  
Stared from the woeful head that seemed a mask  
Of mortal pain in Hell's unholy shrine.

He goes on...

But to the end, unjudging, he'll endure  
Horror and pain, not uncontent to die,  
That Lancaster on Lune may stand secure.

That horror can be juxtaposed with Christ-like sacrifice in this way suggests that acknowledging the one does not necessarily preclude the other. I would go further than that in the context of this poem: what enables the soldier's transfiguration - his identification with Christ on the cross - is precisely the horror and pain of this scene. The horror amplifies rather than undermines the sacrifice. It is not necessary that a reader accepts my interpretation of Sassoon as a strong claim about the relationship between the sentiment of horror and the virtue of self-sacrifice. It is

sufficient to acknowledge that encouraging students to remember that war is horrific does not entail that we have to believe it is meaningless or futile.

So what does it entail? In Sassoon's later poem, 'At the Cenotaph', the 'Prince of Darkness' regards the monument amidst the European turmoil in which the first stirrings of a second world conflict could already be discerned, and utters the following prayer:

"Make them forget, O Lord, what this Memorial  
Means; their discredited ideas revive;  
Breed new belief that War is purgatorial  
Proof of the pride and power of being alive;  
Men's biological urge to readjust  
The Map of Europe, Lord of Hosts, increase;  
Lift up their hearts in large destructive lust;  
And crown their heads with blind vindictive peace."

Siegfried Sassoon (1933) 'At the Cenotaph'

What does 'this Memorial' mean? There is a lot of room for interpretation here. The poet, as is appropriate to his medium, only implies this meaning through what the Prince of Darkness claims it is not. But we need not stray too far for our current purposes from the literal meaning – the 'empty tomb' that stands alternatively as a grave for *all* who gave their lives or for all of those to whom no other monument stands. The monument stands for the dead.

The once powerful rhetoric of social Darwinism to which Sassoon alludes here does not speak with as much emotive force to a contemporary audience. We might also question the biological claim that man's 'destructive lust', if left unchecked, will lead us into death and ruin. Yet the poem forcefully reminds us of the lessons of history: that powerful and persuasive ideologies can all too easily assuage or smother the pricking conscience of the individual. This, it might be argued, is the motive force for the educational endeavour of remembrance: the young should be reminded that even if war is necessary, and however morally justifiable it might be to take a life, even the death of one individual through violent action is never less than horrific. Faced with the merest possibility that some conflicts might not be necessary, and considering the persuasive power of contemporary rhetorics such as the heroism of our armed serviceman, our heritage of British values, or the need to promote liberal democracy worldwide, the duty of educators to provide their students with the emotional resources to resist these rhetorics in appropriate circumstances seems compelling. Whatever else might be glorious, some elements of war at least are neither to be taken for granted nor celebrated. No death in war is to be accepted with a workmanlike necessity. The death of a soldier might be heroic, but it will always be horrific. That is to say nothing of the inevitable civilian casualties.

Horror, I would argue, is all the more fitting when we consider the question of what is remembered by those who did experience these events first hand. The 'mixture' of courage and horror to which the Prime Minister referred in his speech on remembrance is particularly marked in the attitude of war veterans, in whom we often observe a mingling of nostalgia with a recognition that there are some events and feelings of which we will not, or cannot speak. When we see those dwindling numbers of veterans arrayed in their solemnity at the Cenotaph, we ought to ask whether horror is not an appropriate part of the attitude with which they remember – not just the horror of what they have seen, but also of what they have done.

## 5. Gratitude

***We ought to remember the sacrifice of the war dead as the fulfilment of a debt of gratitude to those who have died on our behalf in past or current conflicts.***

Remembering the war dead will always go hand in hand with feeling certain sentiments toward them. The educator's 'purposeful reminding' will moreover entail *encouraging* certain sentiments. A certain sorrow or regret at the passing of the war dead is an entirely appropriate sentiment, and I have argued in the preceding section that something stronger - something more like horror - is also an appropriate sentiment for educators to expect their students to feel in relation to the manner of the passing of military servicemen. Other sentiments, however, might also be considered appropriate; gratitude for their sacrifice would be a popular contender here.

Let us think for a short time about gratitude. We are normally grateful for something (i) freely given, (ii) that is of genuine benefit to us, and (iii) that was conferred with an intention or motivation that was in some way directed towards us. The second and third of these requirements bear some elaboration. On the second, let us consider the 'token gift' that is of no particular financial value and has no functional use, such as a home-made card or child's drawing. We nevertheless appropriately feel grateful when we receive such a gift because of the sentiments attached to it. The love or affection that accompanies the gift is precious to us; the gift is likely to be highly valued and perhaps treasured for some time. In some cases, this gift will also have a cost in terms of the time and effort taken to produce it, but this is not always necessary. Sometimes it is the thought that counts. On the other hand, if a gift is unasked for and of no benefit to us, the cost at which it was bought is of relatively little importance.

The third criterion might not seem immediately clear, but this will enable us to distinguish gratitude that is owed from gratitude that is simply felt. This is of prime importance to the educator, who needs to be able to identify the former and engender it in students where the sentiment does not naturally occur. We might feel grateful, for example, to the person who sat on a seat before us in a cold classroom and warmed it. One imagines that they were not forced to give up their body heat, and we are certainly benefiting from the warmth they left, but no gratitude is owed because the heat we are feeling is merely a by-product of their sitting in the chair. They did not intend to warm it for us or anybody else. More correctly, I think that we are glad of the heat of the chair, rather than grateful. Compare this with the classic example of the 'random act of kindness,' where we discover in a coffee shop that someone at some previous time has already paid for our coffee. Here, the intention was not directed toward us as specific persons, but nevertheless we fit the criteria for the general category of person who was intended to benefit from the gift. The gift was not given to us personally, but was nevertheless intended for us. We would like to return some benefit for the debt we feel we owe, even if this simply takes the token form of expressing our thanks (although of course the beauty of this particular situation is that the gift is given in such a way that there is no possibility of conferring this token on the appropriate party). There is no possibility of this debt being *repaid*, and normally gratitude does not demand that we do so.

Why should students be grateful to those who 'gave their lives' in past conflicts? Before we begin, we should clarify some potentially misleading ways in which we talk about remembrance. Although the language of remembrance is often about the giving of lives, it seems more fitting to say that the lives that were given were not the gift itself, but its cost. It is not claimed that the life laid down is beneficial to us, but some other good for which the giver was prepared to pay the 'ultimate cost'. Let us now consider the three criteria for gratitude in turn.

An assumption that would underpin any claim that we owe gratitude to the war dead is that their lives were freely given. A lot here depends on language. We can say that lives are given, lost or taken. It is almost certainly not the case that the majority of soldiers who sailed, for example, to the Normandy beaches on the D-Day landing went with the express intention of laying down their lives for their countrymen. At most, we could say that the majority went in full knowledge that they could very likely die, and went nevertheless. This is not to denigrate the courage many of these young men undoubtedly displayed. But it at least introduces the possibility that many, if not the majority, could have sailed hoping that they would not die, or that they would not have to make the ultimate sacrifice.

Then let us consider the moment the sacrifice is made. There are those instances when a soldier makes a conscious decision to give up his own life in place of his companions in arms, such as when a grenade is smothered to prevent the spread of shrapnel. These instances blur with those occasions where a soldier proceeds, heedless of his own safety, into an action or situation to which he has not been ordered and which will almost certainly result in his own death. There is further blurring here: what distinguishes these actions from those of any soldier who freely chooses to put himself in harm's way by entering a conflict? Certainly, the current rhetoric of soldiers as heroes (as encapsulated in the slogan of the charitable campaign 'help for heroes') supports a characterisation of all military death and injury as similarly heroic. Yet the fact that some heroes are decorated for bravery or sacrifice where others are not suggests that, in the eyes of the military establishment at least, some soldiers' actions are more 'giving' than others.

We need not become too embroiled in attempts to make distinctions along this spectrum. It is sufficient to acknowledge that many war deaths are of a different order to those standout instances when the ultimate sacrifice is willingly made. An armoured personnel carrier passes over an unexpected mine. A shell lands in a trench. In such cases, at the moment of death, it seems more fitting to say that lives are taken indiscriminately than that they are given. That is before we have said anything about the possibility of cowardice, or of the possibility that, at the moment of ultimate sacrifice, the once willing soldier regrets his decision or changes his mind; he wishes not to die, and to revoke the gift; perhaps he even hopes that another might die in his place.

This difference is all the more important when we consider the part that conscription played in the world wars of the twentieth century. It is not at all clear that gratitude is an appropriate sentiment to foster in relation to the death of conscripts. Here was a gift in many cases not willingly given. We might feel glad when others die instead of us, but in cases where they do so against their will, the sentiment of gratitude seems misdirected, and gladness is likely swiftly to be accompanied or replaced by guilt. Whatever our feelings are about the necessity of war, the necessity of conscription is even more questionable, and encouraging gratitude toward conscripts is likely to obscure the possibility of thinking critically about whether human beings ought to have been placed in the kind of position in which conscripts find themselves. We are not normally grateful for a gift that the giver was forced to give up.

The analogous language of the giving of life, therefore, is hard to apply with clarity in the context of military service. This is a very strange kind of gift. The potential giver undertakes a path, perhaps, with an initial preparedness to give, but in the last moment the gift is in fact snatched from his hands. Furthermore, it is not within the remit of the supposed 'receiver' to accept or reject this gift. It is some other party altogether that does the 'taking'. Where we end up, I think, is recognising that if lives have sometimes been freely given in past conflicts, by no means all were, and where they were, this was not always in the same way. If we do therefore owe a debt of gratitude to the war dead, it is not owed to all of them, or at least the gratitude that is owed is not of the same kind for all of the war dead.

Perhaps we should not think of this gift only in terms of the ultimate sacrifice. Perhaps we ought to remember that soldiers gave other elements of themselves. This would, I think, stretch the sense of remembrance that is ordinarily intended, but it might be appropriate. No soldier goes to war knowing that he will die. A soldier in a modern western technologically assisted army knows that, in fact, this is a statistically unlikely circumstance compared to the likely casualties that will be sustained on the opposing side. But all go knowing that it is one of the tasks of a soldier to kill, and that they will be expected to take life. We don't often think of remembrance in terms of the soldiers who were prepared to kill on our behalf, but here any gratitude we might feel would rightly, I think, be intermingled with some of the horror we touched on in the first justification of remembrance.

Passing for the time being over the second criterion, let us consider the third, that of the intention of the giver. What did the soldiers of the first and second world wars die *for*; what was their intention? To what extent can we think of the gift as having been intended for us? I think it is unproblematic to imagine that inasmuch as many soldiers in the great conflicts of the twentieth

century believed they were defending their countrymen, or the values of their countrymen, against tyrannical regimes and oppressive ideologies, they were doing so for the sake of future generations as well. So that whatever they were prepared to give, they were as much prepared to give for the sake of those not yet born as for those to whom they hoped to return when war was done. Although what was given was not given to us personally, it is reasonable to imagine that we fit the general category of people for whom the gift was intended.

But this rather thrusts us toward the second criterion – that of the value or benefit of what is given. There is no doubt that one's life is the ultimate price to pay. Nevertheless, the gratitude owed to someone who is prepared to pay the ultimate price will differ depending on the value of the item to which that price is attached. I recall when my father paid through the nose for some flowers for my mother that had more or less already wilted. The gratitude that my mother expressed to him was mingled with a fair amount of reproach. If he had been more discerning in his choice of flowers and used his money more wisely, my mother's gratitude would have been purer and more intensely felt; and she did not owe him as much thanks for long dead flowers as for fresh ones, regardless of the supposed thought that had gone into the gift.

The claim that we owe a debt of gratitude to the servicemen and women of the twentieth century assumes that we have received something of value from them, albeit indirectly, for which they were prepared to give up their lives. This gift is usually thought of in terms of values or institutions. Soldiers died to preserve values or institutions that could otherwise have been lost. These are the same values and institutions that we today hold dear, so the gratitude is owed because without their sacrifice something beneficial to us would not exist. Sometimes the claim is more about our political situation. Some political state of affairs now holds which would not hold without the costly sacrifices of the world wars. This state of affairs was therefore bequeathed to us by those dead servicemen, and we owe them a debt of gratitude.

Readers may be familiar with the well-known comedy sketch about what the Romans ever did for us. Although the speakers are originally occupied contemporaries of the Romans complaining about the yoke of Roman oppression, many of the advancements eventually listed could be considered gifts bequeathed by the Romans to subsequent generations. Yet we do not tend to argue that we owe a debt of gratitude to the Romans. Let us put aside for simplicity's sake the other civilisations who could make competing claims to have bequeathed these technological enhancements. The reason we do not feel indebted is largely to do with water under the bridge. So much historical change has occurred between us and the Romans that it seems highly unlikely that we resemble any of the future generations that any Roman who intended to bequeath some good to posterity might have had in mind. More importantly, as time goes on, the historical counterfactual claim becomes more difficult to sustain. That is, the claim that 'If the Romans had not done some x, we wouldn't now have some y', becomes tenuous: in hindsight we see that it would have come about some other way.

The pace of change in the twentieth century means that such counterfactuals are also difficult to maintain in more recent cases. It is hard to conceptualise the alternate states of affairs that might have pertained, for example, had the First World War progressed differently, or had Britain not become involved in the first place. Certainly, the map of Europe could now look very different, but it hardly seems appropriate to claim that we owe a debt of gratitude to previous generations for the nature of territorial boundaries of the map of Europe. Our preference for the current geo-political situation is natural, given that if the historical counterfactual pertained, it is very difficult to see how there could be any meaningful 'us', in terms of national identity, with which to compare this different situation. But we do not appropriately feel gratitude for the historical contingencies which have brought about the situation in which we find ourselves, at least inasmuch as these contingencies are morally neutral: participants in any alternative counterfactual future would have just as much reason for gratitude. And I would argue that this geo-political case is morally neutral.

The First World War was a territorial rather than an ideological conflict. Wittgenstein, as philosophers are wont to point out, may have written large parts of his work, the *Tractatus*, in the trenches of the First World War, where he served as a freely enlisted member of the Austro-Hungarian army. It is difficult to see how the values he felt he was upholding would have differed significantly from those in which any intelligent British serviceman believed at the same time. Interestingly, even the Prime Minister, in his address discussed earlier, acknowledged that one effect we can reasonably attribute to allied victory in the First World War is the creation of the political conditions that led to the Second World War. It does not seem easy then, and certainly not uncontroversial, to attribute specifically to the sacrificial actions and even to the victory of British and colonial servicemen in the First World War the survival of any beneficial set of values, institution, or political state of affairs. I think these problems also apply if we think of servicemen fighting to protect an inter-generational community or some entity such as a 'nation'. Conceived as a political entity only, it does not seem a matter for gratitude that a particular nation has endured over time, and it does not seem appropriate to celebrate that this entity emerged from a given conflict more wealthy or powerful than its defeated opponent. If we do not think of a nation only as a political entity, then we are perhaps thinking of a community connected by the survival of some continuous national identity which would rest on the kind of enduring communal values that I have questioned here and will problematise further in the next section.

It is often suggested that there was, on the other hand, a moral necessity to the Second World War. It does seem in hindsight to have been important that someone resisted Hitler. But it is equally difficult, even with this more recent conflict, to engage meaningfully in counterfactual speculation about a series of connected events that spanned the globe. If no-one had violently opposed Hitler's fascism, would it have remained unchecked after his death? What other ideological and political transformations would Europe or the wider world have undergone in the later half of the twentieth century? Would there have been more or less bloodshed in the long run? Would liberal democracy be more or less widespread? One thing our contemporary interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan demonstrate is that it is very difficult to predict what long term difference such interventions will make, even in relatively bounded regions.

It does seem certain from a contemporary point of view that allied victory in World War II checked Hitler's extermination of the Jewish race across Europe. Yet we ought to recall the connection between gratitude and intention. The events and extent of the holocaust were largely unknown to the majority of serving soldiers and its ending was in many ways as a side effect of allied action. The common belief of many secondary school students that the Second World War was fought against anti-semitism is largely a misapprehension. The seductive tendency is to ascribe moral sentiments that we now commonly attach to a conflict to the historical actors with which we identify.

Without the possibility of connecting any undesirable contemporary counter-factual state of affairs with the intentions of those willing to pay the ultimate cost, it is difficult to establish any debt of gratitude to them. We can certainly approve of those who believed that they were doing their moral duty, but we cannot really maintain, at least without considerable controversy, that in so doing they benefited us. In such situations we commonly praise what we consider to be right actions, but we do not owe a debt of gratitude to them.

In summary, then, it is not at all clear that many of those who paid the ultimate price in war did so willingly; gratitude is not due in those cases where they did not. Furthermore, although we might in some cases praise those who gave their lives in past conflicts for doing what they felt to be their moral duty, it is hard to establish that those sacrifices either directly or indirectly brought about a state of affairs that is more beneficial to us or overall more morally acceptable than any alternative. Neither is it clear that we can connect the survival of any shared set of values with the intentions of those servicemen who happened to be on the winning side in past conflicts. Finally, any gratitude students might be encouraged to feel is gratitude not only for dying, but also for killing, on their behalf. The gratitude thus condones the killing as a further necessary price paid for

the benefit received. In the context of the cost of the 'ultimate sacrifice' thus being mixed with another more sinister cost, the question of whether we *asked* for or *accepted* the gift becomes vitally important. The gift of the death of another is a terrible thing to give without asking the intended receiver's permission. In light of this, it does not seem appropriate in educational settings to encourage gratitude to the war dead, but rather to allow students to engage with the open question of whether a debt of gratitude is in fact owed.

I think this last point is worth reiterating. I am not arguing that we know that gratitude is not owed, but that it might not be. In this case, it is inappropriate for schools to proceed as if the matter had been resolved in favour of gratitude. I should add that I accept that some measure of gratitude might be due to those who are currently prepared to put themselves in harm's way for the sake of the security of their nation or community, in the same way that we might encourage children to be grateful in some measure to the fire service or the police. But this comes with two caveats: firstly, this is a gratitude that is not offered unreservedly, and can be withheld if servicemen and women are engaged in a conflict that we believe to be immoral. Secondly, this gratitude depends on the possibility that the armed services might offer protection from certain real threats to our wellbeing or that of our loved ones, rather than on any connection with past conflicts. I will argue in the next section that connecting any gratitude due to the armed services in the present with the sacrifices of the past could have undesirable results.

## 6. Shared Values

***We ought to remember the sacrifices of past conflicts so that we continue to feel bound to uphold the values for which those who died gave their lives.***

Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from failing hands we throw  
The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.

John McCrae (1915) 'In Flanders Fields'

While one justification of remembrance so far discussed looks backward to some event for which it is argued we hold a debt of gratitude, and the other looks forward to the avoidance of unnecessary future conflict, this justification establishes a thread between past conflicts and our present situation.

Here's one way that it could go: values that we now hold are sufficiently dear that in the past people have been prepared to die to defend them. We ought therefore to treasure and uphold these values.

The first problem to be noted is that a person's being prepared to die for a set of values does not provide a warrant for upholding them. Willingness to die for a set of values is not the sole preserve of the morally righteous, and if a student genuinely feels disinclined to subscribe to a value, we ought to be very cautious about attempting to persuade or encourage them to do so on the grounds that someone in the past has died to uphold that value. In the current global political climate we might have reason to fear that they will be enlisted in many more dubious sorts of causes on precisely these grounds.

A further observation can be made here. The claim that our adherence to our shared values ought to be strengthened through remembrance sits in a circular relationship with the claim that we owe gratitude to those who have defended the values that we hold dear. The one establishes the value of the sacrifice on the basis of the values, and the other reinforces the values on the basis of

the sacrifice. What this mutually sustaining circular relationship precludes is the possibility that a student might legitimately wish to question the extent to which she does hold values in common with her classmates, and certainly the extent to which her values are shared with the British or colonial soldier of the twentieth century. Each justification seems to rest on the further assumption that a relatively enduring set of specifically 'British' values can be identified and shared by young people across the country.

The Prime Minister attempts a list of shared values – courage, loyalty, mateship etc. – and there are others that might be offered. Any list that we might offer, however, encounters the same problem: it must be more or less distinctively 'British' in character. If the list is less distinctively British (and indeed it hardly seems that anyone at all would refuse to subscribe to the Prime Minister's list, with the exception of the possibly questionable concept of 'mateship'), then it is less controversial, but it is hard to see how any special affinity with these values is encouraged through remembering our historical connection to the war dead. If, on the other hand, the list is more distinctively 'British' -whatever that might mean - it becomes easier to connect it with a nation's specific heritage, but it also becomes more controversial. The more controversial the list, the harder it is to assume the educational principle that we ought to be encouraging all students alike to subscribe to it through the observation of the event of remembrance.

There is a further nuance here. Courage, loyalty, and even 'mateship', are largely uncontroversial when understood in the broadest terms. However, when understood in the broadest terms, it hardly seems necessary that we require a commemoration of war to promote these values or to establish a connection with our heritage. The soldier, although he may happen to have died in a conflict, is not necessarily an unproblematic exemplar of such virtues, and certainly not universally so. Perhaps there are other historical events, equally or more worthy of our special remembrance, that might also exemplify the virtues or sense of heritage that the Prime Minister wishes to encourage. One thinks particularly of the suffragette movement, where virtues of courage, loyalty, and even willingness to pay the ultimate price, might all be exemplified. The model of courage and sacrifice offered here is all the purer because it is not also intermingled with a willingness to take life (or at least, not by any means to the same extent).

When transferred into the military context, furthermore, these seemingly uncontroversial values become far more liable to contestation. To what extent is courage exemplified, for example, by the conscript who refuses to fight in the First World War and is subsequently shot as a coward? Certainly, such a refusal puts the soldier's 'loyalty' in question – but to what persons or principles is loyalty owed? Is loyalty to be equated with an unquestioning obedience? These are open questions about value that one would hope teachers could encourage students to approach critically. It is certainly difficult to see these values as definitive of or exemplified by a particular conflict. While they might motivate particular soldiers in different ways, the values of courage, loyalty and mateship are hardly the values that motivate conflicts as a whole. Conflicts are motivated by much more complicated and ambiguous political principles. A sense of 'mateship', in fact, is likely to motivate a soldier to continue to fight on behalf of his fellows *regardless* of any strong political or moral justification, or lack thereof, for the particular conflict in question.

Let us explore the exhortation to 'take up' the torch found in the poem 'In Flanders Fields' (commonly acknowledged to be the origin of the decision to use the poppy as a symbol of remembrance). Rather than exhorting peace, the fallen urge the living to continue their 'quarrel with the foe' and not to 'break faith with us who die'. The implication is that questioning the grounds on which soldiers embarked on a conflict breaks faith with them. The same concern is found in Laurence Binyon's insistence that 'Age shall not weary them/ nor the years condemn'. Again, it should be noted that the weight of death does not serve to legitimise past conflict. Pupils ought to be free to question the legitimacy of the great conflicts of history without being encouraged to feel that doing so somehow undermines a shared set of values for which so many have given their lives.

This justification of remembrance starts us on a slippery slope that is eventually susceptible to political opportunism. Once the assumption of a historically continuous set of shared values is accepted, it requires only a short step to identify contemporary conflicts with those values. Now the weight of past sacrifice is added to legitimise contemporary conflicts in which soldiers continue to die alongside the historical fallen, and to question the legitimacy of these conflicts is to break faith not only with 'our boys' overseas but with all of those who have died throughout history for the same values. The young child who has been encouraged to believe in a historically continuous set of British values and who then looks at media images of political figures stood alongside the neatly arrayed ranks of servicemen from past and present conflicts could be forgiven for inferring that all of the conflicts thus represented were motivated by the same principles and were all equally legitimate. But this would be a false inference. Also false is the claim that questioning the legitimacy of any past or present conflict constitutes any sort of dishonour or disrespect to servicemen who are currently deployed abroad in service of the foreign policies of the current elected government. Promoting either of these false beliefs would have the effect of discouraging students from thinking critically about the legitimacy of this nation's involvement in current conflicts and other conflicts in the future.

## **7. The involvement of charities**

In the preceding sections I have argued that remembering the horror of all conflict would be a fitting justification for educational participation in an event of remembrance, but that a debt of gratitude owed to the war dead, or a desire to foster adherence to a set of shared and historically continuous values, are not. I have also suggested that if we wish to exemplify certain shared values in order to commend them to our students, the commemoration of other historical moments or achievements, like the suffrage movement, might be more conducive to this end. If, on the other hand, our aim in engaging in remembrance is to foster a sense of horror at the inevitable atrocities of war, then this purpose is diminished by being intermingled with other more questionable messages such as encouraging gratitude or commending the values for which those who have died were fighting.

I have also argued that the public event of remembrance is susceptible to a certain political opportunism, and although I will not push this point, it is easy to imagine how political motives might account in large part for why this public event has been sustained to the extent it has over the last hundred years. However, we ought also to consider the role played by high profile charities, namely the Royal British Legion and in recent years Help for Heroes. The Royal British Legion alone claims to have raised £35 million in the period between October 2012 and September 2013, specifically through the campaign known as the 'poppy appeal', and plans to have raised £37 million in the following year (Royal British Legion 2014). The funds raised are used to provide support to injured servicemen and bereaved families, and it is the British Legion that has been solely responsible in the United Kingdom for selling or distributing poppies as a fundraising mechanism since 1921.

Understandably, with such a significant fundraising commitment, charities campaign to promote their cause. The production of educational resources around remembrance is a significant part of this campaign and takes a prominent place particularly on the Royal British Legion's website. Both charities' campaign slogans and images are prominent throughout the season of remembrance, and the symbol of the poppy, in particular, is ubiquitous in schools. These slogans and images are designed to arouse the sentiments and encourage giving. We accept this as part of charitable work. However, we should note that this extent of involvement in schools of a charity, lobby or pressure group is otherwise unknown in education and has elements that ought to cause concern.

Firstly, let us consider the content of the slogans. 'Help for Heroes' by its choice of nomenclature promotes an understanding of all servicemen and women as heroic by definition, a characterisation that I have already argued to be highly questionable, but which has as its effect the

discouragement of any sort of critical voice in opposition to the causes or political motives for which these so-called heroes continue to risk life and limb. The Royal British Legion has tended to adopt and promote slogans to accompany the poppy appeal and which are therefore called to mind when the poppy is seen. The slogan 'wear your poppy with pride' has become familiar over many years and still features prominently on the charity's website today. In 2011 the slogan was 'standing shoulder to shoulder with all who serve'. It is an open question, related to those I have discussed above, whether pride is a sentiment that ought to be encouraged in relation to the war dead, and the idea that we ought to support those who currently serve at the same time as we commemorate those who have fallen is subject to political exploitation.

If we accept my argument that the fostering of the sentiment of horror in relation to armed conflict is the only tenable justification for a school's participation in the event of remembrance, then the adoption in schools of the slogans and resources of partisan charitable bodies works counter to our educational aims. The image of the poppy, furthermore, not only connects with these slogans but also, through its romantic connotations, may not itself be ideally conducive to fostering the sentiment of horror in relation to warfare. The writer Ted Harrison (2012: 19) records how one serviceman was moved to enlist in the army by the stirring sight of falling poppies, and The Royal British Legion's own website records a royal naval officer who explains thus why she wears her poppy: "It is not a time to be sombre, as they would not want that, but a time to have faith and pride for those that have passed away for our country."

This is not to denigrate the cause for which each charity works or their motives. The funds raised by the Royal British Legion and Help for Heroes are undoubtedly needed and valued by those who receive them. But these ends alone are insufficient justification for the wholesale participation of schools in a national event of commemoration. It is with only minimal hesitation that I would argue that other causes are more deserving of this scale of attention. The work of these charities may well improve lives in a particular way, but does not for the most part save them. Anyone wishing to see how tens of millions of pounds might be spent with more moral urgency and efficacy needs only consult the philosopher Peter Singer's excellent work, *The Life You Can Save*, in which he attempts to calculate the genuine cost of saving a life or improving the lot of those who are suffering the most around the world. Students might be encouraged to consider, in an event of global commemoration, the millions of children their own age who die each year for want of a daily amount equivalent to the cost of a bottle of mineral water to sustain their minimal needs for shelter and food.

## **8. Conclusion – Remembrance in Schools**

I clarified at the outset that my specific focus in this pamphlet was the participation of schools in the event of remembrance occurring on and around November 11<sup>th</sup>. I considered a range of justifications for such involvement and found only one that was uncontroversial and could be legitimately assumed by all parties. If there can be justification for a special moment or event of remembrance in schools, it must be to remind students of the horror of war, which should act as a spur to the constant critical evaluation of involvement in any and all armed conflict, particularly since there is never a shortage of political authorities who are prepared to advocate its expediency

I should repeat my initial claim that the possibilities for a nuanced exploration of conflict already exist in the explicit curriculum. The critical study of history, or the philosophical exploration of supposedly shared values and the moral justification for war all have their home in curriculum subjects. I hope I have demonstrated that incorporation into what might be considered a 'seasonal curriculum', in which certain more controversial sentiments are to be fostered or encouraged in relation to the war dead, actually works counter to the critical possibilities of those subject areas.

I have also argued for curtailing the involvement of charities in schools during the event of remembrance on the grounds that their interest in fund-raising requires them to actively promote

sentiments whose value ought at least to be left open, or even examined critically (depending on the age group of students) in an educational context.

I end therefore with the following positive proposals for schools' participation in the event of remembrance. The only sentiment that ought to be commended or encouraged in relation to the war dead is horror. This encompasses all those who die and not just those who fell on 'our side'. Furthermore, while the media, charitable bodies and the political and public sphere will continue to reproduce the observance of the event of remembrance, educational institutions ought to be safe spaces in which critical questions can be raised about this event and dissenting views can be expressed with confidence. This may require the moderation of certain familiar and usually unquestioned practices, such as the observance of particular rituals or ceremonies and even the distribution of poppies. There are other means by which students who wish to display their affiliation with the poppy appeal can acquire poppies, and their sanctioned distribution by fellow pupils in classrooms during school time can hardly be construed as anything other than a commendation of the justifications of remembrance espoused by the charity's current media campaign. I am not proposing a ban on poppies in schools. We do not ban the wearing of crosses in secular schools, but we also do not hand them out. I am advocating that schools should avoid commending the adoption of such symbols and their associated sentiments, and – where older students are concerned – ensure that they have an opportunity to consider why poppies might be worn, evaluate the views of those who dissent from the public rhetoric of remembrance, and reject this practice if they wish to do so.

In other respects, I would urge careful consideration of whether our practices around remembrance accord with our aims. There is no doubt that engagement with war poetry provides rich opportunities for consideration of the kinds of critical questions I have argued for around gratitude, say, or the moral justification of conflict, particularly for older children. But if we really want to convince students of the horror of war, we might share with them also stories not of servicemen, but of children their own age who have become casualties in war, or who have been mutilated by it: perhaps in indiscriminate bombing campaigns conducted by their own nation as well as others. If we signal the start of the two minutes' silence with a bugler playing the last post, there is no doubt that one or two sensitive souls will be moved to sense of sadness. But if we want children to think on the horror of war, perhaps we should be substituting images of those children whose lives have been cut short, even in conflicts that continue in the present moment, for the usual associations with bright red flowers, pristine stone memorials, and elderly men wearing medals.

## References

Cameron, D (2012) 'Speech at Imperial War Museum of First World War centenary plans', Cabinet Office, Gov.UK, available online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/speech-at-imperial-war-museum-on-first-world-war-centenary-plans>

Carr, M (2014) 'Will the first world war anniversary be a launch pad for new forms of militarism in 2014?', No Glory in War 1914 – 1918, available at <http://www.noglory.org/index.php/articles/99-how-the-uk-government-will-use-the-world-war-i-centenary-in-2014-as-a-launchpad-for-new-forms-of-militarism#.VAgwPeog-00>

Daily Mail (2011) 'Poppy-burning Muslims plan new "Hell for Heroes" demonstration on November 11', Daily Mail Online, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2055365/Poppy-burning-Muslims-plan-new-hell-heroes-demonstration-November-11.html>

DfE (2013) *History Programmes of Study: Key Stage 3*, Department for Education, available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-history-programmes-of-study>

Gove, M (2014) 'Why does the Left insist on belittling true British heroes?', Daily Mail, available at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2532923/Michael-Gove-blasts-Blackadder-myths-First-World-War-spread-television-sit-coms-left-wing-academics.html>

Harrison, T (2012) *Remembrance Today: Poppies, Grief and Heroism*, London: Reaktion Books

No Glory (2013) 'Open Letter: How should we remember the first world war?', No Glory in War 1914-1918, available online at: <http://noglory.org/index.php/open-letter/no-glory-in-war-open-letter#.U-iDZX-9KK0>

Royal British Legion (2014) 'Poppy Appeal', available on Royal British Legion website at <http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/poppy-appeal>

Sassoon, S (1983) *The War Poems*, arranged and introduced by Rupert Hart-Davis, London: Faber and Faber