Civic Humanism Center. Establishing a research and transference center on liberal education, character development, and professionalism in Spain

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Introduction

The mission of the university has been a matter of intellectual and academic debate over the past decades. Its proper function is under discussion (Kerr 2001). There is growing criticism of the career-focused and disciplinary orientation it has taken, i.e., that its main educational aim is to prepare students for the job market. The contemporary university seems to have forgotten or neglected other educational aspects that were once considered essential, such as liberal and humanistic formation or civic and character education (Bok 2020; Jubilee 2020; Brant et al. 2022).

In response to this situation, a number of initiatives have emerged in recent years to promote liberal and character education at the university level. Examples of liberal education are the Great Books or Core Texts programs which, from the United States, are spreading to other countries (Cohen de Lara – Drop 2017). An example of character education programs for university students, either as an extracurricular activity or integrated into the curriculum of each degree, are the the Oxford Character Project (Brant et al. 2020; Brooks et al. 2019) and the Program for Leadership and Character at Wake Forest University (Lamb et al. 2022)

These initiatives allow the recovery of one of the traditional missions of the university: that of educating students at the personal level, which, together with doing research and educating professionals, forms a basic triad (Ortega y Gasset 1947). In the education of the person, two complementary areas may be distinguished: intellectual growth through general humanistic education (or core curriculum) and the cultivation of character through curriculum design or participation in certain specific activities (Jubilee 2020).

In universities of the French tradition, which is the norm in Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Latin America, the professionalizing orientation of education is stronger than in those of the German or Anglo-Saxon traditions. For this reason, the recovery of the mission of educating the person is more complicated (Torralba 2022).

In the Spanish context, the Civic Humanism Center for Character and Professional Ethics (CHC) at the University of Navarra was established in September 2022 as an institute for research and transference that aims to help universities to offer an education that meets the three above mentioned missions. The rationale guiding the work of the Center is the

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following. Studies of professionalism show that in order to be a good professional it is not enough to acquire a technical qualification, it is also necessary to develop certain intellectual and character qualities (Jubilee 2016, Pellegrino 2002). Since it is not simple, nor perhaps realistic, to pretend to change the institutional model that Spanish universities already have, one possibility to improve the kind of education they offer is to argue that in order to offer sound professional preparation, general humanistic formation and character development should also be part of a university education.

The paper is divided into three sections. The first section presents the central theses of the studies on professionalism intending to show that the concept of "profession", as usually understood in Spanish universities, is reductionist. From a fuller conception of a profession, attention is drawn to the need for professional education to focus not only (or mainly) on technical qualifications but also on the ethical dimension of any job. The aim is for students to acquire a professional identity at the university, i.e., a mode of being (or character) specific to a professional domain while inviting them to grow as persons. Following this understanding of professional education in the university, CHC has begun to work in two areas: (a) character development and mentoring; and (b) Great Books seminars as a paradigm for liberal education.

The second section presents the rationale for embracing neo-Aristotelian principles in character education at the university level (following the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues and OCP's path-breaking work), briefly introduces the pilot program "Leadership as Service: Developing Purpose and Character", and explains how mentoring can contribute to character development. The third section reviews the principles of liberal education and presents the great books seminars as one of the most common and effective ways to put these principles into practice, and argues that these seminars provide an appropriate context for developing intellectual and moral virtues.

1. Professionalism: towards a fuller concept of profession and university education

1.1 The problem of professionalizing education

There is a generalized tendency in universities worldwide to offer an increasingly specialized and professionalizing education. In Spain (and, in general, in Latin America), this tendency is even more pronounced because its higher education institutions belong to the French university tradition, where the liberal education model that lingers in the Anglo-Saxon sphere is not common (Pérez-Díaz & Rodríguez 2001, pp. 59-74).

In this institutional context, in recent decades, several liberal arts or core curriculum programs have emerged in order to "supplement" the education offered by specialized universities (Torralba 2022). However, this approach, although worthy, is insufficient. It frequently becomes a mere formative add-on that does not shape the educational curriculum in a comprehensive way (Lacalle 2018). Moreover, it perpetuates among students the idea that it is one thing to prepare oneself for a profession (the proper task of the university) and

something else to receive a general humanistic education (a positive and enriching thing, but not essential to a university education).

1.2 Two possible solutions: institutional reform and widening the concept of a profession

A possible solution to this problem would be to establish universities based on a liberal education paradigm. Nevertheless, it is difficult and unrealistic in the short term because in most of these countries there is hyper-regulation by the state, and the dynamism that we find in other European countries is absent (the Netherlands would be a paragon case due to its relatively recent foundation of several liberal arts and sciences colleges; Cohen de Lara 2017)[5]. In Spain, there is hardly any diversity of institutional models. The vast majority of universities offer studies at the three levels of bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees and have the same kind of educational programs. The main factor for choosing a university apart from offering the desired degree is its proximity to the place of residency. New students do not perceive that universities provide different educational programs to choose from, in particular at public universities, which the vast majority of students attend: 83% (Ministry of Universities 2022).

The other possible solution to the problem would be widening the concept of a profession or delving deeper into its meaning. Since Spanish universities offer professional training, which is what students and their families demand, a modification in the concept of a profession would directly imply a transformation of education.

In Spain, the concept of a profession is understood in a reductive way for at least the following three reasons: (a) it is limited to its technical aspect (as know-how), without properly acknowledging its ethical dimension, (b) the profession is conceived as something independent of one's personal life, as if professional and personal development were unrelated, that is, it is overlooked that the profession contributes to defining a person's way of "being", and (c) the profession is understood mainly in terms of personal achievement: what you get from your work, whether in the form of salary, recognition or social status, is seen independently from considerations of service and one's contribution to the common good.

In the field of studies on "professionalism", research has been carried out to develop a concept of a profession that avoids these forms of reductionism. Moreover, it proposes an educational model for the professions that includes more than technical qualifications or skills. The CHC has adopted the findings of this research as its conceptual basis.

Professionalism is a relatively recent field of scholarship dedicated to studying how the education offered by universities ought to be if they are to adequately prepare students for the practice of a profession. These studies have been specially developed in the field of medicine

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5 There are exceptional cases such as the Liberal Arts Program at the Adolfo Ibáñez University in Chile or the General Studies Program at ITAM in Mexico. Both were inspired by U.S. institutions. In the tradition of core texts, a program with a minimal structure in Spain is the Great Books Program at the University of Navarra.

(Arbea et al. 2020). Here, proposals such as those of Edmundo Pellegrino stand out, emphasizing the ethical dimension inherent to the medical profession and the need for universities to cultivate intellectual and moral personal habits among future physicians (Pellegrino 2002). There are similar approaches in other areas. Studies can be cited in the fields of law (Longan et al. 2020), education (Falcón, Arraiz, 2020), economics (Barrenetxea et al. 2013), or architecture (Ahuja et al. 2017).

Let us begin by clarifying in what sense "profession" is used in professionalism studies. In ordinary language, someone is said to be a professional when he or she is paid for the task he or she performs, as opposed to an amateur. In addition, a person who performs a "well-done job" is described as a professional (Carr 2000, p. 22). In a more specific definition, being a professional would be characterized by these four features: "possession of a body of special knowledge, practice within some ethical framework, fulfillment of some broad societal need, and a social mandate which permits a significant discretionary latitude in setting standards for education and performance of its members" (Pellegrino 2002, 378).

In addition, we may draw from the traditional concept of the "learned professions", so called "by virtue of their educational breadth and their importance in satisfying some fundamental human need" (Pellegrino 2002, 378). These included professions such as medicine, law, education, the military, or religious ministry. What sets these professions apart would not be their expertise but "a certain degree of altruism, or suppression of self-interest when the welfare of those they serve requires it" (Pellegrino 2002, 378). Indeed, these professions often require going beyond the call of duty while the professional relationship is not reduced to an exchange of goods and services but also includes the development of personal bonds. We call this particular dedication to the good of others and to society as a whole, transcending self-interest, an "attitude of service"[6]. In widening the concept of a profession, paying attention to the dimension of service is crucial.

Although the service dimension is evident in the professions mentioned above, it can be said that any profession includes the dimension of service--with the necessary nuances and adaptations. There is no compelling reason to exclude, for example, the field of business or communication[7].

1.3 Ethical dimension of the professions

Along the lines as Pellegrino, Carr (2000) proposes five criteria to define the concept of a profession: "(i) professions provide an important public service; (ii) they involve a

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6 We are using "service" in the sense in which it appears in the concept of servant leadership (Greenleaf 1977).

7 Neither are the blue-collar occupations, although these are not the object of consideration here, as they fall outside the scope of university education. Carr excludes these professions (such as hairdressing) because he distinguishes between those occupations whose purpose is to meet "basic needs" and those whose purpose is to fulfill "civil needs" (Carr 2000, p. 26). Without denying the relevance of this distinction, it is helpful to consider a twofold perspective: objective (regarding the content of the work) and subjective (regarding the work's meaning for the person who performs it). From the subjective perspective, what will be said here about profession and professionalism could be applied to any job.

theoretically as well as practically grounded expertise; (iii) they have a distinct ethical dimension which calls for expression in a code of practice; (iv) they require organization and regulation for purposes of recruitment and discipline; and (v) professional practitioners require a high degree of individual autonomy-independence of judgement-for effective practice" (p. 23). This definition places particular emphasis on the fact that the professions are morally loaded activities. Indeed, someone who has the necessary knowledge and skills may be considered unfit to practice a profession because of a lack of "appropriate values, attitudes or motives" (Carr 2000, p. 24). In addition, professional practice, especially in the case of learned professions, makes a decisive contribution to the flourishing of individuals and societies. This contribution is not achieved mechanically or automatically but depends precisely on the conception that the professionals and the institutions have about human flourishing. These conceptions can be diverse; since we live in plural societies, professionals are involved in activities that generate "genuine ethical controversy" (Carr 2000, p. 28).

The moral dimension of the professions becomes evident in the existence of codes of conduct, professional associations with integrity committees, and, especially, by the inclusion of professional ethics courses in university curricula. Some of these professional ethics courses are limited to learning ethical principles that can be applied in a quasi-mechanical way, or focusing on studying specific cases as if the moral dimension appears only in unique or extreme situations. This approach understands the moral dimension as something added to professional practice while ignoring its intrinsic aspect. The professions involve the worker as a person, which means that professional ethics cannot be reduced to acquiring a body of knowledge but also requires the development of certain habits or personal qualities.

The Jubilee Centre's *Statement on Character, Virtue, and Practical Wisdom in Professional Practice* claims that "to perform well in a professional role is not simply to be a competent technician who follows officially prescribed professional rules, but a person of moral virtue" (2016). In addition to certain general virtues necessary for the good practice of any job, we can identify specific virtues for each profession (Pellegrino, 2002). The development of these virtues means that students should acquire virtue literacy and have opportunities to explore "vexed moral issues and dilemmas" (Jubilee, 2016). Among the virtues to be cultivated, *phronesis* stands out as a meta-virtue that enables students to make the right decisions in their work and in life. To summarize, the tradition of virtue ethics is particularly appropriate to teaching professional ethics (Sison et al. 2018) (more on this in section 2).

1.4 From a top-down model of ethics education to a communal one

The ethical regulation of professions and their teaching usually follows a 'top-down' model (Jubilee, 2016) that is based on conveying normative codes and without discussing the ethical assumptions on which the practice of the profession is based. An example would be that of economics, where the dominant paradigm still understands the purpose of business activity as "advancing the private good, maximizing shareholder returns, and defining personal and organizational purpose in maximizing economic value" (Naudé 2020, p. 258). The

shortcomings of this form of education have become apparent, for example, in the economic crises of the past years. A better approach is for universities to develop a sense of community where the values and ethical assumptions of the professions are openly discussed and communicated. For instance, in the field of management, the question is "not how to include non-economic values in the curriculum as an add-on, but how to embed an array of values in the curriculum itself and provide a framework for this education as a whole" (Naudé, 2020, p. 260). Indeed, some studies show that, as a result of dominant values, students currently attending business schools take on values such as "free-riding" and lose some of their "prosocial openness" (Pitt-Watson and Quigley 2019; cited in Naudé 2020, p. 260). Similar examples could be pointed to in other professional fields.

If we take medical education as an illustration, one could say that in medical school, each student, consciously or not, "shapes her self-image as a physician" and begins "to practice the virtues (or vices) of that model". Such self-image depends on the "dominant concept of the profession that defines its faculty" (Pellegrino 2002, 383). Therefore, the primary responsibility of schools is to reflect on their concept of a good professional in their field. This concept is more than merely theoretical, since the development of the student's character depends on it. As Pellegrino explains, in the same line of argument as the Jubilee Centre's Statement, "Students enter medical school with their characters partly formed. Yet, they are still malleable as they assume roles and models on the way to their formation as physicians" (Pellegrino 2002, 383). For this reason, professors cannot disengage themselves from the configuration of their students' characters. Whether they want to or not, for better or worse, they are shaping it.

1.5 Professional identity and hidden curriculum

In the field of professionalism, the concept of professional identity refers to the concept of a profession shared by faculty, which is used to define the educational curriculum (Bebeau et al. 2017). Three dimensions are usually distinguished as forming a professional identity: being, knowing, and doing (Cruess et al. 2016). According to what has been explained so far, the dominant conception in university education in Spain is limited to the dimensions of knowing (basic and specialized expertise) and doing (application of such knowledge through skills)[8]. However, as has been argued, education in a profession consists, above all, in conveying a way of being, i.e., a character. A professional possesses specific expert knowledge and skills and has formed a specific character.

In addition, from the perspective of professional identity, one can better understand the profession's place in people's lives. For instance, someone can only be considered a physician when he or she "consistently demonstrates the attitudes, values, and behaviors

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[8] A recent study on the current state of Spanish university education points precisely to the need to move from "the now classic ideas of employability and competencies" to a "more holistic and integrated conception of student development around (...) the ways of thinking and acting that characterize the expert in a given field" (Paricio, 2009, p. 10).

expected of one who has come to 'think, act, and feel like a physician'" (Cruess et al. 2016, p. 181). The profession is a means of both personal and social transformation. On the one hand, it shapes how a person "is in the world". On the other hand, the service dimension of any profession emerges, i.e., its contribution to the common good.

Four dimensions can be distinguished in the curriculum of a university program: formal, informal, hidden, and empty (Lehmann et al. 2018). The formal curriculum is made up of formal teaching, usually in the classroom. The informal curriculum consists mainly of extracurricular activities. The hidden curriculum comprises the implicit aspects that the student receives in an unspoken way, such as, for example, the conception of the purpose of economic activity. The empty curriculum is constituted by those matters that are not considered relevant for a university education, such as, in the case of Spain, the question about the general human good or the meaning of the profession as a form of service. In universities such as Spain's, the question of professional identity remains on the side of the hidden curriculum because it is not usually an issue that is addressed explicitly. However, it is inevitably transmitted as students develop a self-image of what it means to be such a professional.

The kind of transformation of professional education that CHC seeks to achieve requires: (a) that professional identity moves from the hidden curriculum to the formal and informal curriculum and (b) that personal and civic education moves from being part of the empty curriculum to being part of the formal and informal curriculum as well.

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The following conclusions can be drawn:
1. Professions have an intrinsic moral dimension and are a means of personal and social transformation.
2. A proper professional education must consider such dimensions and form students in it.
3. This ethical formation cannot be reduced to the transmission of codes of integrity or considering unique moral cases. It needs to be part of the regular training of students and be present in a transversal way in the curriculum.
4. Ethical qualification is not limited to acquiring knowledge but involves the cultivation of intellectual and moral habits. Professional education ultimately aims to develop a way of being, a specific character in the student, called professional identity.
5. In order to convey this professional identity, it is necessary that the curriculum be designed in such a way that no relevant aspect remains in the realm of the hidden or empty curriculum but that all of them are part of the formal and informal curriculum.

The document *Character Education in Universities. A Framework for Flourishing* (Jubilee 2020) guides the questions universities must consider to advance in this direction. Universities should develop a curricular approach that cuts across all degrees and subjects

and includes the informal educational setting. One such approach is currently being developed at Wake Forest University.

The CHC, following in the footsteps of the OCP, has so far designed the LASP extracurricular program at the University of Navarra. It is an activity that complements the education that students receive in their degree, similar to how the core curriculum (in particular, the great books program) does. However, it is intended to be an intermediate step to pave the way for a full-fledged curriculum transformation[9].

2. Character development and university mentoring

Moral education in universities and colleges has traditionally been a controversial issue (Glanzer & Ream 2008). Some scholars argue that universities should only promote a vision of moral education that is confined to a professional or vocational identity (Fish 2012). Others argue that universities should enhance moral education for the formation of citizens of liberal democracies (Shapiro 2005; Colby *et al.* 2003). A third group is made up by those who favor a further-reaching moral education in university, based on arguments such as the faculty's transformative role on students' lives and character (Kiss & Euben 2010).

Despite, or perhaps as a result of the controversy, a renewed sensibility on the role of the universities regarding the formation of the students is emerging. Many universities are institutionally assuming and expressing in their mission statements a more holistic and socially engaged vision of higher education. This encompassing approach to higher education aims at helping students to reach their potential, promoting their well-being and flourishing (Archer & Schuetze 2019; Barden & Caleb 2019; Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues 2020). In this context, character and virtue education is increasingly adopted by prestigious universities (Brant et al. 2022, 6) because it contributes to the renewed commitment of higher education institutions to promote students' personal development and their engagement in furthering the good of the society (Arthur & Bohlin 2005). Accordingly, a growing number of universities are developing research and character education programs. Notable instances of these initiatives are the already mentioned Oxford Leadership Initiative developed by the OCP (Brant et al. 2020; Brooks et al. 2019) or the Program for Leadership and Character at Wake Forest University (Lamb et al. 2022). These programs share the conviction that the cultivation of character and virtue in the university can provide the holistic formation that universities aim for and prepare students to face the challenges of current societies. The CHC shares the conviction that universities constitute an educational context for intentional character development.

A recent and significant milestone in character education at the university level is the programmatic document "Character Education in Universities: A Framework for

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9 The "Universitas Program. Professionals who add up", promoted by the rectorate and currently in its initial phase of definition in the schools, could enable this objective to be achieved. Its main purpose is to define the professional identity of each degree program, as well as the learning patterns that will allow students to acquire it during their years at the university.

Flourishing" (2020). This new framework has been developed by the Oxford Character Project in partnership with the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues at the University of Birmingham, and in consultation with specialists in higher education from universities in the UK, USA, Europe and Asia. The framework aims to clarify and reinforce the idea of flourishing in the university and proposes that universities intentionally embrace character education in order to advance students' flourishing. The document suggests core principles for the promotion of character in higher education, designs subsets of virtues suitable to the university setting, answers objections, and provides pedagogical and institutional strategies. The CHC seeks to adopt the principles and practices set out by the Framework. Furthermore, CHC has published a Spanish translation of the Framework[10] in order to help Spanish-speaking universities across the world in their mission to promote the cultivation of character.

In spite of its troubled history (Arthur 2020b) and its disparate theoretical and practical approaches, this "character education turn" (Arthur 2020a) has triggered a myriad of character education research (Zhang 2023) and a corresponding proliferation of educational practices and interventions around the globe. Current character education research is enriched by a kaleidoscopic and interdisciplinary vision nurtured by moral philosophy, education, and more recently by psychology (Fowers et al. 2021; Wright et al. 2021; Peterson & Seligman 2004). The advancement of character education is conducted by leading international research centers like the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues that develop thorough and evidence-based research on character and its impact on individuals and society (Arthur 2018, 106-151). These efforts are increasingly shaping educational policies, especially in the United States (Glanzer & Milson 2006) and in Europe, most notably in the UK (O'Shaughnessy 2020; Arthur 2018, 10-38; Arthur *et al.* 2015). Until recently, in the Spanish context, character education has not found much resonance (Fuentes 2018), but is now gradually emerging, with the activities of the University of Navarra's "Education, Citizenship and Character" research group (founded in 1997) and the launch of the CHC or the Virtues and Values Center at the Francisco de Vitoria University as examples.

2.1 Theoretical underpinnings

The increasing interest in character education has promoted further research on different character education models. These models inform a variety of inspirational frameworks for teachers and practitioners applicable to a wide variety of educational contexts and on different education levels. Broadly understood, character education embraces "any form of holistic moral education focusing on the systematic development of virtues as stable traits of character" with the purpose of promoting "human flourishing (*qua* objective wellbeing) and founded on some general virtue theory" (Watts & Kristjánsson 2023, 172). Some of these models have a positive education approach (Peterson & Seligman 2004). These could be

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10 "La educación del carácter en las universidades. Un documento marco para el florecimiento" (translated by Vianney Domingo).

called US-style character education models, whether liberal or conservative (Berkowitz 2002; Lickona 1991)[11].

The Civic Humanism Center conducts research and develops programs based on an open neo-Aristotelian approach (Kristjánsson 2015). This approach possesses, among others, some of the following salient features: (1) A systematic philosophical foundation (Peterson & Kristjánsson 2023; Sanderse 2012) (2) a continuum between personal and societal flourishing (Peterson 2020); (3) a naturalism that allows for empirical and interdisciplinary research on character based on social scientific methods that are both quantitative and qualitative (Fowers et al., 2021; Wright et al., 2021; Salkever 2005); (3) The consideration of a single virtue –*phrōnesis* (practical wisdom)– as a higher-order virtue or a meta-virtue that possesses an integrative and holistic function over the different components of virtue (cognitive, emotional, desiderative, perceptive, etc.) allowing a right reflection and evaluation that enables specific virtuous actions and for the virtuous life as a whole (Aristotle 2000: 1140a 23-26; 1141b 13–16). Therefore, prudence has a function over the rest of the virtues harmonizing them all (Kristjánsson et al. 2021; Burbules 2019; De Caro et al. 2018). Practical wisdom is an over-arching virtue for character development.

In addition, we argue that neo-Aristotelian character education provides holistic education that addresses all the faculties of the person. These include rational, emotional, desiderative, perceptual and even imaginative dispositions. These faculties are interconnected, and a holistic education addresses them as such. In its most foundational and Aristotelian sense, character education approaches moral development as a unified achievement (Corcilius, 2015; Perler, 2015). Thus, character education promotes a particular moral unity within the human being, a right and harmonic relationship between these different constitutive faculties and capacities in the human *psyche* and their use.

2.2 Educational practice: "Leadership as Service Program"

Starting out from neo-Aristotelian principles, one area of work of the CHC is the development of a character education program called "Leadership as Service: Developing Purpose and Character" (LASP). The program promotes the personal growth of students by developing responsible character traits or leadership virtues: a sense of mission and purpose, prudence, humility, resilience, gratitude, and service. LASP is developed in collaboration with the Oxford Character Project (OCP) (Brooks et al. 2022; Brant et al. 2020) and adopts the seven strategies of character education (Lamb et al. 2022).

The theoretical underpinnings of the program are based on the concept of servant leadership (Greenleaf 1977). For Greenleaf, servant leadership entails putting other people's interests, concerns, and aspirations first at the core of leadership (Greenleaf 1977, 13). LASP connects servant leadership to neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics (Meyer et al. 2019). Thus, LASP assumes

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[11] For a historical division of models of character education see Arthur 2020b, pp. 8-36.

that becoming a servant leader requires the development of certain specific virtues or character traits. The selection of the different virtues targeted in the program pay attention to those virtues especially relevant for university students. This vital and educational stage –between adolescence and adulthood– is known as "emergence adulthood" (Arnett 2007; 2014). This stage or period of life is frequently a time of instability in which personal relationships and career development are still being defined, characterized by greater general awareness of uncertainty (Arnett, 2007); marked by the exploration of identity and life aspirations; a time when a more exclusive focus on oneself may be predominant, in that there may be a lesser degree of commitment (Arnett 2014, pp. 8-17).

The virtues integrated into LASP promote the acquisition of character traits that can contribute to overcoming the difficulties that go hand in hand in this period of life, making the program a particularly propitious context for cultivating character. For instance, resilience can be a powerful virtue to provide stability and to face the uncertainty identified in at the stage of emergent adulthood. Virtues such as humility and gratitude, insofar as they imply the recognition of others, necessarily contribute to focusing attention beyond oneself. Another central aspect that has motivated the selection of the virtues that integrate the program is the inclusion of the different categories or types of virtues, as suggested by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues (2017; 2020). LASP – aspiring to a complete and integral formation of character– bundles intellectual (prudence), moral (humility and gratitude), civic (service), and performative virtues (resilience), allowing students to respond soundly to life challenges and day-to-day demands. LASP also pays significant attention to the development of a sense of purpose. This all-encompassing formation paves the ground for the other-oriented leadership that LASP espouses.

A more detailed description of the program may be found in Cohen de Lara, Lleó, Domingo, and Torralba (2023). The impact of the program on students' character is being empirically assessed to evaluate its effectiveness and to improve its implementation. The initial findings coincide in some significant respects with the reported results of OCP's Global Leadership Initiative (Brooks et al. 2019). In this way, CHC considers LASP a valuable intentional character education tool at the university level and it is planning to offer a full seven-month version the next academic year.

LASP integrates the Tu&Co mentoring program, an already existing program designed for University of Navarra's students (Lleó et al. 2020). Mentoring –broadly understood and under different forms– is receiving growing attention in higher education on the assumption that it promotes a specific educational process that enables personal and professional development. It strategically helps the development of competencies and skills that unleashes students' full potential (Woolhouse & Nicholson 2020; Schofield 2018; Lunsford *et al.* 2017). Accordingly, there has been a proliferation of mentoring programs in universities around the world (Law et al. 2020; Gershenfeld 2014), and in the Spanish context as well (Queiruga-Dios M. et al. 2023; Lleó 2020; Rodriguez-Cuadrado & Cortés 2020, 142-146; Lleó et al. 2018; Alonso 2010). Ultimately, the practice of mentoring in universities is considered as contributing and reinforcing some of the higher education universally recognized purposes, such as learning,

career and professional life enhancement, or the development for individuals within our society (Law et al., 2020; Schofield 2018, 15; Knippelmeyer & Torraco 2007).

Mentoring practice has a positive and effective impact on students' lives. It embraces and leads to better performance in different life domains such as academic, professional, and personal. Therefore mentoring, among others, positively influences students' outcomes in their transition to the university and all along their degree completion. It enhances their sense of belonging to the university, their learning skills, their professional or personal competencies, or their development of socially and responsible leadership forms (Lunsford et al. 2017). Some conceptualizations and applications of mentoring in higher education assume and articulate their practice in a multidimensional approach in which this impact in the different life spheres is rendered more evident, embracing different dimensions that go from psychosocial or emotional support to career guidance or academic assistance (Nora and Crisp 2007). Furthermore, mentoring, as an underlying feature in its different types and applications and to a greater or lesser extent, is recognized to promote the growth of the whole person. The guidance provided by the intense and unique relationship between the mentor and the mentees helps students' reflection and regulated learning experience (Mullen & Klimaitis 2021, 31). A holistic mentoring fosters the development of personal capacities, and it might intentionally encompass character development as well. It is widely assumed that mentoring generally promotes students' personal development and full potential (Woolhouse & Nicholson 2020, 2; Rosser & Egan 2005; Crawford & Smith 2005), even their psychological growth (Galbraith 2001, 32; Schofield 2018, 20) and providing moral support through the creation of a moral environment in the mentoring process (Silva & Tom 2001; Awayaa *et al.* 2003). Mentoring is not only focused on "doing things better and doing better things" but may afford the opportunity for "doing things right and doing the right things" too and is therefore able to reach a moral impact (Schofield 2018, 14). Beyond its different conceptualizations, mentoring can involve –or even directly pursue– moral development (Silva & Tom 2001). Moreover, "mentoring-intended moral growth" is also explicitly referred to as character development. For instance, mentoring is seen as a significant asset in promoting Positive Youth Development education. In this educational model, character –jointly with competence, confidence, connection and caring, forming the so-called "Five C's– is one of the constitutive dimensions whose development is taken into account to assess youth's positive outcomes (Lerner et al. 2013). Thus, mentoring is considered a privileged tool for character strengths development. Consequently, Positive Youth Development programs introduce mentoring as a resource for character formation, as well for the other essential indicators of youth maturation. Even though in mentoring literature little attention is paid to how mentoring can shape mentees' moral character, some strategies have been suggested. The mentor –once the mentee willingly accepts this kind of advice– can intentionally pursue character development via different exercises cultivating his or her *protégé* experience, reflection, and inspiration (Moberg 2014). Eventually, as the mentor models with his own life, the mentor-mentee relationship almost unavoidably shapes the mentee's character.

Both from the mentoring perspective as well as from the standpoint of character education literature, mentoring is considered as a tool for character development (Moberg 2008; Ray & Montgomery 2006). Mentoring easily fits with other strategies for character education, such as engagement with virtuous exemplars, dialogue that increases virtue literacy, and friendships of mutual accountability (Lamb *et al.* 2017). Mentoring allows for the further development of these methodologies for character development. The consideration of mentoring as enabling character formation explains why it is widely incorporated by practitioners in programs of character education in universities (Lamb *et al.* 2022; Brooks *et al.* 2019).

In this vein, the Tu&Co program intends to foster a holistic mentoring approach to personal growth. The program pursues the acquisition of a set of competencies defined as habitual behaviors that allow one to be successful when acting in different personal and professional spheres (Cardona & García-Lombardía 2005). The approach of competencies development is not understood from a view of carrying out one-off actions but of developing habits that shape students' personality and character, helping them grow as human beings. The way in which Tu&Co is part of LASP is described in more detail in Cohen de Lara, Lleó, Domingo, and Torralba, 2023.

3. Liberal education through Great Books seminars: creating a context for the development of intellectual and moral virtues

3.1 Defining liberal education: practical wisdom and character education

Liberal education has a long history, and can be understood as a contested tradition that continues to adapt itself to intellectual, social-political, and technological changes. A guiding threat throughout the tradition is that liberal education provides for the integral formation of students (Torralba 2013, p. 257). A liberal education goes beyond a strictly professional or disciplinary education by asking great questions and by preparing students intellectually and morally for living the good life. As DeNicola argues, liberal education is, ultimately, "structured learning that aims at human flourishing" (DeNicola 2012, p. 37). A liberal education entails the goal of educating the whole person (Roche 2010; Torralba 2020). It involves education that actively engages the student in meaningful discussions, addressing fundamental questions, and prepares the student for further learning in the sense that it fosters both the joy of learning and develops the students' capacities to think through complex and deeper questions for themselves. An education is 'liberal' in the sense that developing one's highest capacities of thought and reflection leads to a person who is free and who has developed autonomy. As Roche (2010) argues, a liberal education asks questions about higher ends and ultimate values. Such knowledge is an end in itself.

Liberal education has its roots in ancient Greece. The Greeks "were the first to recognize that education means deliberately molding character" (Jaeger 1939, p. xxii). Homer's poetry provided ancient Athenians with a model of the courageous warrior, which was thought to

shape their character by means of imitation. Next to the imitation of virtuous role-models in the arts, Plato's Socrates proposed that "the unexamined life is not worth living" (*Ap*. 37e). Plato understood genuine freedom to be based in the full development of a person's moral and intellectual capacities. Education, so Plato argued, had less to do with passing on knowledge and more with philosophical questioning that trains the student to think about the way things are (*Rep*. 518c).

Aristotle argued that an education aimed at developing the moral and intellectual virtues was *liberal*. "[A]ny occupation, art, or science, which makes the body or soul or mind of the freeman less fit for the practice or exercise of virtue, is illiberal… to be seeking always after the useful does not become free and exalted souls" (*Pol*. bk. 8). Such an education promotes ends – the virtues – that are valuable in and of themselves. The knowledge that results from liberal education is intrinsically valuable rather than being subservient to other purposes. In this way, the ancients distinguished a liberal education from a vocational or professional education that promoted knowledge for the sake of something else, that is, making a living and developing a career.

The curriculum that developed based on the ancient understanding of education consisted of the *trivium* – grammar, logic and rhetoric, and *quadrivium* – arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music. As Dorothy Sayers explains in *The Lost Tools of Learning* (1947) these arts and sciences did not primarily serve to impart knowledge, but to train students in the art of thinking. For centuries, including the medieval universities, a training in the seven liberal arts were considered to be essential preparation for the further study in the professions such as medicine, law, and theology.

In the nineteenth century, we see the appreciation for liberal education reflected in John Henry Cardinal Newman's understanding that "liberal education and liberal pursuits are exercises of mind, of reason, of reflection" (Discourse V). Newman argued that an education is properly liberal when "A habit of mind is formed which lasts through life, of which the attributes are, freedom, equitableness, calmness, moderation, and wisdom", referring to this as "a philosophical habit" (Discourse V). Writing at a time when the university developed into an institution with a range of specialized disciplines, Newman understood a liberal education to be essential for helping students develop an integrated view of the different knowledge areas. "When I speak of Knowledge, I mean something intellectual, something which grasps what it perceives through the senses; something which takes a view of things … Not to know the relative disposition of things is the state of slaves" (Discourse V).

Such a connected and enlarged view of knowledge may be understood as an end in itself: "there is a knowledge worth possessing for what it is, and not merely for what it does" (Discourse V). This end is specific to being human, and Newman argued that such activity – the activity of contemplation – brings a unique joy to human beings, citing Cicero who wrote about the "intrinsic attractiveness of knowledge, which is the sweetest of human pleasures" (*De Oratore*, III.XV). Cicero, like Plato and Aristotle, assumed that human beings have a natural desire to know and, therefore, have a distinctively human desire for contemplation:

"the distinctive faculty of man is his eager desire to investigate the truth. Thus, when free from pressing duties and cares, we are eager to see or hear, or learn something new, and we think our happiness incomplete unless we study the mysteries and the marvels of the universe" (Cicero, *De Off.* I.13).

However, it would be a mistake if, based on these philosophers, we understand liberal education purely as an end in itself. The distinction between the contemplative life that aims at wisdom, and the active life that is aimed at engagement in society, politics, or a profession runs throughout the tradition, as is marvelously charted by Kimball (1986). Next to a desire for wisdom, a liberal education trains the capacity for practical judgment (*phronesis*). This capacity applies, firstly, to liberal education itself. As Hannah Arendt (1961) argues: "for the true humanist neither the verities of the scientist nor the truth of the philosopher nor the beauty of the artist can be absolutes; the humanist, because he is not a specialist, exerts a faculty of judgment and taste which is beyond the coercion which each specialty imposes upon us" (p. 225). Secondly, a liberal education trains the capacity for judgment that extends beyond the practice of liberal education itself. In ancient times, Cicero claimed that "my devotion to letters strengthens my oratorical powers" (*Pro Archia Poeta*, in Gamble 2010, p.69), meaning that an immersion into literature, philosophy, and history feeds into the art of thinking and speaking, both of which are essential for becoming a citizen who engages in public life.

The ideal of a liberal education as the best preparation for citizenship and the professions gained significant traction in the United States after World War II. The famous Harvard Redbook understood a liberal education or, rather, a general education that would extend beyond the undergraduate years, to be essential for the development of free democratic citizens and professionals, in distinction to those looking for a career in scholarship or pure science. Education was to "help young persons fulfill the unique, particular functions in life which it is in them to fulfill, and fit them so far as it can for those common spheres which, as citizens and heirs of a joint culture, they will share with others" (p.4). More than imparting knowledge, education involved "the cultivation of certain aptitudes and attitudes in the mind of the young" (p. 64). The report lists the specific aptitudes as follows: "to think effectively, to communicate thought, to make relevant judgments, to discriminate among values" (p.65). The Redbook provides an excellent conceptualization of these aptitudes, but for now we may have to summarize these under the Aristotelian notion of practical wisdom.

Next to the training of wisdom and judgment, we may discern a third ground for a liberal education. A liberal education is said to foster character education and the development of a sense of purpose (Roche 2010). Although it is disputed whether a liberal education at the university level involves character education, several philosophers in the tradition indicate that a training in intellectual virtues cannot do without moral education. Indicating that the moral and intellectual virtues go together, Cicero writes: "when to a lofty and brilliant character is applied the molding influence of abstract studies, the result is often inscrutably and unapproachably noble" (Cicero, *Pro Archia Poeta* in Gamble 2017, p. 69). One of the "handmaidens and companions of wisdom", indeed, the "guardian of all the virtues, which

shuns disgrace and attains praise in the greatest degree, is modesty" (Cicero, *De Partitione Oratoria*, in Gamble, p.82). Another example is Thomas Aquinas who, in a letter to a young friar, writes: "to gain something from the treasure-house of knowledge… it is necessary to embrace purity of mind; do not neglect prayer … Do not get interested in any way in worldly talk or deeds. Avoid idle talk on all matters; do not fail to imitate the example of holy and good men; do not be concerned about what speaker you are listening to; instead, when something good is said, commit it to memory. Make sure that you understand whatever you read. Make certain that you know the difficulties and store up whatever you can in the treasure-house of the mind; keep as busy as a person who seeks to fill a vessel" (*Letter to Brother John*, in Gamble 2017, p. 287). Although it is debated today whether a liberal education at the university level involves moral education, Kiss and Euben (2010) have argued that the question is not so much whether but how moral education takes place, in the sense that all universities foster a sense community that can be more or less supportive of certain moral character traits that help students grow as persons.

Over the last few decades, several authors have critiqued American higher education for becoming too career-focused while shifting away from helping students think about who they are and who they want to become (Kronman 2007; Deresiewicz 2014). Kronman (2007) argues that without addressing the greater questions of what is life for and what is *my* life for, a focus on a specific career lacks a meaningful direction. Hitz (2020) shows how the intellectual pursuit of reading great books has changed the course of well-known people's lives, ranging from Augustine to Albert Einstein, to Malcolm X. Montás (2021) describes, in an honest and gripping autobiography, how a liberal education and, more specifically, a liberal education based on great books has irrevocably gave him a sense of purpose. In a time when our students are considered to be "emerging adults" (Arnett, 2015), who–as has already been said–explore their identity and personal purpose, liberal education meets important needs by providing students with the opportunity to ask deep questions, foster one's identity, develop relations with peers, and pursue overarching questions. Furthermore, liberal education constitutes an essential element of a more holistic professional education.

3.2 Liberal education and great books seminars

One way of providing students with a liberal education is by means of great books seminars (DeNicola 2010). In a way, great books seminars have almost as long a philosophical history as liberal education. In the classical tradition, 'great books' were thought to provide young students with models to imitate: "All literature, all philosophy, all history, abounds with incentives to noble action, incentives which would be buried in black darkness were the light of the written word not flashed upon them" (Cicero, *Pro Archia Poeta*, in Gamble, p. 69).

For centuries, it was taken as a given that the content of the *trivium* and *quadrivium* largely consisted in what today we would call great books. These concern texts that are great on account of their depth, complexity, and scope. They are great because they address great questions. Nussbaum (1997; 2010) has, rightly, pointed out that great books should not be

understood as authorities from which to copy answers to great questions. Rather, we may say great books are authorities in the sense that they constitute worthwhile conversation partners when thinking about great questions. Students in great books seminars engage directly with primary sources. They are encouraged to enter into intellectual traditions on their own terms, which is an important pathway towards intellectual confidence and independence (Hitz 2020). Didactically, the primary aim for a teacher is to encourage students to read and develop the habit of reading. This kind of encouragement has more to do with 'lighting a fire' than with passing on knowledge (Baena in Brooks et al. 2021).

In the United States, the "golden age" of the Great Books programs (1929-1945), with the establishment of the Columbia core curriculum in 1919, and at the University of Chicago (1931) (Torralba, 2013, p. 63). Today, St. Johns' College (Annapolis and Santa Fe, USA) is an example of a curriculum that is exclusively centered on great books. At large research universities, such as the University of Notre Dame, the rationale is that great books provide the content that helps students overcome the fragmentation of knowledge at universities focused on specialized disciplinary education, and provides students with a common language to address great questions (Roche 2010; Stapleford 2017).

Great books seminars not only imply a certain content but also a certain methodology. This methodology is usually called Socratic or dialogical (Brooks et al. 2021). The Socratic methodology has several characteristics. Firstly, the student is the protagonist in the learning process, not the teacher; even though the teacher has an essential presence. The teacher serves much more as a facilitator or - in Socratic terms - as a 'midwife' (Plato, *Theaetetus*, 148e-151d). Secondly, the Socratic method presupposes not just any type of question. Socrates understood the 'what is' question to be the fundamental question of practical philosophy (cf. Plato, *Gorgias*, 448e). This question, being fundamental, is the first of a range of other questions by means of which the student exercises the faculty of judgment. Thirdly, the Socratic method entails asking meaningful questions that engage the student in an existential way. This implies a certain level of integrity; a student cannot get away with answering a Socratic question in terms of what other people think or what a specific text might postulate.

3.3 How do great books seminars create a context for the development of intellectual and moral virtues?

So far, we have argued that a liberal education develops the intellectual virtues of wisdom and practical wisdom, and a sense of purpose. We have also indicated that strands within the tradition emphasize the need for moral virtues, such as modesty and propriety, in the pursuit of a liberal education. As a specific kind of liberal education, great books seminars provide an important context for the development of intellectual and moral virtues. In what follows, we explore the connection between great books seminars and the development of intellectual and moral virtues while noting that these reflections are not exhaustive and more detailed research may be done in this area.

Firstly, great books deal with overarching or ultimate questions, meaning that engaging with great books cultivates the mind towards comprehensiveness. Contemplating questions such as what is the good, what does it mean to be a human being, what is justice, entail theoretical reflection of the world in a disinterested way. This remove from the world and its everyday material or realist pursuits develops the ability to assess that world (Roche 2010, p. 29). There is a "contemplative seeing (*theoria*)" afforded by the invitation of great books to engage in deep and fundamental questions (Steel 2014, p.70). In short, great books seminars tend towards the cultivation of wisdom.

Secondly, great books seminars cultivate practical wisdom. Great books may provide moral examples to imitate, as Cicero argued, but also models of moral complexity. This offers the reader an opportunity to practice moral deliberation and reflection. Bohlin (2005) highlights the educational value of "morally pivotal points" found in works of great literature, defined as "dramatic markers that help to illustrate the characters' movement in a new or slightly refined direction" (p.6). Becoming more attentive to a literary character's moral development helps the reader in ethical reflection and refined judgment.

Thirdly, great books seminars develop intellectual humility. Encountering a range of arguments and perspectives in texts requires engagement with different positions, and helps to develop a sense of openness and awareness of one's own limitations. Classroom discussions on texts that address meaningful questions require each participant to listen attentively. A sense of integrity is involved in intellectual humility when the student develops the ability for self-reflection and self-correction in the process of reading great books and discussing these with others. Great books provide students with a well-rounded view of what it means to be human across time and place, and this may feed into intellectual humility as well.

Fourthly, great books seminars foster the joy of learning for its own sake. Hitz (2020) writes about the *pleasures* of the intellectual life, while recognizing that these higher pleasures are curious pleasures in that they require toil and dedication. Hitz emphasizes a sense of 'flow' that is developed by means of the sustained effort to read and understand great books. Roche (2010) emphasizes the "intrinsic joy of engaging our faculties" (p.36). Developing a joy of learning for its own sake is important and relates to intrinsic motivation to learn, being more effective and reliable than extrinsic motivation (Baehr 2021, p.35).

Finally, great books seminars train virtues of character. Many intellectual pursuits presuppose virtues of character and, therefore, it is likely that the two develop together (Roche 2010). Among the moral virtues that are presupposed and developed in great books seminars are: integrity or intellectual courage inherent in the possibility of self-correcting one's position in intellectual debate, diligence in preparing for class, resilience ('grit') in pursuing understanding of a complex text, focused attention required to parse a complex and meaningful argument, the ability to listen to others.

One way to explore the connection between character education and great books seminars is to apply the seven strategies of character education (Lamb et al. 2022). Here, a brief overview may suffice. Firstly, great books seminars demand students to seriously dedicate themselves to intellectual pursuits. There is a habituation through practice (strategy 1) involved in taking a great books course, providing students with the opportunity to train their temperance and intellectual courage. Secondly, great books seminars deal with meaningful questions, and classroom discussions involve Socratic questioning where one is invited to reflect on one's own intellectual positions, view of life, and experiences (strategy 2). Thirdly, great books and, in particular, works of great literature provide (fictional) role models to imitate or avoid (strategy 3). Fourthly, obviously not all great books involve a discussion of virtue, but several great books do and, as such, provide good sources for dialogue that enhances virtue literacy (strategy 4). Fifthly, great books provide a well-rounded view of what it means to be human across time and place and in different circumstances. They may train an awareness of situational variables (strategy 5). Sixthly, some great books may serve as moral reminders (strategy 6). And, finally, there is a way in which great books seminars build community in the classroom, which may lead to friendships of mutual accountability especially in an intellectual sense (strategy 7).

Overall, we argue that being a good physician, or engineer, teacher, consultant, lawyer, etc. ultimately implies being a good human being. We think that for a kind of university education that - at least in some parts of the curriculum - provides students with the opportunity and material to reflect on the richness and complexity of human existence. Great books eminently constitute such materials. They provide for a humanistic education in terms of cultivating the ability to morally deliberate about concrete dilemmas in an integrated way, that is, in light of an enhanced understanding of the good life (from Brooks et al. 2021).

Conclusion

In this paper, the three areas of CHC's work have been presented: professionalism, character development, and liberal education. We have also sought to explain their relationship by understanding the professions as a service. In the Spanish university context, the theoretical approach and the activities CHC has begun to develop are novel. They can serve to transform education, which is limited by a reductionist understanding of the concept of a profession. Although CHC has only existed for a few months, the experience gained suggests that, as is already the case with other initiatives with the same purpose, it has the potential to make some relevant contributions to our society and others with a similar university paradigm.

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