

Routledge Research in Character and Virtue Education

LITERATURE AND CHARACTER EDUCATION IN UNIVERSITIES

THEORY, METHOD, AND TEXT ANALYSIS

Edited by

Edward Brooks, Emma Cohen de Lara,
Álvaro Sánchez-Ostiz, and José M. Torralba



Literature and Character Education in Universities

Literature and Character Education in Universities presents the potential of literary and philosophical texts for character education in modern universities. The book engages with theoretical and practical aspects of character development in higher education, combining conceptual discussion of the role of literature in character education with applied case studies from university classrooms.

Character education within the academic context of the university presents unique challenges and opportunities. *Literature and Character Education in Universities* presents perspectives from academics in Europe, the USA, and Asia, offering unique insights into the ways that engaged reading and discussion of core texts can promote the development of intellectual and moral virtues. Chapters draw on a wide range of texts from Confucius' *Analects* to J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, focusing on themes such as truthfulness, self-knowledge, prudence, tolerance, friendship, and humility.

Literature and Character Education in Universities will be of real use to researchers, academics, and postgraduates in the fields of higher education, philosophy, and literature. It should be essential reading for university educators interested in character development and advocates of literary education in modern universities.

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Routledge Research in Character and Virtue Education

This series provides a forum for established and emerging scholars to discuss the latest debates, research and theory relating to virtue education, character education, and value education.

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Literature and Character Education in Universities

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Introduction

Over the last thirty years, a growing movement in moral education scholarship and practice has seen the application of virtue ethics and positive psychology in an educational focus on the development of students' character (Arthur, 2019; Kristjánsson, 2015; Sanderse, 2012). This new wave of character education has spread from the United States to Europe and beyond (Naval et al., 2015). It has moved beyond a Kohlbergian prioritization of the rational intellect in moral development with a return to Aristotle, which is reflected in an emphasis on emotion, practical habituation, the importance of exemplarity and friendship, and a central focus on the guiding virtue of practical wisdom (Kristjánsson, 2014). Drawing on the classical idea of *eudaimonia*, character development is seen as central to human flourishing (Kristjánsson, 2020a) and is thus advocated as an important component of education next to knowledge transfer and the training of skills. Following a pattern of moral education that stretches back to the ancient world, fictional narratives and philosophical texts have been employed by educators in order to fuel students' moral imagination, stimulate reflection, introduce exemplars, and develop virtue literacy (Bohlin, 2005; Carr & Harrison, 2015).

This volume explores how core texts can contribute to character education in universities. It presents a combination of literary analyses of texts that may be useful in educating character at the university level as well as case studies of existing approaches. The contributions in this volume illustrate the potential of a dialogical approach centring on important philosophical and literary texts. These are understood as core texts, in the sense that they perform an educational role in a core course or programme at universities. It is important to note that 'core' is understood in terms of its pedagogical value, rather than in terms of a distinction between 'core' and 'peripheral' texts. Many core texts are culturally influential; even so, a core text may be too new or too little known to be a classic or 'great book,' yet still hold pedagogical value (Lee, 2020). With the exception of the final chapter, which offers an insightful reflection on Confucius' *Analects*, the texts that are discussed in this volume are from a Western tradition that stretches from the classical world to late

modernity. While works from this tradition continue to hold important value for general education programmes, and their extensive use is reflected in this book, core texts are far from limited to this historical stream. The inclusion of texts from a wide range of cultural traditions, including those written by historically marginalized voices, is important for the ongoing vitality and relevance of liberal arts education. Their under-representation in this volume may be a legitimate point of criticism and one that we hope will be addressed in future work on literature and character education in universities.

At different periods in the previous century, a humanistic education based on core texts was thought to contribute to the development of character by offering students arguments and ideas that sharpened their intellectual faculties, self-knowledge, and moral and civic dispositions. This approach was marginalized by the shift within universities away from the ideal of a general education and towards a specialized, disciplinary approach (Menand, 2010). Moreover, battles over the curriculum in the sixties and seventies, the so-called ‘canon wars,’ meant that the formative potential of general education based on important philosophical and literary texts was no longer uncontested. Still, from the 1990s onwards, there has been a general thrust to understand core text seminars as an important element in helping to develop students’ moral imagination and capacity for empathy (Nussbaum, 1997, 2010) and humility (Daneen, 2013). The current volume builds on this development, in the recognition that a university is not a neutral playground of ideas but always, in one way or another, contributes to students’ moral education.

Notwithstanding recent work on character development in higher education (Arthur & Bohlin, 2005; Colby, 2008; Lamb et al., 2021), the educational turn to character development has focused on schools. Central to our aim is to illustrate one approach to how character education might take place amongst autonomous adults in modern, plural higher education institutions, extending the scope of character education from schools to universities. The importance of such an extension is highlighted by the evolving insight that students at universities are at a stage of development in between their teenage years and full-blown adulthood that is marked by ‘identity exploration’ (Arnett, 2000, 2015; Smith et al., 2011). University students are typically at an age when they separate themselves from their parents and explore their own purpose in life, developing their moral vision and practice as they encounter increasingly complex ethical, social, and political situations. The fluidity of character through this stage of emerging adulthood invites universities to reflect not on whether but how they contribute to the character education of their students. The importance of such reflection is becoming increasingly entrenched in discourse on higher education (Bok, 2020). One advance is made by those who contributed to a recent consultation to develop a framework for character education in universities (Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues & Oxford Character Project, 2020). This framework emphasizes the importance of character for students

to flourish in all aspects of life; the relationship between character virtues and the ‘graduate attributes’ or ‘twenty-first-century skills’ that are a key part of contemporary higher education; and the need for character education in universities to be student rather than teacher-led. In this regard, the emphasis is on student autonomy and the development of practical wisdom, with a focus on the character being ‘sought’ rather than simply ‘taught.’

This turn to character education in universities brings with it both complications and opportunities. The complications centre on the moral permissibility of character education amongst mature adults in diverse, liberal institutions. Concern has been voiced that where there is no clear professional need for the development of particular character virtues, direct attempts to shape the character of students who are mature adults may lack justification (Carr, 2017). This is an important note to heed. However, we would argue that this objection falls away when it comes to the practical reality of character development in higher education. Universities inevitably shape the character of their students and can do so most ethically and beneficially by owning rather than avoiding the reality. So long as the autonomy of students is actively acknowledged and reflected in the pedagogical methods employed, Carr’s earlier work on the role of teachers to navigate between paternalism and neglect when it comes to moral education can helpfully be extended into the university classroom. The key role of educators is, then, to equip students with the capacity of practical judgment by avoiding both the paternalistic stance of deciding what is good for others, and the liberal stance of leaving students to themselves to accept any moral perspective based on their inalienable freedom to make their own decisions (Carr, 1993; cf. Kristjánsson, 2014).

Core texts and the development of practical wisdom and empathy

The current volume focuses in particular on the connection between core text education and the development of practical wisdom. Practical wisdom (*phronesis*) occupies a unique place in Aristotelian ethics. A bridge between cognition and action, practical wisdom is an intellectual virtue that connects right reason with ‘the correct desire to act or react’ (Kristjánsson, 2014, p. 156). Knowing the right thing to do, based on this Aristotelian understanding, is not an intellectual condition that can be achieved without the harmonious ordering of desires. It is for this reason that the current volume also explores how the reading of core texts in the university classroom may promote the virtuous habit of empathy.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle defined practical wisdom as the ability ‘to deliberate well about what is good and expedient for himself, not in some particular respect, e.g. about what sorts of thing conduce to health or to strength, but about what sorts of thing conduce to the good life in general’ (1140a26–28). In other words, practical wisdom is the ability to deliberate

about what is good to do in concrete circumstances in order to live a good life. In a university setting, we might think of the value of cultivating practical wisdom in terms of specialized professions, such as medicine. A good physician has a well-trained ability to make good decisions with regard to her patients. However, as important as this specific professional focus is, Aristotle emphasizes that practical wisdom goes beyond the specialized development of the skill of practical reason, in the sense of the mastery of a technique. Practical wisdom is connected to an overarching view of the good life. What is good in a particular circumstance is ultimately viewed in light of what is good for the person's life as a whole. This, we think, is why *phronesis* is often translated in terms of practical *wisdom*. However concrete and technical the exercise of practical wisdom can sometimes become, there is an aspect of sagacity to this virtue.

This rich understanding of practical wisdom has important implications for moral education. To be specific, it *opens up* education and effectively connects a specialized education to a general education. Take, again, the example of a physician in training. As we established, a good physician has a well-honed ability to make good decisions with regard to her patients. Increasingly, this is incorporated into the training of physicians at university. Not only do students acquire experience making actual decisions as part of their internships, but courses also often involve ethics or medical ethics modules incorporating case studies that invite students to deliberate about what would be the right thing to do. This kind of reflection and deliberation is very important. However, if practical wisdom is understood in the Aristotelian sense as reaching beyond a specific discipline or area of life and including an overall sense of the good life, then medical students (in this example) should be invited to partake in a general education programme as well. In such a programme, the emphasis would be less on profession-specific case studies than life as a whole. This is where literature can make a vital contribution. For example, medical students may be invited to read the book of Job and Shakespeare's *King Lear*, inviting them to reflect in an integral way on the meaning of suffering and the nature of a flourishing life (Vallès-Botey & Rodríguez-Prat, 2017).

In Chapter 2, Cascales and Echarte continue this argument. Focusing on science students, they show how the development of practical wisdom and what they call 'seeing with the heart' can be cultivated by means of reading science fiction literature. Of course, some would argue that reading such literature as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* or Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* has nothing whatsoever to do with the practice of modern medicine or any number of other professions. It is a sentimental indulgence, so the critical argument goes, to include such a frivolous luxury as part, let alone a compulsory part, of university education.¹ But what if a student, digesting the *Ethics*, comes to understand something about her own medical practice, namely, the very fact that being a good physician is not simply about following rules and protocols, but more centrally about cultivating a well-developed

intellect. And what if this student, moreover, and to her surprise, finds out that wittiness is actually described by Aristotle (1998) as a wonderful social virtue (1127b34–1128b9), confirming her intuition that her patients may do better if she is able to practice the virtue of wittiness in conversation with them.

Being a good physician, or engineer, teacher, consultant, lawyer, etc. ultimately implies being a good human being. In this volume, we argue 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. Core texts in literature and philosophy eminently constitute such materials. They provide for a humanistic education in terms of cultivating the ability to morally deliberate about concrete dilemma's in an integrated way, that is, in light of an enhanced understanding of the good life.

Turning to the question of pedagogy, we think that training students' practical wisdom by means of reading core texts may require special teaching techniques. Several chapters in the current volume stress that core texts should not be viewed as authorities. Indeed, as Fernández Urtasun argues in Chapter 8 about J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*, core texts in literature may be beneficial for developing practical wisdom not only when they present the reader with moral exemplars but also when they present the reader with exemplars of moral complexity. This is not to say that students should simply take from the novel the message that 'life is complex.' Rather, the moral complexity of its main character, Holden Caulfield, creates a space where the students themselves may engage with the questions that Caulfield himself faced. This space, the space where moral deliberation takes place, is fundamentally characterized by dialogue. Some authors in the current volume stress the ability of core texts to spark an inner dialogue in the student that mirrors actual deliberative processes in concrete situations. Other authors emphasize the need for dialogue in the classroom, between teacher and students and amongst the students themselves about the questions and dilemmas in the text. Overall, the current volume calls for a Socratic or dialogical rather than a didactic method of reading core texts (Lamb et al., 2021).

The Socratic method has a long history and has been understood in different ways (Schneider, 2013). The features we take to characterize it, and those that make it an important method in the teaching of core texts are, firstly, that it foregrounds student learning. The student, so to speak, 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 is offered the opportunity to exercise her faculty of judgment. The student's

ability to judge, constituting the intellectual part of practical wisdom, refers to the grasp of what is relevant, to relate what is particular to what is general.

Thirdly, the Socratic method entails asking meaningful questions, that is, the method entails asking questions that engage the student in an existential way. Socratic questions are personal; the learning is ‘in the first person,’ so to speak. 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. A teacher who embraces the Socratic method will carefully respond to such deflection by asking, ‘sure, that may be what most people think, but what do *you* think?’ Or, ‘sure, that is what this particular philosopher may think, but what do *you* think?’ The Socratic method asks the students to participate in an active and engaged mode. They do not learn the content in a purely theoretical or abstract way but are encouraged to reflect on the implications that the ideas in the texts have for their own lives and for the way that they understand the world. In technical terms, this methodology promotes deep learning (Metha & Fine, 2020).

Fourthly, the Socratic method is not purely intellectual. There is, we may say, a performative dimension to a teacher who asks Socratic questions. Certain questions that arise from the reading of a text may be asked in one way to a modest student, but in another way to a bold student. A teacher need not shy away from emotion in this kind of questioning. Wittiness, irony, sternness, generosity, surprise, laughter, and embarrassment may all play a role in the Socratic classroom. The Socratic method engages the student as a whole person.

Fifthly, we may ask the question whether the Socratic method can be understood as a conversation among friends. Certainly, a sense of friendship between students in the classroom is conducive to the aims of the Socratic method. If anything, a sense of friendship builds trust between the students, making it easier for them to open up and to say what they truly think. Moreover, students who comment on each other’s opinions and interpretations in a spirit of friendship may help each other in developing judgment. Such a conversation resembles what we expect from ‘character friendship’ (Chapter 10). Following Aristotle, Kristjánsson (2015) has argued that ‘challenging conversation in order to help each other see more ample and appropriate ways of being, feeling and acting’ (p. 125), which is only possible in a relation of friendship. The shared reading and discussion of core texts in the classroom foster this kind of personal relationship.

This raises the question of whether teachers should see themselves as friends to their students. This question merits further exploration than we can offer here. For one thing, one cannot ignore the unequal relationship that exists between teacher and student. This inequality exists by necessity, and may generally be understood as a good thing. However, as we argued earlier, the Socratic method also presupposes that the student is the protagonist in the learning process. Suffice it to say, here, that we agree with Kristjánsson (2020b)

that ‘viewing students as friends seems to be a healthier attitude than viewing them as clients or customers’ (p. 362).

In addition to the Socratic method as a teaching technique, students in core texts seminars learn directly from 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, simply, to encourage students to read and develop the habit of reading. After all, whoever reads, thinks. This kind of encouragement has more to do with ‘lighting a fire’ than with passing on knowledge, as explained by Rosalía Baena in Chapter 1. In particular, core text seminars help to ‘educate the gaze,’ that is to say, to grasp the reality behind appearances or, more colloquially, to understand the way things are. For this, the process of asking questions is more important than having the answers. Students can be impatient, and may demand answers from the teacher, but this attitude misses the point. The point is that an inquisitive disposition is fundamental for understanding reality. We are again speaking of a habit here; this time not the habit of reading but the habit of thought that cultivates the mind towards comprehensiveness, versatility, and a just estimate of things. In core text seminars, students are not compelled but invited to reflect on core texts in a way that engages their moral imagination, helps them discern their own framework of meaning and purpose, and can pave the way for the intentional development of intellectual and moral virtues.

In addition to developing the virtue of practical wisdom, core texts may have the ability to develop empathy in the reader. Nussbaum (1990, 1997, 2010) and Bohlin (2005) have done much work to articulate this connection. Empathy, understood as a virtue, is practiced by means of engagement with the different characters that are offered by literature. Nussbaum (2010) emphasizes that literature cultivates the moral imagination, moving beyond the pursuit of logical argument that is generally taken to be at the heart of the Socratic method (cf. p. 104). In the context of core texts modules, empathy appears in several different ways. Firstly, shared discussion facilitates opening up to the psychological state and perspective of the other participants to the point of reading, interpreting, reasoning, and feeling with the other. In this way, the Socratic inquiry becomes a shared and communal inquiry.

Secondly, empathy also occurs between the reader and the text, insofar as the issues raised in a module allow the student to go beyond reading for mere pleasure and ‘feel with’ the judgements, dilemmas, and moral sentiments evoked by literary narrative or philosophical reflection, a point explored by several chapters in this volume. Learning to read more critically, rigorously, and sensitively also perfects the ability to make sound moral judgments expanding the reader’s range of experience. Students may share in the joy, enthusiasm, perplexity, astonishment, shame, outrage, or helplessness of characters, or, conversely, be made aware that they do not share

them. Here, we would point to Fernández Urtasun's chapter, which draws attention to the limits and challenges of a reading that is *too* empathic. A thoughtless sensitivity towards the main character may also mislead the reader's interpretation of the narrative and obscure her moral judgment. In this way, it would be fair to say that empathy properly understood is connected to the virtue of practical wisdom. The reading of literature may train empathy. Readers are not only invited to share the suffering and emotions of the characters in the text but also pressed to become intelligent about these emotions and to exercise their judgment. In this way, they become intelligently empathic.

Overview of chapters

The current volume is based on the insights, observations, and experiences of practitioners, most of whom are teachers of core texts in university settings. The first half of the book deals with methodological questions about what happens when one reads, and practical questions about teacher training, assessment, and life-long learning. The second half of the book has a particular focus on the kind of virtues and dispositions that may be trained by means of core texts seminars, such as practical wisdom, friendship, empathy, and humility.

In Chapter 1, Rosalía Baena explores the contribution of reading fictional narratives to the cultivation of character in universities. Baena argues that there is too often a division in educational settings between reading for enjoyment and reading for knowledge or moral improvement. To focus only on the latter is a mistake since it is the pleasure of reading that allows literary works to engage students' hearts and minds, connecting with their experience in a way that enables personal growth. Baena proposes a phenomenological approach to literature that moves beyond 'suspicious criticism' to focus on reading as a communicative act. Drawing on the post-critical approaches of reflective reading (Felski), creative reading (Attridge), and rhetorical reading (Phelan), she advances an approach whereby students don't simply study but *experience* the impact of literary texts in their lives.

In Chapter 2, José Manuel Mora-Fandos explains how the phenomenon of inhabiting narrative fictional worlds through reading may facilitate a new moral self-understanding on the part of the reader. He develops a didactic approach based on Paul Ricoeur's theory of reading, whereby the reader is invited into the fictional world by a process of prefiguration and, subsequently, is invited to re-enact the configuration of a text. By grasping the intended moral understanding of a text not merely on a cognitive but also on an experiential level, the reader is able to develop practical wisdom.

In Chapter 3, Bram de Muynck and Bram Kunz present a 'design study' of a core-text module in the final year of a teacher training programme. Their chapter focuses on core texts in the field of education and argues that these

core texts are especially effective in a teacher training programme when the author's biography is included, making a student's encounter with the text more personal. In this way, the author becomes a companion to the learner on the path towards entering the teaching profession. The method of the design study involves the participants in the design of the research, as a way to ensure their commitment to the intended educational innovation.

In Chapter 4, Álvaro Sánchez-Ostiz shows how different texts by Cicero provide fertile ground for thinking about character education by means of core texts as appropriate not just for the young but also for anyone throughout a lifetime. In Cicero's view, the education of the ideal orator, as one who is engaged both in intellectual and public life, is based on character education and has to spark habits of mind that last throughout life. This applies not only to today's university students but also in particular to teachers. Teaching in core text programmes, and reading texts by authors such as Cicero, may allow teachers to reflect on their contribution to the common good and on the need to keep cultivating the same habits that they wish to foster in students. This approach can have a liberating effect for teachers, moving the focus away from competitive accomplishment and towards becoming a good person, and may prevent over-specialization while training the ability to enter into wider, human conversations.

In Chapter 5, Tessa Leesen and Alkeline van Lenning's discuss an innovative character assessment method that is based both on the concept of learning gain and narrative identity theory. The assessment method is applied to students taking part in a liberal arts and sciences programme, which involves several core texts modules, and involves a narrative questionnaire that invites respondents to self-assess their exit level and provide retrospective narratives on perceived character growth during their time as a student, in particular as this relates to civic virtue. The data are combined with quantitative data on the entry and exit level of students' civic commitment.

In Chapter 6, David Carr draws on Iris Murdoch as a valuable conversation partner. He begins with a critical analysis of Murdoch's account of the purpose of literature as facilitating insight into the mystery of 'otherness' that characterizes human nature. Also, he outlines her view that great novelists are those that allow their characters maximal freedom to live, without the author's external ideological interference. Carr disputes the presence of such freedom in the nineteenth-century authors favoured by Murdoch, and argues for the moral value of symbolic and allegorical works, as well as twentieth-century literature. Modern fiction, he suggests, 'is a garden in which many colourful blossoms have flourished.' The implication of Carr's argument for university education is that a diverse range of 'morally serious fiction' has the potential to further the flourishing of students as they engage with it.

In Chapter 7, Nancy E. Snow turns to Dostoevsky's famous and famously complex novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, in order to explore the themes of virtue, vice, and saintliness. Focusing on six main figures in the book, Snow

showcases how literature can illumine the depths of human character in relation to the complexities of particular social, political, and religious contexts. Writing from a neo-Aristotelian perspective that understands virtues as reliable dispositions to perceive, think, feel, and act in ways guided by practical wisdom towards the good, Snow's analysis leads beyond Aristotle to the Russian Orthodoxy that infuses the novel. Virtue is understood in terms of the spirituality of Dostoevsky's religious faith. Vice, interpreted according to three levels, from inadvertent failure to intentional evil is related to ideas of sin and temptation. Saintliness is a kind of moral goodness sourced in the grace and love of God. The framework for Snow's reading is provided by Dostoevsky's famous notion, stated in the novel by Father Zossima, that human beings have a responsibility for the good of all others and the good of creation. Analysing characters, their actions, and relations within this framework, Snow not only explores enduring human themes but reveals the potential and invitation of literature to gain deep insight into moral character and indeed into the human condition.

In Chapter 8, Rosa Fernández Urtasun shows how literature can function as a guide in the process of character development, in particular with regard to practical wisdom. Literature does so in a way that invites the reader to engage with particular characters and situations, which is similar to real life where dilemmas are particular and concrete. Fernández shows how literature works in a way to create a space for reflection by describing her practice of reading J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* with students. This novel, Fernández argues, is particularly helpful for character education at the university level because it is a coming-of-age novel, and because the main character in the novel has moral complexity. The novel creates a space for reflection by engaging the reader in a range of questions and dilemmas.

In Chapter 9, Raquel Cascales and Luis Echarte focus on the development of practical wisdom and what they call 'seeing with the heart' for science students by means of reading science fiction literature. They argue that literature can bring the student into contact with the reality of moral life as moral dilemmas are made concrete by the characters and circumstances in a novel. They provide an analysis of how Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* can be read in the classroom, and show how the novel invites students to think about the role of science in society, the evolutionary paradigm, advances in genetic and psychological manipulation, as well as questions concerning human emotions, suffering, and friendship.

In Chapter 10, Ana Romero-Iribas focuses on the importance of friendship for character development in university education, with a particular focus on the way friendship furthers self-knowledge. Romero-Iribas explores the connection between friendship and self-knowledge before proposing two texts that might helpfully be introduced to core curriculum programmes: C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, and P. Laín Entralgo, *Sobre la Amistad*. These texts reveal important aspects of friendship, Romero-Iribas argues. Studied

reflectively in a process of guided discovery they offer a way to learn a structure of friendship that can further self-knowledge and develop character.

In Chapter 11, Yang Yeung considers the meaning of humility in the *Analects* and explores the question of its relevance for university students. Yeung describes her experience teaching this text as part of the ‘In Dialogue with Humanity’ course at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and explores how students should be encouraged to engage with Confucius’ example. In particular, she asks to what extent should the kind of humility that Confucius demands of himself be emulated by those at a very different stage of life. Yeung answers this question by building on Amy Olberding’s approach to the *Analects*, reading Confucius as a moral exemplar and guide on ‘the path of learning to be good.’ Probing humility from this perspective, Yeung highlights a distinction in the *Analects* between humility as submission and servility and humility as a deeper ethical notion, a right relation between oneself and the cosmos that is enacted in a way that is always sensitive to the circumstances. Her reading connects humility to honesty and trust and, while cautioning against exhorting students to humility as an overriding virtue, suggests an important alignment between Confucian humility and the freedom valued by liberal education.

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This conference was the third European conference on Liberal Arts and Core Texts Education. The previous ones were held at Amsterdam University College, in 2015, and at the University of Winchester, in 2017. The aim of these conferences is to promote further reflection on the tradition of liberal arts education and the use of core texts in European universities. One could say that it is part of a modest but growing movement in Europe in favour of liberal education (Cohen de Lara & Drop, 2017). We see as a positive sign the growing number of European Liberal Arts Colleges as well as the number of universities that include a core curriculum or similar programme as part of their educational offering.

In any case, the proposals included in this book may be of interest to educators at any university institution, regardless of whether they have a core texts programme or offer a degree in the liberal arts. Some of the authors of the book, as they explain, use core texts and apply the seminar discussion method independently.

The initiative of these European conferences emerged under the impulse of the Association for Core Texts and Courses (ACTC). This association is based in the United States, but has a global reach, with members from almost all the continents. We are grateful for the support of its president, Joshua Parens, and Kathleen Burk, executive director at the time of the conference. We are also grateful for the financial sponsorship of ACTC, Springer Nature, and the University of Navarra. Edward Brooks' work in this publication was made possible through the support of a grant from the John Templeton Foundation. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the John Templeton Foundation.

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Note

- 1 The common argument is that students should read good books in their own time. According to this argument, implicit in many academic institutions, good books are not only 'irrelevant' to a disciplinary education but also 'unscientific,' following a kind of Weberian understanding of science as 'value free.' Such a paradigm of university education has made learning a process of collecting facts and behavioural skills, leaving the inner life of students untouched. The current volume argues that such an approach to education is both incomplete and unrealistic. The question is not so much 'whether' a university should provide moral and intellectual education, but 'how' (Kiss & Euben, 2010, p. 17). Character education lies at the foundation of a good and liberal university education. From a virtue ethics perspective, education is always, and centrally, about the inner life of students.

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