

# Deliberation as the Foundation of Ethics in Higher Education Training: Foundations and Challenges

Jesús Enrique Beltrán Virgüez 

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## Abstract

Deliberation as a necessary attitude in contemporary life seems to be specifically rooted in the early stages of education. However, as a primarily moral and evaluative stance, it is a powerful tool for shaping more reflective, critical, and proactive citizens. Furthermore, it establishes a way of engaging with knowledge, others, and, above all, oneself. In this sense, it is important to identify the foundations of deliberation to understand how its possibilities can be unfolded in higher education. It is crucial to recognize the challenges of this notion in the contemporary configuration of the world and the current university spirit. In this regard, through a phenomenological hermeneutic approach, deliberation is initially presented in light of Gadamer's concept of the fusion of horizons to ensure its contextualization along with Gracia's proposal. Consequently, understanding the dynamics of deliberation in the realm of higher education allows us to recognize its potential in shaping education and, at the same time, identify its challenges in the face of the current configuration of the university. Finally, deliberation is presented as a fundamental element in comprehensive education and in the ethical constitution of individuals, as well as in the formation of their character necessary to address the problems of contemporary life.

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## Introduction

*"The performance society, as an active society, is gradually turning into a doping society."*

*Byung-chul Han*

Contemporary education faces numerous challenges that become increasingly complex as society evolves. Among the most relevant factors characterizing our era is the rapid advancement of technology, which impacts various areas of life. In particular, artificial intelligence has emerged as a central element that promises to integrate in multiple ways into the daily lives of current and future citizens (Mintz & Brodie, 2019). This development is accompanied by other technological innovations, such as big data and data science, high-level tools that converge in the identification of new productivity-oriented scenarios, which, according to some perspectives, will improve people's quality of life, even at the cost of ceasing to be human (Harari, 2016). However, alongside these potential benefits, there also arise risks and challenges of various kinds, both social and ethical (Morozov, 2014).

Various thinkers, from the 20th and 21st centuries, have reflected on the relationship between education and social transformations. Since the Industrial Revolution and the rise of capitalism, education has been increasingly subordinated to the needs of the labor market. According to Foucault (1975), this process of instrumentalization has closely linked education to economic interests, prioritizing the training of individuals useful to the productive system over the comprehensive education of critical and ethical citizens. This trend has led to an education mainly focused on technical and job-related instruction, contributing to the erosion of traditional moral values, which in many cases have been replaced by an ethic centered on economic performance (Bauman, 2002).

In this context, it is crucial that education reclaim the space it has ceded to predominantly economic interests. Educational processes must be reoriented towards the training of critical, ethical, and cooperative citizens, capable of questioning models of human relationships based solely on economic value. As Byung-Chul Han (2017) notes, contemporary society, marked by fatigue and exhaustion resulting from constant performance demands, requires a deep reflection on the speed and purpose of our activities. In this sense, education should foster a deceleration of the pace of life, promoting spaces for dialogue, quality communication, and a reencounter with spiritual and human values that encourage a more balanced and fulfilling life.

Thus, education must not only serve the logic of the market but also recover its original function: the comprehensive formation of human beings capable of living in community, critically reflecting on their environment, and contributing to the construction of a more just and humane society (Nussbaum, 2010). This is the true challenge that education faces in the 21st century: to transcend the limits imposed by productivity and honor the idea of a formation that encompasses all dimensions of the human being. In this important task, deliberation becomes a collective exercise that contributes to the formation of individuals and societies that are much more reflective, capable of carrying out a self-driven and contextualized interpretation of the various situations that surround them, rather than merely adhering to a unidirectional interpretation that defines the utility and purpose of everything available (Marcuse, 2013).

## **Deliberation**

Deliberation has been recognized as a key process for decision-making, from the times of the Greek philosophers to contemporary studies in cognitive psychology. Aristotle (2004), in particular, established the foundations of deliberation by stating that human rationality is the source of virtue (*aretē*) and prudence (*phronēsis*). For the Greek philosopher, virtue does not consist of following fixed rules but in finding the mean between two vicious extremes. This is achieved through a process of prudent deliberation, where the individual evaluates particular circumstances to make the most appropriate decision, always oriented towards practical good (Hernández Velandia, 2023). Thus, deliberation is not only an ethical process but also a fundamental tool for resolving practical problems in situations where the future and the outcome are unclear, primarily a procedure that contributes to the achievement of a higher end, eudaimonia (Naranjo Gálvez, 2003), which is generally understood in tradition and accepted translations as happiness (Guariglia, 1997). Accordingly, deliberation cannot be reduced to an instrumental calculation tool disguised under the idea of progress or

economic success, as it requires an analysis that allows for an understanding of the intentionality of a happy life from one's character.

In the contemporary context, where society is characterized by its fast pace and the fleetingness that defines our interactions, both with objects and other people, the modern world is marked by immediacy and neutrality, where everything seems ephemeral, and the value of things, relationships, and feelings is measured more by their duration than by their meaning or symbolism (Galicia, 2020). The ability to reflect and make prudent decisions not only facilitates confronting the challenges of an uncertain world but also helps reduce biases and errors that affect our judgment (Renn, 2004). Aristotle already highlighted the importance of this aspect, emphasizing that prudence does not apply solely to the universal but requires careful attention to the particular and the contingent. This process involves constant adaptation and evaluation of circumstances, leading to contextualized thinking and the construction of interpretations grounded in what surrounds us, its needs, and possibilities.

As Aristotle argues, deliberation is an active process of inquiry that rejects automatic or habit-based decision-making (Vigo, 2010). This approach remains fundamental today, especially in contexts such as education and the training of critical and reflective citizens. The ability to deliberate allows individuals to develop a deeper relationship with knowledge, society, and themselves, promoting a more conscious and responsible approach to decision-making. Deliberation contributes to a sensible rationality, as it enables an understanding of others and the context within the framework of appropriate good (Sorral, 2022).

By exploring the philosophical roots of deliberation and its practical application, it becomes evident how this process is essential not only for ethical reflection but also for decision-making that affects both the personal and collective levels. Thus, deliberation, far from being a passive act, presents itself as a dynamic mechanism that fosters a more critical and responsible interaction with the challenges previously mentioned. In this scenario, education plays a fundamental role, as the ability to respond to a world facing a crisis of moral values and coexistence levels defined by economic rules rather than vital or moral ones (Lynch, 2021), appears to represent an apparent abandonment not only of reason, prudence, and good but also of the foundational sensitivity of understanding.

From the Aristotelian perspective, deliberation has been a central concept in the development of human thought, following diverse paths throughout history, addressing areas such as education, politics, ethics, and more recently, bioethics. This concept has been fundamental in generating methods that enable more reflective decision-making based on the ability to analyze, recall situations, identify involved actors, and foresee the effects of the decisions made. One of the contemporary thinkers who has excelled in exploring and developing the concept of deliberation is the Spanish philosopher Diego Gracia, who has successfully applied this method in various contexts, particularly in the clinical and bioethical fields (Sanchini et al., 2020). The relevance of his approach lies not only in its practical application but also in its capacity to serve as a key tool in pedagogical and instructional design, enabling deeper and more reflective learning. However, before understanding its applications, it is necessary to thoroughly explore the fundamental principles and pillars of deliberation

according to Gracia.

For Diego Gracia (2023), deliberation is an inherent process of human nature. It is not an activity exclusive to the field of ethics but a biological necessity that drives individuals to project their actions and transform their environment. According to him, to deliberate is a fundamental condition for the development of any human project, as it is through deliberation that human beings transform their natural surroundings into a cultural and humanized environment. This transformation process is carried out through the use of intelligence, which allows one to anticipate consequences and project actions. Gracia (2014) emphasizes that human beings do not act automatically in all their actions; rather, deliberate acts are those that involve prior reflection and conscious decision-making. Through this process, human actions are ensured not only to respond to an immediate need but also to be directed towards higher goals that promote the humanization of the environment.

In his approach, Gracia (2019) distinguishes three fundamental pillars of deliberation, corresponding to the phases of the human project. The first phase is cognitive, involving the rational analysis of facts. At this stage, relevant facts for the project are identified, leading to the issuance of so-called “factual judgments.” These judgments are based on knowledge and experience regarding the present facts and similar situations. The second phase is emotional or evaluative, which is not cognitive in nature but is based on the emotional assessment of facts. Here arise “value judgments,” which allow for the valuation of facts and the projection of their transformation. This is the most complex moment to understand, as values, though subjective, guide decisions and give meaning to projects. In this stage, values are superimposed on facts and become the predicate that defines how those facts should be transformed. The third phase is practical or operational, where the project is concretized, and what has been deliberated is executed. At this point, “duty judgments” are issued, representing the will to act and implement the project, adding value to reality by transforming facts into something better.

For Diego Gracia (2023), deliberation is not merely an intellectual process but also a moral act that involves responsibility. In deliberating, human beings not only project and transform but also assume responsibility for their decisions and the outcomes derived from them. This responsibility involves accountability, both to oneself and others, ensuring that decisions made are not arbitrary but always seek to maximize the realization of values (Pintor-Ramos, 2020). In this sense, ethics, according to Gracia, is based on the realization of values, and deliberation is the means by which these values are optimally realized.

For Diego Gracia (2023), deliberation is not only an intellectual process but also a moral act that involves responsibility. When human beings deliberate, they not only project and transform but also assume the responsibility for their decisions and the results that arise from them. This responsibility implies responding both to oneself and to others, ensuring that the decisions made are not arbitrary but always seek to maximize the realization of values (Pintor-Ramos, 2020). In this sense, ethics, according to Gracia, is based on the realization of values, and deliberation is the means by which these values are optimally realized.

Furthermore, Diego Gracia (2023) introduces an intersubjective vision of values, arguing that they are neither completely objective nor completely subjective, but rather reasonable. Values, in his concept, are the result of a

reasoning process that involves both intelligence and feelings. This intersubjectivity is expressed in the ability to engage in dialogue and debate with others about the best ways to realize values in specific situations. Deliberation, therefore, is not only an individual process but also a social one, as values are constructed and managed collectively through dialogue and discussion (Shaffer & Longo, 2023).

In summary, Diego Gracia (2023) conceives deliberation as an integral process that unites intelligence, feelings, and will to transform reality in a conscious and humanizing manner. Through deliberation, human beings not only project their actions but also assume the moral responsibility for their decisions, always seeking the best way to realize values. This approach, which combines cognitive, emotional, and practical aspects, makes deliberation a fundamental tool in various fields, from bioethics to pedagogy, offering a solid structure for decision-making and the transformation of the social and cultural environment.

Ultimately, deliberation reveals itself as a hermeneutic process of facticity or praxis, as it implies interpreting and giving meaning to the specific situations in which the human being is immersed. This process is not merely theoretical or abstract but is deeply rooted in lived experience, where facts, values, and actions intertwine to form a deeper understanding of reality. In deliberating, the individual not only reflects on what they should do but also interprets their own circumstance, their possibilities, and the effects of their decisions in a specific context. In this sense, deliberation becomes a practical act of interpretation that guides action toward a meaningful transformation of reality, situating the human being in an active and responsible relationship with the world around them.

## **The Fusion of Horizons in Gadamerian Hermeneutics**

Hans-Georg Gadamer stands as a key figure in the tradition of philosophical hermeneutics, whose approach has profoundly influenced the way the process of interpretation is understood. In his main work, *Truth and Method* (1960), Gadamer challenges the traditional conception of hermeneutics as a technical method for interpreting texts, proposing instead a broader and more philosophical understanding of the hermeneutic phenomenon. According to Gadamer, understanding is not simply about reconstructing the author's intentions but is a dynamic and dialogical process in which the horizons of meaning of the interpreter and the text—or the other—meet and mutually transform. This encounter is known as the "fusion of horizons" (*Horizontverschmelzung*), a central concept in his theory.

The influence of Martin Heidegger on Gadamer's thought is crucial for understanding the basis of his hermeneutics. Gadamer, as a disciple of Heidegger, adopted and expanded several ideas from his mentor, especially the notion that understanding is not merely an intellectual act but a fundamental way of being in the world (*Dasein*). Heidegger, in his work *Being and Time* (1927), argued that all interpretation is conditioned by temporality and by the prejudices the interpreter brings with them, which Gadamer takes up to develop his concept of the fusion of horizons. Like Heidegger, Gadamer rejects the separation between subject and object in the act of understanding, emphasizing the participatory and dialogical nature of this process. In this way, Gadamerian hermeneutics deepens Heidegger's critique of objectivism and transforms it into a theory of

interaction between traditions and cultural horizons (Vessey, 2021).

The fusion of horizons emphasizes that every act of understanding is contextual and takes place from a specific historical and cultural perspective. When engaging in dialogue with the past, the interpreter not only understands a text or a tradition but is also transformed by them. In this way, Gadamer overcomes the subject-object dichotomy and underscores that understanding is an event that occurs in the encounter between diverse horizons. This hermeneutic process involves openness to the other and a willingness to be affected by what is different (Vergara Henríquez, 2008).

In Gadamer's work, dialogue is considered fundamental to understanding. It is not merely the transmission of information but a transformation of the participants through interaction. In this sense, understanding is not a rational agreement on an absolute truth but a shared process of seeking meaning in which individual horizons are expanded (Vergara Henríquez, 2008). The importance of this notion lies in its relevance not only for the interpretation of texts but also for the human and social sciences, which seek to understand human experience in all its diversity.

Authors such as Martha Nussbaum (1990) and Paul Ricoeur (1992) have developed these ideas, highlighting the ethical and communicative dimension of Gadamerian hermeneutics, where respect for otherness and the recognition of one's own prejudices are essential for authentic dialogue. Thus, Gadamer's hermeneutics remains a crucial framework for understanding the dynamics between tradition, dialogue, and transformation in the act of understanding.

## **Method**

Hermeneutic phenomenology, as a research approach, offers a profound scope by allowing the exploration of human experience through the interpretation of meanings. By focusing on the description of what is directly presented to intuition, it goes beyond traditional theoretical constructions, favoring a more authentic and direct understanding of phenomena. This approach not only seeks to capture lived experiences in their purest form but also acknowledges that all experience is, in a certain way, interpreted. In the realm of research, hermeneutic phenomenology allows for addressing the complexity of social, cultural, and ethical contexts by considering that understanding the world is not an objective process but an interpretive act influenced by the researcher's perceptions and preconceptions. Thus, this perspective invites researchers to delve into the underlying meanings that emerge from human experiences, recognizing that interpretation is an inevitable and enriching process (Domingo Moratalla, 2017). This broadens the scope of phenomenological analysis, making it possible not only to describe what is perceived but also to understand how subjects attribute meaning to their experiences, thereby allowing a deeper understanding of the studied reality.

The proposed methodology is framed within a hermeneutic phenomenological approach (Ayala Carabajo, 2008), which is suitable for investigating the nature of deliberation as a moral and evaluative attitude in the context of higher education. This approach enables the interpretation of experiences and meanings associated

with deliberation from the perspective of the subjects involved, emphasizing a deep understanding of the phenomena through dialogue and the interaction between horizons of meaning, as Gadamer proposes. Thus, the research process focuses on how deliberation is constructed and experienced in higher education, examining both its philosophical foundations and its practical application in this environment.

Regarding the type of research, it is a qualitative and exploratory study, with a descriptive and comprehensive scope (Bernal Torres, 2011). This approach allows not only to describe the dynamics of deliberation within the university but also to understand its ethical and formative implications in shaping the character and development of the student. Through theoretical analysis, the study seeks to identify existing practices, current challenges, and opportunities for effectively integrating deliberation into the university context, recognizing its potential to address contemporary challenges in the holistic education of students.

## **Results**

### **Ethical Formation and Deliberation**

Contemporary ethical formation and deliberation should be understood as a dynamic process that responds to both social demands and the challenges posed by the educational and political context. Unlike a prescriptive and rigid ethics, designed to sustain an economic model through a form of totalitarianism applied to human behavior, deliberation proposes an emergent and contextual ethics. This ethics is nourished by the specific conditions in which the individual is immersed, allowing for a more flexible and adaptive approach (Domingo Moratalla, 2017). In this regard, Diego Gracia, following the Aristotelian tradition, argues that ethics cannot be reduced to simple apodictic norms but must be rooted in a deliberative process that acknowledges the inherent uncertainty in decision-making within complex situations.

According to Gracia (2023), deliberation becomes the fundamental intellectual procedure for confronting this uncertainty. It is a practical process that does not seek absolute truth but rather prudence, understood as the ability to make sound decisions under uncertain conditions. In this process, practical reasoning gains prominence, as it allows decisions to be based on a dialectical analysis of the factors at play, integrating diverse perspectives. Aristotle already emphasized the importance of broadening analysis through collective deliberation, which adds a dialogical and collaborative dimension to the decision-making process.

In the educational sphere, deliberation promotes a practical ethical formation that transcends mere instruction in pre-established norms or principles. Its goal is to develop in students the ability to critically evaluate the contexts and factors that influence prudent decision-making (Pintor-Ramos, 2020). This approach contrasts with predominant educational plans, which tend to prioritize individual competence over reflective dialogue. The challenge is further intensified by the growing influence of artificial intelligence and the rise of remote and virtual education programs, which often deviate from a model of formation based on deliberation and prudence. Instead of fostering critical analysis and practical dialogue, pre-defined or purely rhetorical content is often favored. Current curricular designs lead to student learning being supported by activities evaluated in theoretical terms or through case studies that, although useful, do not always faithfully reflect the complexities of the real



world. This limited approach underscores the need to integrate ethical deliberation at all educational levels, not only in higher education, to form individuals capable of making prudent decisions in real contexts, rather than merely relying on assumptions or abstract theoretical frameworks (Georges-Auguste, 2014).

As Gracia (2019) points out, deliberation requires not only knowledge and experience but also skills and attitudes that must be developed from the earliest stages of education. Intellectual humility and openness to dialogue are essential for deliberation to become a formative and transformative process. Ultimately, deliberation is a hermeneutic process of praxis, where the interpretation of circumstances and reflection on actions intertwine to guide ethical and prudent decisions in a world full of uncertainties.

### **Affective-Based Deliberation**

In the educational field, training within the horizon of deliberation requires a solid affective foundation, as a genuine construction of thought is impossible without an ontological dimension that includes emotions. From Heidegger's perspective (2022), the notion of mood (*Stimmung*) is fundamental to human existence, as it reflects how the being is "attuned" affectively to the world. In this sense, emotions are not external elements to the deliberative process but are intrinsic to how reality is understood and confronted. Affectivity is not merely a complement to rationality; it constitutes the very condition of possibility for reflective thinking to emerge and develop.

This approach directly connects to deliberation in the educational context, where the formation of critical and reflective citizens cannot be reduced to the mere transmission of knowledge or logical argumentation (Georges-Auguste, 2014). Instead, deliberation demands an affective openness that enables the recognition and integration of different perspectives, facilitating the fusion of horizons as described by Gadamer. Therefore, education must promote an environment where emotions such as empathy, compassion, and a sense of justice are actively cultivated, as they provide valuable guidance for decision-making and participation in ethical and social dialogues.

Throughout history, affectivity has been underestimated in many theories centered on rationality (Gazmuri Barros, 2022). However, philosophers like Aristotle already acknowledged that emotions play a crucial role in practical deliberation. *Phronēsis* or prudence, which is key to moral judgment, involves not only a rational component but also an appropriate emotional disposition (Abizadeh, 2002). In the educational context, training in deliberation also means fostering the ability to manage emotions so that they contribute to a deeper and more humanized understanding of ethical situations.

Contemporary authors such as Martha Nussbaum (2003) and Antonio Damasio (2019) have emphasized the relevance of emotions in moral decision-making, and this approach is essential for present-day education. Affectivity not only guides the evaluation of situations but also motivates active participation in deliberative processes, both individually and collectively. In this sense, affectivity in deliberation should not be seen as an interference with reason but as a fundamental framework that allows for openness to others and the



transformation of one's own horizons. This facilitates an education that is based on character building and the formation of individuals capable of facing the challenges of contemporary life with a comprehensive understanding of reality.

### **Challenges in Virtual Education and AI**

Virtual education, which has seen exponential growth, particularly in Latin America (Varas-Meza et al., 2020), presents a series of challenges surrounding key elements of the educational process, such as holistic education, ethics, and the recognition of others. Within this context, a central concern emerges: is it possible to foster deliberation within the framework of virtual education, understood as an ethical and practical exercise? Deliberation, traditionally associated with face-to-face interaction, appears to be threatened by the lack of physical presence and diminished affectivity that characterize virtual classes. This raises the question of how deliberation can survive, or even thrive, in an environment where physical distancing is the norm (De Brasi & Gutierrez, 2020).

One of the primary challenges to deliberation in virtual education is the absence of in-person encounters, which are essential for building affective relationships and fostering authentic communication. In a physical classroom, direct exchange facilitates spontaneous dialogue, empathy, and the creation of a space where ideas can be ethically challenged. However, in the virtual setting, such interactions are mediated by screens, and students often experience an emotional disconnection that can hinder deep dialogue and shared reflection (Turkle, 2016). Overcoming this barrier requires rethinking how to create virtual spaces where emotions and interactions are equally meaningful, thus fostering deliberation.

Another key challenge is related to the asynchronous autonomy that characterizes many virtual education programs. While this model offers flexibility by allowing students to work at their own pace, it also limits opportunities for real-time deliberation (Anderson & Dron, 2011). Deliberation, as a process requiring continuous and reflective exchange, can be impeded by the differing paces of participants and the lack of simultaneous interaction, which restricts immediate feedback and the perception of otherness and emotional connection between participants. This asynchronous autonomy results in uneven learning rhythms and reduced levels of interaction, potentially leading to fragmented and less effective deliberation.

To address these challenges, it is essential to design virtual environments that intentionally promote deliberation (Salmon, 2013). Simply transferring educational content to the digital space is insufficient; it is crucial to create structured interactive spaces that encourage students to actively engage in ethical and reflective debates. This can be achieved through the use of discussion forums, live virtual seminars, and collaborative activities that foster dialogue, empathy, and the exchange of diverse perspectives (Rovai, 2002). Furthermore, instructors must act as facilitators who create an atmosphere conducive to ethical and constructive deliberation, overcoming the inherent limitations of the virtual format and ensuring that ethical training is not relegated to a secondary role in this new context (Salmon, 2013).

In conclusion, virtual education should not be seen as an insurmountable obstacle to deliberation but as an opportunity to rethink how dialogue and ethical reflection can be promoted in a digital environment. Although the lack of physical interaction and asynchronous autonomy pose significant challenges, these can be overcome by creating virtual spaces that integrate deliberation and affectivity. The key lies in designing educational experiences that focus not only on knowledge transmission but also on building affective relationships and ethical engagement among students, ensuring that deliberation remains a central component of comprehensive education, even in the virtual realm.

### **Instructional Design and Diego Gracia's Method**

Diego Gracia's deliberation method offers an effective framework that can be applied to instructional design in both in-person and virtual education, through an approach that follows its three fundamental phases: cognitive, emotional, and practical. These phases ensure that the teaching-learning process not only focuses on the acquisition of theoretical knowledge but also on the development of critical, evaluative, and operational skills that connect theory with reality and concrete actions. However, in the age of advanced technology, a significant challenge arises: ensuring that these spaces for deliberation and learning are not easily supplanted by automated systems, such as artificial intelligence, which may lack the ethical and emotional depth required for genuine deliberation and the construction of affectivity.

#### *Cognitive (Intellectual) Phase*

In this initial phase, instructional design must focus on identifying and presenting key facts and concepts relevant to the course content. This phase corresponds to what Gracia calls "judgments of fact," where intelligence and knowledge are used to understand the fundamental aspects of a topic. In in-person education, this phase is implemented through lectures, reading activities, and discussions where students explore and debate the facts. In virtual settings, multimedia resources, discussion forums, and interactive platforms enable students to access information and engage in online debates, ensuring they comprehend the material critically.

It is essential that instructional design in this phase facilitates in-depth analysis that goes beyond the mere transmission of information. While advanced technologies can aid in content distribution and access, the educational environment must promote authentic human interaction, where contextual understanding and critical reflection are generated—elements that a machine cannot provide. The challenge lies in designing spaces that invite curiosity and inquiry, preserving the uniqueness of human thought.

#### *Emotional (Evaluative) Phase*

The second phase of Gracia's method emphasizes the importance of reflecting on and evaluating facts from an ethical and emotional perspective. Here, "value judgments" are constructed, allowing students to assess the significance of facts in relation to a specific context and their own values. This evaluative component cannot be reduced to algorithms that calculate predefined responses; it requires interaction that fosters empathy, affectivity, and the recognition of otherness, which are key factors for legitimate and authentic deliberation.

In in-person education, this phase may include debates, case studies, and simulations where students discuss the facts and evaluate them in light of the course objectives and the personal transformations they seek to achieve. In the virtual environment, it is equally necessary to create genuine interaction spaces that encourage empathy and mutual understanding. Platforms must go beyond merely being communication channels; they should be designed to facilitate exchanges that build meaningful connections between participants, preventing technology from replacing the emotional richness of human interactions. In this way, the value of deliberation as an act involving both the mind and heart is preserved, which is essential for the student's comprehensive ethical development.

#### *Practical (Operational) Phase*

Finally, in the practical phase of Gracia's deliberation method, instructional design should focus on the application of what has been learned, transforming knowledge into valuable and concrete actions. This stage involves generating “judgments of duty,” where students make decisions and carry out actions based on the values they have developed. In in-person education, this phase may involve field projects, experimental activities, or the execution of practical projects that transform theory into action.

For the practical phase to be effective in virtual environments, it is crucial to design simulations, collaborative online projects, and practical activities that allow students to apply their knowledge to real or hypothetical problem-solving. However, these technological tools should not simplify the application process to a set of automated responses. While artificial intelligence can support practical learning, it cannot replace the human experience of making complex and ethically nuanced decisions. Instructional design must ensure that students experience the deliberative process in all its complexity, thus fostering creativity and the ability to act with prudence and responsibility.

### **Discussion**

Deliberation, as understood from the perspective of Aristotle and more recently Diego Gracia, emerges as an essential process in ethical, pedagogical, and social decision-making. In a contemporary world characterized by the rapid flow of information and complex challenges, deliberation offers an approach that allows for a deep analysis of facts, an evaluation of values, and conscious and responsible decision-making (Gracia, 2003). However, it is crucial to identify potential biases that may arise from a totalizing orientation of reasoning, which can lead to the forced elimination of opposing views or multiperspectivism (Luján Christiansen, 2020). This ability to reflect and act prudently stands as one of the fundamental competencies needed to face current challenges in educational, ethical, and technological fields.

On the other hand, Gadamer's hermeneutics, where horizons of meaning meet and mutually transform, complements the deliberative vision by emphasizing that understanding is a dialogical and contextual act. This process of the fusion of horizons invites us to open ourselves to others and recognize our limitations and prejudices, facilitating a more authentic encounter with knowledge and otherness (Walhof, 2005). Thus,

deliberation and the fusion of horizons, as interrelated processes, promote a more holistic formation of individuals (Walhof, 2005). In an educational context that has often been subordinated to market interests, both approaches underscore the importance of forming critical citizens, capable of dialogue, reflection, and acting with prudence and ethics. This is the central challenge that 21st-century education must confront: to transcend the limits of economic productivity and reclaim the formative function that encompasses all dimensions of the human being, in favor of a more just and balanced society.

At this point, it is important to emphasize the necessity of not turning deliberation into an instrument integrated into the current mechanisms of economic operationalization, nor into just another tool of calculative thinking (Biesta, 2014). Instead, it should be recognized as a criterion of character, not as a device for adjustment and legitimization of a specific idea of progress or success. In this sense, confining deliberation strictly to a specific political or economic purpose represents a fundamentally teleological orientation and understanding that undermines its value and transformative potential in addressing the problematic realities of 21st-century life. Using Diego Gracia's method within a Gadamerian horizon implies seeking progress towards eudaimonia, aiming for a higher end, not instrumental means that might disguise deliberation as a mere platform for debate and construction under a democratic or economic principle.

Diego Gracia's method, when applied to instructional design, as emphasized, suggests that teaching cannot be reduced to the mere transmission of information or operational efficiency. In a context where advanced technologies, including artificial intelligence, present both opportunities and threats, it is essential to ensure that the design of these environments preserves and promotes the legitimacy of deliberation, as an effort and expression of human intelligence (Spector & Ma, 2019). The key lies in designing educational experiences that facilitate affective interaction, empathy, and the transparent pursuit of eudaimonia, or human flourishing (Gracia, 2003). While technologies can support certain educational tasks, genuine deliberation—one that considers cognitive, emotional, and practical aspects—must remain a human activity, not subject to automation or algorithmic simplification.

Therefore, educational spaces must be intentionally constructed so that they are not displaced by technologies incapable of understanding, feeling, and deliberating (Spector & Ma, 2019). This requires designing learning environments that foster the development of cognitive, evaluative, and practical skills, thereby creating a comprehensive learning experience. The cognitive phase ensures a solid knowledge base; the emotional phase encourages critical and ethical reflection; and the practical phase guides students toward action and application, ensuring that learning is meaningful and transformative, with deliberation and affectivity remaining at the core of the educational process.

## **Conclusion**

Ethical formation and deliberation, as proposed by Diego Gracia, offer a framework that goes beyond rigid theoretical teaching to foster a dynamic, holistic, and contextual learning experience. This approach emphasizes the development of cognitive, emotional, and practical skills, essential for making prudent decisions in complex

and uncertain situations. In the educational sphere, deliberation must not only address theoretical knowledge but also integrate the affective component as an essential part of the reflective process, in line with thinkers like Aristotle, Heidegger, and Nussbaum. In a context where virtual environments and artificial intelligence are gaining prominence, new challenges arise in maintaining and promoting ethical deliberation. However, through a deliberately structured instructional design, it is possible to overcome these challenges and create spaces where dialogue, critical reflection, and affectivity remain central elements of education, both in physical and virtual settings. This ensures a more comprehensive education, focused not only on the transmission of knowledge but also on the development of ethical and reflective citizens, capable of addressing contemporary challenges with prudence and empathy.

## **Recommendations**

For future research and practice, it is essential to explore how instructional design can effectively integrate ethical deliberation processes that foster genuine human connection, especially in virtual contexts. It is recommended to investigate the development of didactic methodologies based on Diego Gracia's method and Gadamer's hermeneutics, to promote critical, evaluative, and operational competencies in students, ensuring that online interactions retain the authenticity and depth of ethical reflection. Additionally, it is vital to study the role that technologies, including artificial intelligence, can play in facilitating these deliberative processes, without replacing the human essence of interaction and deliberation.

Furthermore, it is crucial to create clear indicators that allow for the assessment of the quality of deliberation in educational settings, as well as to develop training programs for educators to equip them to facilitate these ethical and reflective discussions. Future research should adopt an interdisciplinary approach, combining pedagogy, technology, ethics, and philosophy, to ensure that instructional design not only conveys knowledge but also promotes holistic development and eudaimonia in students, helping them to flourish as ethical, critical, and empathetic individuals.

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### Author Information

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**Jesús Enrique Beltrán Virgüez**

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3144-3720>

Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios

UNIMINURO

Colombia

Contact e-mail:

[jesusenrique.beltranvirguez@gmail.com](mailto:jesusenrique.beltranvirguez@gmail.com)

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