

# The moral dimension in Chilean higher education's expansion

Peodair Leihy<sup>1</sup> · Jose M. Salazar<sup>1</sup>

Published online: 9 August 2016  
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**Abstract** Chilean higher education has expanded greatly in recent decades, primarily through drawing on the private contributions of students and families, and an increased number and variety of institutions. In the context of attempts to address criticism that the sector is not free, public or high-quality enough, this article examines the association between education and its moral and ethical dimensions, and their separate yet complementary consideration alongside economic development, through the two centuries of the Chilean state's existence. Since the beginning of the current decade, discontent with the framing and performance of higher education as a whole has grown. The overview traces this process not as fresh crisis, but part of a social question pondered repeatedly in the past and supported with varying success through educational and political initiatives. This historical (and historiographic) approach illuminates the limits of conceiving of higher education as either an economic good or as a human right, and an overlooked need to support its benefits through policy. Not simply an interpenetration with economic thinking, but also a lack of sufficient appreciation of Chile's fundamental and singular character, present as challenges in understanding expanded access's function and its prospective contribution to growing debates around ethics and inequality.

**Keywords** Ethics and morals · Chile · Massification · System expansion · Market · Moral economy

## Prologue

Inasmuch as anything is known abroad of Chilean society—including education—it is its vigorously, if divisively, capitalist underpinnings. Recent attempts to address popular demand for free higher education (HE) are an exception that proves the rule. Here, scant

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✉ Peodair Leihy  
pete.leihy@uv.cl

<sup>1</sup> División Académia, Universidad de Valparaíso, Valparaíso, Chile

public resources are directed at the poorer half of the population for places at assenting institutions deemed of good quality (Morgan 2016). While avoiding middle class welfare, this legitimises financial leverage for those more able to pay; without doubt, the campuses need their money. The rector of one private institution excluded from the scheme through the lobbying of the leaders of the state and older private universities for its inability to prove that it does not operate on a for-profit basis retorted: ‘It deeply annoys me that they constitute the true administrators of the moral for others’ (Quevedo 2016).

For better or worse, Chilean HE has summoned and facilitated private investment from individuals and their families and grown from single-digit participation in the 1980s to reach 30 per cent participation among school leavers by 2010. Most analysis, then, has focused on these private energies and the markets that frame them (Brunner 2009; Salazar and Leihy 2013), the private and public dimensions of universities (Parada 2010; Garrido et al. 2012) and their interactions with a wider but neglected overall ‘public’ fabric (Brunner and Peña 2011; Guzmán-Valenzuela 2016).

The qualitative changes inherent to HE expansion, whether or not these are properly tracked, can be obscured by any notion of market growth. Worldwide, when more of a society participates, while indeed comprising growth and unlocking economies of scale, how that society is woven changes too—the circulation of knowledge mattering more than arbitrary lack of opportunity for most people. Chile’s has moved from a small, elite system inherently concerned with leading the country, its morality and pondering the *social question* of headlong inequality, with today’s mass HE’s role in guiding society not discussed much at all. Yet the economic self-interest that has propelled expansion towards diminishing returns confronts increasing critique. This article uncovers the moral background and implications of Chilean HE’s market-oriented reforms.

Other countries eyeing user-pays expansion can learn from Chile; that economic rationales are powerful, but also that locally situated moral conversations are muted at healthy growth’s peril. If Chile’s is a complicated history, other developing countries—often with only harsher authoritarian heritages hardly reconciled by sometimes pollyannaish populism—must themselves confront theirs. *Moral*, and its fancier, Grecian synonym *ethical* work in tandem; in general parlance, morals are a shade more prescriptive (to conform to) and ethics more reflective (to process). In that sense, Chile is ripe for ethical pondering, as rising education levels furnish individual agency; any paternalism connoted by the moral has never, however, been entirely superseded by economic thinking.

## Towards a moral vacuum?

In 1948, as Latin America’s more or less hereditary political classes reorganised themselves for the geopolitical and popular pressures promised by the Cold War, conservative jurist Jaime Eyzaguirre published *The Historical Physiognomy of Chile*, an investigation of the Chilean people and its ways. The title recalls the address launching the Universidad de Chile in 1843, in which founder Andrés Bello considered how the European institution of the university could support the evolving features of the independent American nations. In the intervening century, the problematic of Chile’s ‘social question’ would also emerge (e.g. Bilbao 1844; Ortega Luco 1884; Mac-Iver 1900; Recabarren 1904; Pinochet Le-Brun 1909)—understood by the intelligentsia as accommodating and leading the interests of the masses in order to foster development and political stability.

Eyzaguirre's *Physiognomy* affirmed the 'Realm of Chile' concept, inspired by Diego de Rosales's seventeenth-century chronicle of colonial life *as recontextualized* through writer Benjamin Vicuña Mackenna's redaction and publication (1877–1878). The term became a romanticised assertion of the natural statehood and integrity of Chile within its territory (soon to expand with further conquests), rather than as simply an offshoot of Spanish rule, or that of the Incas, Mapuche and other polities before. The revived image of a shared national face, also developed by Palacios (1914)<sup>1</sup>, rather than a small patriciate separate from masses colloquially dubbed *rotos* ('broken ones')—suitably supervised, not without their uses for military purposes, down the mines and so on—, would, however, ground Chile's singular path to mass HE.

Eyzaguirre's chapter 'The fight between the ethic and the economy' broaches the special obligation that had been established in Latin America, under Catholic doctrine, for the ruling classes both to harness the population for economic development and to protect (if rarely educate) and indeed morally improve it. Notwithstanding the iniquities of the Spanish colonial system and its republican afterglow, Eyzaguirre's account ventures into apologetics in drawing comparison with anglophone America, which, for all its relative egalitarianism (with notable exceptions) and economic triumph, had near exterminated its indigenous peoples. Here, *the ethic* refers to a special duty of care for the still largely illiterate masses; unlike the Protestant ethic that Eyzaguirre conceded had brought the economic and moral into mutual reinforcement elsewhere; in Latin America, the two remained separate and sometimes antagonistic considerations.

It was clear that Chile's education system was not functioning optimally, producing neither a widely illuminated population nor general prosperity. Dying in 1968, Eyzaguirre would live to see one new political movement—the Chilean instantiation of the Christian Democrats—embark upon an expansion of HE. Eyzaguirre taught and influenced the future democracy activist, education minister (1990–1992) and eventual President (2000–2006) Ricardo Lagos, as well as academic lawyer Jaime Guzmán, who would mastermind a second, market-oriented expansion of participation, from the middle of the military government that had cracked down on universities upon its ascent in 1973 and would end in 1990. With respect to the moral function of HE, Guzmán offered measured faith in academia's: 'There are some academics and researchers of superior intellectual and moral quality. Without doubt that is not and nor should it be the general rule' (Guzmán and Larraín 1981: 26). With that, HE would be mostly about the generation of valuable and so saleable skills, without reliance on such abstractions as bettering society wholesale. Further, given that existing universities and academics were to provide fee-for-service vouching for the standards of new ones, even superior intellects and moralities were suborned to the new rationale.

Chile is interesting because, despite selectively taking inspiration from more advanced systems, to a great extent government and commissioned experts would guide the transition towards and beyond mass HE by fomenting a new culture (present but generally less elaborated elsewhere in Latin America) of various kinds of private investment ('privatism' Habermas 1975; Brunner 1990) in the process. Before examining the antecedents of the

<sup>1</sup> In a re-edition's foreword, Palacios's brother Senén notes that the sojourning Charles Darwin himself had noted a distinctive Chilean physiognomy (1914: 21). Palacios's interest in human eugenics (shared by many coevals around the world, including feted academics) would go on to inspire the minor Chilean form of nazism, yet was unusual for the extent to which he criticised the 'Chilean race' even as he was advocating for it.

current situation in ample historical depth, the links between Chile's market-driven massification and the inherent if low-key moral side of higher education bear consideration.

Market features in HE have become of wider interest ever since HE has become a feasible aspiration for large parts of societies around the world. What can and cannot be bought in HE is both a political bone of contention and a philosophical conundrum for markets in general (Sandel 1998) and for markets in education in particular (Marginson 1997), increasingly dedicated as they are to gradations of opportunity and the generation of new knowledge. That emphasis on market relations called capitalism supports the pursuit of self-interest, and its discontents would say excessively so. In practice, of course, any self-interest is couched within a wider, social context. Friedrich Hayek's contention that any free market deal is based on and manifests 'equally divided knowledge' (1945: IV) asserts that all of that social context is fairly brought to table and divided along with property or other rights. Others would suggest that the social good needs to be judged by other moral criteria. In Chile from the 1980s, the historical association between education and morality, however, may have been sidelined in reimagining education as more urgently a source of economic development and opportunity.

Talking about any moral dimension of HE is not very modern, but perhaps it is experiencing a revival. And *mores*, or customs, are always some brake on the economically liberal; hence, EP Thompson's use of *moral economy* for what recourse 'the masses' had to unregulated price rises for necessities in early modern times when paternalist custom ought to protect them from the forces driving newly prominent mercantilism. (1971) Of course, such a moral economy is necessarily disrupted by massification—massed first-in-family students, especially when understood almost *ipso facto* as a 'new middle class' (Fleet 2011). Nevertheless, if we imagine expanding HE as innervated with the pursuit and formation of newly more fluid social and cultural capitals (Bourdieu 1984), all manner of duty of care is implied, both for HE's traditions and the values of previously excluded groups and perspectives.

Smelser (2015: 7–9) acknowledges the tacit centrality of HE's moral dimension firstly because it is about institutionalising values, and secondly due to its heritage as a sacred function—it is not just about common values, but the best ones: the sort summoned from ascetic equanimity, not motivated overmuch by material gain. In practice, certainly values like *citizenship* and, if that be too redolent of school curricula, being *diverse* and *international*, are raised, but for social engineering, such jargon is fairly light-touch. Of course, research *ethics* has become an important node of university life, albeit largely as a vetting of egregious infractions rather than the positing of any special virtue. Sexual harassment and bullying policies contend with evolving yet traditional intramural abuses of power but there is rarely anything pious about them; institutions need to be comfortable places to learn and work, not to mention to comply with enforceable law. Some institutions may have honour codes and such, and there is comparative advantage for cultivating niche markets or loyal cadres there. But the idea that HE broadly has some special moral function for wider society is quaint. Yet, it is one way to label that part of HE's dynamics beyond economic interactions.

## The moral remit since independence

Education's role in buttressing economic progress with wider enlightenment has long been a prominent concern in Chile. Fired by the possibilities of independence in the 1810s, nation building started from the low base of an underdeveloped, semi-feudal society that

had been a minor Spanish colony. An elite public secondary school [*Instituto Nacional*] was established soon after the first attempt at independence, and inherited aspects of the (in stages) decommissioned ‘royal’ university, with some analogues in other population centres coming after the Spanish were definitively expelled—reformists’ down payment on an envisaged comprehensive ‘Teaching State’. Some high-minded moves, such as the abolition of slavery against certain landowners’ interests, succeeded. More ambitious yet, perhaps, was the innovative but impractical constitution of 1823—in this, suffrage was extended to men meeting some modest property or professional qualifications but deniable for a variety of behavioural faults. Projecting Chile as it might be, rather than was (an occupational hazard of trying to codify the moral authoritatively, with its countervailing senses of what is customary and what is hoped), this doomed document was termed the *Moral Constitution*. Moral Constitution failing, eventually a constitution protecting property rights and facilitating strongly led, relatively stable government gained acceptance. With conservative advocacy and practical need, from the middle part of the century, the provision of much schooling (and moral influence) would be outsourced to various Catholic teaching orders, although many of the best schools took root within certain tolerated (yet ‘dissenting’) non-Catholic settler communities.

In 1842–1843, the civil servant and scholar Andrés Bello would reorganise what remained of the colonial-era university along the lines of ‘Napoleonic’, professional-forming HE, with the telling exception of maintaining a faculty of theology, whose absolutely central role in this Universidad de Chile Bello emphasised (eighty-five years later, however, it would be incorporated into the humanities faculty). ‘The moral (which I do not separate from religion) is the life itself of society’ stressed Bello, in a sop to a Church that, unlike in France, he had been unwilling or unable to exclude from the university.

Chile was a modest beneficiary of refugees from the failed European popular revolutions of the 1830s and 40 s. Egalitarian democracy was a serious aspiration for many intellectuals. *The Society for Equality*, founded in 1850, swore members to a three-part affirmation:

- Firstly, do you recognize the sovereignty of reason as authority of authorities?
- Second, do you recognize the sovereignty of the people as the basis of all policy?
- And third, do you recognise love and universal brotherhood as moral life?

The very stridency of their rhetoric betrays how far this remained from reality; government and voting were dominated by the landed and merchant classes, moral or not.

The Church took renewed interest in sponsoring its own HE globally in the second half of the century. In Chile, a push factor was a gradual secularisation of some functions, such as the registration of births, deaths and marriages, before a comprehensive reform (the Lay Laws of 1881,<sup>2</sup> enacted during the successful war of conquest against Peru and Bolivia) motivated the establishment in 1888 of the Universidad Católica, the first successful example of several new Catholic universities in independent Latin America.<sup>3</sup> The century’s

<sup>2</sup> Note even today the tendency in Spanish to use the concept of lay (*laico*) rather than, as in English, the firmer division of Church and State implied by *secular*; in Spanish, continued Church presence is actually assumed, but subjugated to community standards not beholden to it (eg in ongoing demands in Spain for ‘education: public, free and lay’).

<sup>3</sup> Uruguay’s previous short-lived Catholic establishment was called the *Universidad Libre*—curious, given earlier nineteenth-century European ‘free universities’ were founded as free *from religious oversight*.

end saw progress in emphasising efficiency in professional learning over cultural and moral development (Gutiérrez 2011: 15), but in any case HE remained mostly an elite bastion.

If education was a key to the nation's moral advancement, it was largely deficient, and certainly a privilege for the wealthier, as well as a few identified academic talents from the working classes. As part of the navel-gazing with which intellectuals marked Chile's centenary, writer Tancredo Pinochet (no close relation to the later military dictator) made the observation:

The school and the factory are the levers we have in our hands, the two power levers for achieving the transformation of Chile, which must give the country its moral wealth and material wealth (Pinochet Le-Brun 1915).

Industrialisation was a relatively fresh aspiration—compared to its trading partners, primary industry was Chile's forte—but the neat division of economic advancement from the moral focus of education contrasts markedly from the economic fixations with which development of all levels of education would later be marked.

In 1938, as Chile attempted to find an exit from its profound rendition of the Great Depression, one-time schoolteacher Pedro Aguirre Cerda was elected president with the slogan 'To govern is to educate'—remarkably, an allusion to nineteenth-century Argentinian statesman Juan Batista Alberdi's 'To govern is to populate'. Argentina had reached a window of world-leading standards (the 50 years until the Depression) through mass immigration. Now, perhaps Chile—less successful in attracting immigrants—could kick-start a new era by surmounting a Catch-22. That is, of a population not considered educated enough (by the patrician elite, conservative or liberal) to be extended the democratic wherewithal such that governments were truly committed to mass education. As yet, women's suffrage, and thus the doubling of the electorate in raw terms, was still in transit, while agrarian tradition ensured many 'pocket boroughs' and such.

Meanwhile, other universities took shape. Beyond Santiago, five regional private universities were established by the mid 1960s. Perhaps most notably, in 1947, in the capital the *Escuela de Artes y Oficios* [founded 1849, but whose origins were linked by Eyzaguirre to colonial efforts to incorporate the working classes into a modern economy through trades education (1948: 61)] became the *Universidad Técnica del Estado*. The Universidad de Chile, Universidad Católica and Universidad Técnica (its headquarters today the Universidad de Santiago) would also establish branch campuses nationally (later independent universities) (Leihy and Salazar 2012).

Education continued to expand, and in the 1960s, a Christian Democrat government (that is, subscribing to West German *Ordoliberal* example—conflated with *neoliberal* in Chile (Boas and Gans-Morse 2009)—the relatively progressive Vatican II *zeitgeist*, and the Kennedyian mindset that Communist influence could be forfended by material improvement for the populace) made university studies free, boosting expansion from a very low base. Socially conscientious students at the Católica set up a chain of technical training centres for, literally, 'workers' and 'field-hands' (*Departamento Universitario Obrero-Campesino*, or *DuocUC*).

This period also saw the formation of the *Academia Chilena*, in imitation of the French and other national academies under which previously somewhat cloistered scholarship was coopted to advance the national good during the Enlightenment and its more hard-nosed nineteenth-century aftermath—in turn seeing the rise of universities more concerned with both ecumenical research and 'nationally' situated cultures, and famously deemed in ruins by Bill Readings (1995) in the age of globalisation. For its part, a notable feature of the Chilean academy is its 'Politics and Morals' stream, which stands apart from social

sciences, and conceives of a politics answerable then as now for a patchy education system as serving moral aspirations, and enjoying a legitimacy on a par with scientific fields.

A socially ambitious but economically ruinous government led by socialist Salvador Allende (1970–1973) was ended by military coup, precipitated by the withdrawal of Christian Democrat support and US tolerance. Any moral potential for HE was largely defined by the removal of politically progressive elements of the social sciences, as well as politically unacceptable academics and students, from universities. In contrast, the 1970s were also notable for the prominent role played in the military government by the idiosyncratically Latin, especially Chilean, academic discipline of *commercial engineering* (a conceit originating in the USA under the influence of Taylor and Fordism before the Second World War, but largely forgotten there since), as well as free market strains of academic economics. Commercial engineering had appeared first at the Universidad de Chile, while the Católica's program, with ties to Milton Friedman at the University of Chicago, had become particularly pivotal in channelling strong students from the commercial classes into such fields. Previous measures to kindle industrialisation along import substitution lines were opposed under this approach. Broadcasters programmed overviews of approved economists for weekly transmission.

While radical market reforms led to an initially impressive recovery followed by a disastrous bust in 1982, the most crucial reorientation of HE got underway in the early 1980s. In 1980, their chief architect, Jaime Guzmán, had delivered the country's new socially conservative, pro-enterprise constitution, affirming the place of the family rather than individual as the natural unit within the state. If HE elsewhere is often presented an opportunity for self-actualisation, in Chile, it would be framed as mostly an economic investment; Guzmán's rough workings of the dynamics of incentives and outputs of HE continue to have profound implications for the way Chilean HE has swollen in isolation from the thus far moral self-consciousness of the enterprise.

### **Moral hazard: higher education as both public and private good**

'Education, public, free and of quality', at all levels, was the chanted demand of Chilean students taking to the streets from 2010—since 2006, school kids had already been protesting in fits and starts. By 2016, the slogan had been adopted as the title for a compendium of citizen journalism from news site *El Mostrador*—encapsulating the rhetoric of protest-chastened Chilean politics and unsubtly querying actual progress (at least internet self-education and discussion being available). In order to understand the little-trusted rhetoric of public-spiritedness but also increasingly discredited conception of education as a mostly private expense, we must revisit a working generalisation in the scarcely documented Guzmánian blueprint for controlled expansion from the early 1980s.

The first attempt at massification in Chile, in the 1960s and early 1970s, was spurred by the government funding fee-free participation, both at state and private institutions; while fees had not been especially high before and various forms of assistance available, the symbolism of the move inspired rapid growth in matriculation. By decreeing that all students would now pay fees, Guzmán anticipated later rhetoric about the regressive tendency of publicly funded HE to benefit those who needed it least. At the same time, fees would create a direct link between the 'value' of HE to prospective students and its cost—and justly so:

The decision to end this social injustice, and to make each person pay the value of their HE, achieves the greatest ethical importance inside a road towards a society more just (1981: 30).

Moreover, Guzmán made an overarching point whose subtlety often goes missing—from his defenders and detractors alike. He was aware of criticisms of ‘economism’, and of the *approximate* nature of treating education as an economic good. Far from denying that HE had a public value as well as private, private operations of various kinds (albeit formally barred from profit making) should not be disfavoured by the state—in practice, that pre-existing private universities should receive access to funds in the same manner as public counterparts, and various subcultural groups could form their own universities. In this context, the economic rationale of private investment leading to the public benefits of greater development took root as both an operative principle and a focus of critical analysis. Gutiérrez (2011) makes the link between the essentially elitist and conservative reforms of Bello in the mid-nineteenth century, celebrated as the ‘true founder of Chile’ in the introduction of a recent re-edition of his 1843 address inaugurating the Universidad de Chile (Jaksic in Bello 2015:15), and fronting Chile’s highest denomination banknote as well as one in his native Venezuela, and those of Guzmán’s family- and ‘choice-’ based twin constitutional and educational settings in the early 1980s. While both figures certainly instilled conservative values into their reforms, Guzmán’s loose conflation of economic interests with moral steerage (especially when endorsing families to impart both morality and levels of private resources to their children) represents a departure from traditional ideals of HE as percolating some higher good. Moreover—considering Guzmán’s disdain for a ‘giganticism’ in Latin America’s multicampus public universities [Guzmán and Larraín 1981: 29, a truculence bravely clamped in scare quotes by Chilean UNESCO analyst and future government spokesman (1994–1998) Brunner (1982a, b)]—in retrospect at least it is obvious that blessing the treatment of credentials as economic goods would lead to growth in a sense of customer entitlement to higher education’s promises whose distorting influence some focus on the ethical and moral might moderate.

Both Guzmán’s 1980 constitution and his HE settings would outlive the return to electoral democracy in 1990—indeed, a final act of the military government was the passage of an education law designed to extend, among other continuities, the growth of HE-as-market in scalable form. Moreover, many of the new private institutions founded with military government blessing (often involving personal financial stakes) were just beginning to take off; in the next twenty years, they would absorb much of student growth. Guzmán was elected a senator through an idiosyncratic vote-tallying system favouring conservative interests, but was assassinated a year later at the campus of the Universidad Católica where he continued to teach law—an afterword on the violence of military rule.

While internationally ‘public’ may seem an aspiration unproblematically associated with the state university systems that serve most students in developed countries and receive more direct support from public funds, in Chile the diffusive nature of privatism meant that arguments could be made against ‘discrimination’ against private establishments, which contribute to the public good even if the state leaves them to choose how.

In the 2010s, the Chilean public’s call for education more intuitively *Public* direct rebuffs the driving force that has come to be monitored as an especially Latin American privatism—private investment, private returns including profit-taking, and non-state and to varying degrees openly sectarian institutional identities (that is, associated with specific religious orders, political parties, fraternal organisations and business coteries). If Andrew Carnegie had insisted at the start of last century that his monies would only contribute to



those US institutions that continued the trend away from governance structures tied to founding church groups and strengthened the solidaritarian and progressive functions of HE (Marsden 1994: 257), in Chile as other parts of the post-authoritarian Latin world, the flight of social elites or just like-minded subcultures to their own universities is quiet but startling.

*Free* (of fees), meanwhile, protested that many Chileans were going into considerable debt to get qualifications far from guaranteeing greater income, but also bore the more idealistic notion of HE being recognised as a right rather than primarily an economic good. And *quality*, something to maintain and improve ever since expansion was embarked upon, again, was found amiss (notwithstanding Chile's hearty embrace of *quality assurance*).

Public, free education of quality would become a central plank, along with tax reform and a new, democratically conceived constitution, of Michele Bachelet's return as President in 2014. In HE, the concepts of free and public immediately brought abstracted argumentation. For example, the state-subsidised private universities of oldest provenance united under the banner 'Public, non-state universities', while the prominent rector of one newer private university became notable for his insistence that his was the 'most public' among them. Technical institutes too, some of them profit-taking, highlighted their public contributions through economic responsiveness and accessibility for many poorer students. In the incoherence of what public can mean—as efforts to catalogue public's dimensions exemplify (e.g. Guzmán-Valenzuela 2016)—the suspension of moral considerations of education in favour of economic betterment recoded as growth and public benefits through private action betrays the depletion of the usefulness of this as a working generalisation in the early 1980s.

Massifications elsewhere—always mindful of economic investments and projections—have entertained greater meditation on the nature of education's role in societal change and moral evolution. In the United States, on the eve of a Great Depression that would rather postpone things, John Dewey was especially mindful of how a democracy enriched by wider education was a leap of faith, wholly in the knowledge that no-one knew what a society so empowered would want.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Welshman Raymond Williams would assert that 'education is ordinary' (1958)—something the working class should expect (rather than be, in Matthew Arnold's view a century before, grateful of enlightenment from their 'betters'), not least so that society could set about realising its potential. Likewise Basil Bernstein and his famously quizzical position that 'education cannot compensate for society' (1970), which has acquired a life of its own beyond the original critique of compensatory pre-school education for children deemed to be deprived. In Chile, conversely, growth sought only to confirm the primacy of economic goals over social change.

Given the little-explained nature of the Chilean reforms (Salazar and Leihy 2013), and particularly the stress that certain occupations would require approved university qualifications (including, a world first, journalism), the economic benefits of HE were sought while neutralising potential dissent rather than preparing a more open society. If Guzmán had pre-empted complaints of economism in the structuring of user-pays HE as a form of justice, the similarly loose catchcry of new centrist and centre-left coalition (or *Concertación*) governments, headed initially by Christian Democrats, of restoring human rights would be applied in some measure in defence of systems of student loans to make HE more accessible.

<sup>4</sup> 'It is a qualitative question. Can a material, industrial civilisation be converted into a distinctive agency for liberating the minds and refining the emotions of all who take part in it? The cultural question is a political and economic one before it is a definitely cultural one.' (Dewey 1929: 125).

The Concertación's criticism of Pinochet was, of course, not that he prioritised economic expansion, but that—gently put—he lacked a basic moral compass, frequently infringing upon his own citizens' human rights. During the military government, this discourse was highly developed among exiled elites, somewhat tolerated within non-university social studies centres and eventually enjoined, in 1987, by the visiting Pope John Paul II's invocation of human rights as a Christian value in the developing world. With the return to elected government (Pinochet still heading the armed forces, and at one point threatening another coup), the sanctity of human rights became an important if often self-congratulatory aspect of the new order (although, to be fair, much progress was made on reducing levels of absolute poverty).

While important in the perception of reconciliation, that market logic could either be rehabilitated or mitigated by guarantees of human (or social) rights avoids strengthening *civil rights* through which the social contract is formulated, resources distributed and human rights guaranteed. (Agamben 1998) Instead, such reform has only occurred in a piecemeal fashion. A new constitution (underway in 2016) may allow some resetting of this deficiency.

While no-one argues against human rights and they necessarily command an internationalist cachet, construing HE as simply a human right actually subverts its historical understanding. It states in the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*:

Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and HE shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit (Art. 26.1).

Where schooling may socialise a certain morality by precepts, the measure of higher education's contribution is indeed through its support of a merit that implies social mobility—up or down. To the extent that it simply launders levels of advantage across generations, it is morally deficient. Leaving aside that most HE in Chile conforms to instrumental (technical or professional) structures, and they are generally available, here the human right is not HE itself, but rather access to it on the impossible to police basis of merit. The endlessly benign word 'merit' often manifests as a Matthew effect of perpetuating advantage (Merton 1968)—perhaps most infamously in Chile in the rapid increase in international postgraduate scholarships preponderantly accessible to the most advantaged students *as if a conferral of merit*: a retrospective appraisal and future credential. While similar could be said of the 'Generation Erasmus' scenario in which a broad European middle class born from the 1970s became especially worldly and mobile, or US 'study abroad' demographics, in Latin America an insular bourgeoisie (rather than 'new middle class') has more disproportionately enjoyed such opportunity. In any case, watchwords such as merit do not preclude retail markets, at least provided enough equity financing alongside, and, given the times, perhaps even price them.

Over the last two-and-a-half decades, public and state-coordinated investment in HE (including with partners such as the World Bank) has increased, encouraging greater private outlay, including through a comprehensive student loan system (and ensuing debt burdens). Like other destinations of taxation or other public monies, HE is defended as a public good, and for the public good<sup>5</sup>, as well as private benefit.

<sup>5</sup> Jamie Merisotis and Jane Wellman's 1998 report is titled *Reaping the Benefits: Defining the Public and Private Value of Going to College*. It should be noted that 'public goods', promptly assigned to Paul Samuelson's 1954 coinage 'collective consumption good', happily plays on the traditional concept of 'the

Chile's traditional stereovision of moral and economic dimensions coincides with some attempts to tease the concepts of public and private goods apart. For example, in 1998 the US Institute for HE Policy created a grid listing private and public benefits in both economic and social (we might interpolate, moral)<sup>6</sup> dimension [e.g. better tax revenues is a public economic good; better salaries a private counterpart; better social cohesion is a public social good, and broader friendships a private one (p. 13ff.)]. But while goods understood as benefits are separable thus, they often happen in the same fell swoop and are less able to be isolated and targeted separately.

Ironically, it is as, at the macro- and microeconomic levels, the self-evidence of private and public investment in HE (as stand) dries up, with a public increasingly savvy of what HE can and cannot plausibly do for their finances and social status, the moral side and perhaps meaning of HE is not only an abstract complaint, but a demonstrable opportunity.

### A moral to the story?

'We have a moral responsibility' intones the minister for mines advocating exhaustive efforts to rescue workers trapped in 2010 mining the copper so important to the Chilean economy, in the 2015 film *The 33*. It is a feelgood story, shot in cosmopolitan English. Domestically, though, cynics might detect a defence of the legacy and future re-electability of former media mogul and then President Sebastian Piñera, his mandate otherwise troubled by mass protest. But is the moral still or again something for Chile's elite to live up to and impart upon its most *vulnerable* (which has become Chile's official euphemism for *poor*)? What the rich might consider moral, as opposed to any devolution of the concept, remains a cultural mainstay (Contardo 2007), which status-seeking market forces carry forward.

Incidentally, the mining minister would eventually be drummed out for corruption.

The Chilean state and its proxies have found themselves investing ever more heavily in evaluating and incentivising nuances of HE that, left to their own devices, institutions and potential students might entirely overlook. After all, in a boom, that rational individuals are not getting what they think they are paying for can be a victimless crime, reconciled [or 'cooled out' (Goffman 1952; Clark 1960)] by other acceptable opportunities that arise. This is less true as gross participation swells and market segments stratify and perpetuate or launder inherited levels of advantage, and less politic the more public funds are tapped.

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Footnote 5 continued

public good', as is periodically remarked in discussions (eg. Pusser 2006: 11; Marginson 2011). This in turn descends from the Aristotelian notion of 'the good' and treats intangibles as if wares to remind economic thought that they have value. However, inadvertently, this accesses a pun lodged in the Germanic languages' etymological relation between the inherently material concept of *the gathered* and the adjective *good*. While the semantic interplay and alternation between the countable and uncountable (and intangible) forms is intuitive in English, its transmission into Spanish is less sure—*bien* (a substantivised version of the adverb *well*) has more recently come to be used both ways (to mean 'goodness' or 'the moral good', and 'a material good'), although the emphasis tends to be more on the later (*lo bueno* remaining higher style for goodness).

<sup>6</sup> cf. Bruno Latour's position that the 'social' has become a narrowly boosterish word—for a good, often consolatory, dose of compassion, rather than an overview of connectedness (2005: 6). The moral, morals and ethics—as opposed to less judgemental acceptance of mores—have likewise acquired this unnecessarily positive charge.

The moral limits of market financing for educational expansion are, in the event, also economic limits. Yet the need for alternative progress suggests their separation and harmonisation rather than resign us to a dead end. The economic in Chile lacks the legitimacy that Ayn Rand—poet laureate of neoliberalism—celebrated as manifest in the mid-twentieth century US metropolis yet mere fruit of a ‘moral ideal... as an end in itself’ (1963). The moral is not what has been conflated into the market-based nature of the system, but what is struggling to find voice through it. It is susceptible to any concept of the moral dimension being heavily informed by dispatches from experts with experience (or claims of it) in other parts, now that the morality of many market- and growth-based approaches are being questioned. Rather, it is vitally important that Chile recover its historical conversation of the immiscible threads of the moral and the economic in self-appraisal. And that other countries scoping private investment as a font for growth explore their own moral equilibria. It may have to look within—rather than preserving its own exceptional and possibly incorrigible features through rinses of often ill-fitting foreign practices.

Some change in overlapping economic and moral consciousness is evident in the widespread identification of Chileans as middle class (Sepúlveda Garrido 2015). Still, at aggregate level Chile lacks features of a society in which the middle class is central (Barozet and Fierro 2012), such as schooling let alone higher studies of adequate quality. This is only exacerbated by the anachronistic formulation of undergraduate degrees as ‘professional titles’, even though fewer and fewer new opportunities are created in the nominal ‘professions’. Indeed Chilean public discourse and official statistics are heavily informed by a concept of the middle classes that is highly analytic. That is, this does not denote a group lying between those struggling with the exigencies of existence and those with enough capital that they do not have to work for a living [apparently, a usage customary in continental Europe (Rouquié 1989: 155ff.)] but, further, defines the middle classes as certain ‘middling’ income quintiles or deciles. The idea of an expanded bourgeoisie—transformed not simply by occupation, but elevated levels of questioning and culture (the nineteenth-century German *Bildungsburgertum*, or on a grander scale simply the explosion of college-educated US Baby Boomers)—has not taken hold, even if having a university degree is an important social coordinate.

Recently, around the world the moral abuses of an economy that favours ‘the one per cent’ [and in which in developed countries a former middle class is squeezed or hollowed out (Murray 2012)] are often decried. While in Chile that sort of ratio is no novelty, this international outrage lends confidence to denunciations; links spotlighted between politicians and big business have led to the reinsertion of the words ‘moral’ and ‘ethical’ into national economic dialogue. Corruption scandals mount among tight-knit fraternities of commercial engineers and politicians—the celebration of ‘competition’ becomes less plausible as more collusion emerges. Where once HE may have taken this in its stride—for instance, introducing courses in applied ethics—the mood is no longer for incremental adjustments, much less running repairs.

Another element of moral deficiency is found in the difficulties of governance within the universities. While some progress has been made towards ‘triestamentalidad’—the inclusion of academics, students and professional staff in decision-making—, strengthening some universities’ claims to model informed democracy, at times this exacerbates as much as assuages tensions. Sexual harassment of students is increasingly exposed, in the context of a student body that has steadily feminised, ahead of the professoriate. Inadequate public monies for academic research is another moral issue, inasmuch as the general expectation in previous expansions elsewhere have buttressed the qualitative change from reproducing an elite in a fairly zero-sum sense to creating a more educated populace by

seeking to harness other forms of academic productivity with which HE can in some way lead society.

With the increasing discussion of the moral and ethical dimensions of educational and income inequality globally (in which Latin American society can appear to have had a futuristic as much as pre-modern structure), a foreign critical vocabulary gains traction. For example, the national ‘minimum wage’, based on the inputs of a bare subsistence according to the ‘basket of goods’ approach used elsewhere to track inflation from an anthropocentric or family unit perspective, is contrasted to the broader concept of an ‘ethical’ or ‘just’ wage (e.g. Assael 2007; Contreras Sánchez 2009). Prognostications loom, such as the middle income trap, which developing countries struggle to surpass owing to the self-same structures with which they have reached a certain level of development, and whether Chile is a ‘low trust’ society (Fukuyama 1995) lacking such public goods as faith in institutions associated with open societies. Meanwhile, while Chileans can take a pioneer pride in having suites of policy badged ‘neoliberal’ the longest, neoliberalism’s use as an all-purpose slur is often unhelpful (El Mostrador 2016). In sum, while bearing many affinities with problems elsewhere, Chile’s challenges call for a greater introspection than either popular misconceptions or policy buzzwords permit.

Paradoxically, to approximate better the obligations within a moral economy, the elements of the moral and the economic may need to be conceptually disentwined. Certainly, this would refer not to the adjunct of ethical considerations being met in order to conduct business otherwise as usual, but of greater soul searching. With its idiosyncratic configuration of problems, Chile’s autochthonous debate of the *social question* promises much anew.

If Jaime Eyzaguirre’s concept of a national physiognomy inspired the market orientation (albeit one more segmented than open) that marks Chile today, it also differed from a longstanding social question tackled by the elites but at least nominally with elitism’s obsolescence as a goal. This process would necessarily seek to valorise or sentimentalise what Chile has, yet without denying what it is. Yet today approaches to tracking the national character can appear captured within the market—from prominent state- and corporate-funded (not necessarily transparently) art, to the growing pains of academic capitalism. Appraising the physiognomy of Chile often appears to take the form of market research or gauging public opinion (a confusion in Spanish survey jargon between *radiografía*, ‘X-ray’, and the otherwise obsolete *radiograma*, normally ‘telegram’, is signal—sustaining ambiguity between raw, objective data and carefully spun digest). Moreover, the national census of 2012 fell apart; in lieu of such data, more entrepreneurial material acquires prominence (for example, the longitudinal *Encuesta Nacional Bicentenario*, run from the Universidad Católica in partnership with commercial market researchers, or another outfit’s, on secondary students’ aspirations for further study, which reveals little more than the importance of branding).

For all this, any new moral consensus remains unreached by politics and policy; the process of formulating a new constitution presents an opportunity, but also risks further disenchantment. Academic analysts and policy makers (often one and the same) have focused a lot on privatism and very little on the qualitative change inherent in massification. That is, massification is not simply the replication and amplification of HE and its endowments as it was before, allowing for a little loss of fidelity. Some private aspects scream ‘bad investment’ to those in the know, while remaining much of a muchness for surviving ‘elite’ parts of the system—with or without fees, they will still largely be the preserve of the well-prepared wealthy, supplemented by a modicum of talent ‘up from the ranks’—certainly never so much that the social capital bolts. Nonetheless, massification is

a completely different proposition for how societies behave, all the more compellingly when they contrive to perpetuate unfairly differential opportunity. The moral ultimately refers not just to some safely aspirational ‘right’ way of doing things that economics alone would distort, but to how they *are* done. The study of Chilean HE, then, is largely a task of asking impolite questions about occluded arrangements.

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