



The public good approach to higher education is alive and well

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1. Lessons from the pandemic
 2. How can we think better about the collective contributions of higher education?
 3. Exploring the meanings of 'public' in our tradition
 4. Public *versus* private in higher education
 5. Public *and* private in higher education
 6. The common good approach



1. Lessons from the pandemic



Death tolls in Covid-19 pandemic (so far) and World War II

Country	Deaths attributed to Covid-19 up to 01.07.21	Estimated deaths in World War II
United States	603,967	419,400
United Kingdom	128,100	450,900
Canada	26,238	43,600
Australia	910	40,400
China	4,846	15 to 20 million
Japan	14,657	2.5 to 3.1 million
Korea	2,015*	approx. 0.5 million

* South Korea only

Differential responses to and effects of the pandemic

- English speaking Northern hemisphere has had a terrible pandemic – governments tried to ride out Covid-19 as if it was a flu, until Biden responding politically and unable to move decisively, widespread pushback against social discipline/responsibility. In US 2020-21 higher education commencements were down 16% domestic, 43% international.
- English speaking Southern hemisphere would have shared all this if not for the fact that it was able to geographically isolate itself. Slow roll-out of vaccines means it will stay isolated for longer than it should.
- In countries with a public good approach to higher education, funding is more stable, and the non-elite institutions survive better than in a marketized systems. In Europe it is hard to eradicate the pandemic because borders can't be closed, but social discipline has been good in Finland, Norway and Denmark.
- East Asia (the Chinese civilizational zone) and SE Asia have handled pandemic very well. Complete eradication goals, smart states and citizens socially responsible. Small or tiny death tolls across the region including Singapore 36, Vietnam 76, Taiwan 635, Thailand 1934. Higher education there will gain long term.



Lessons

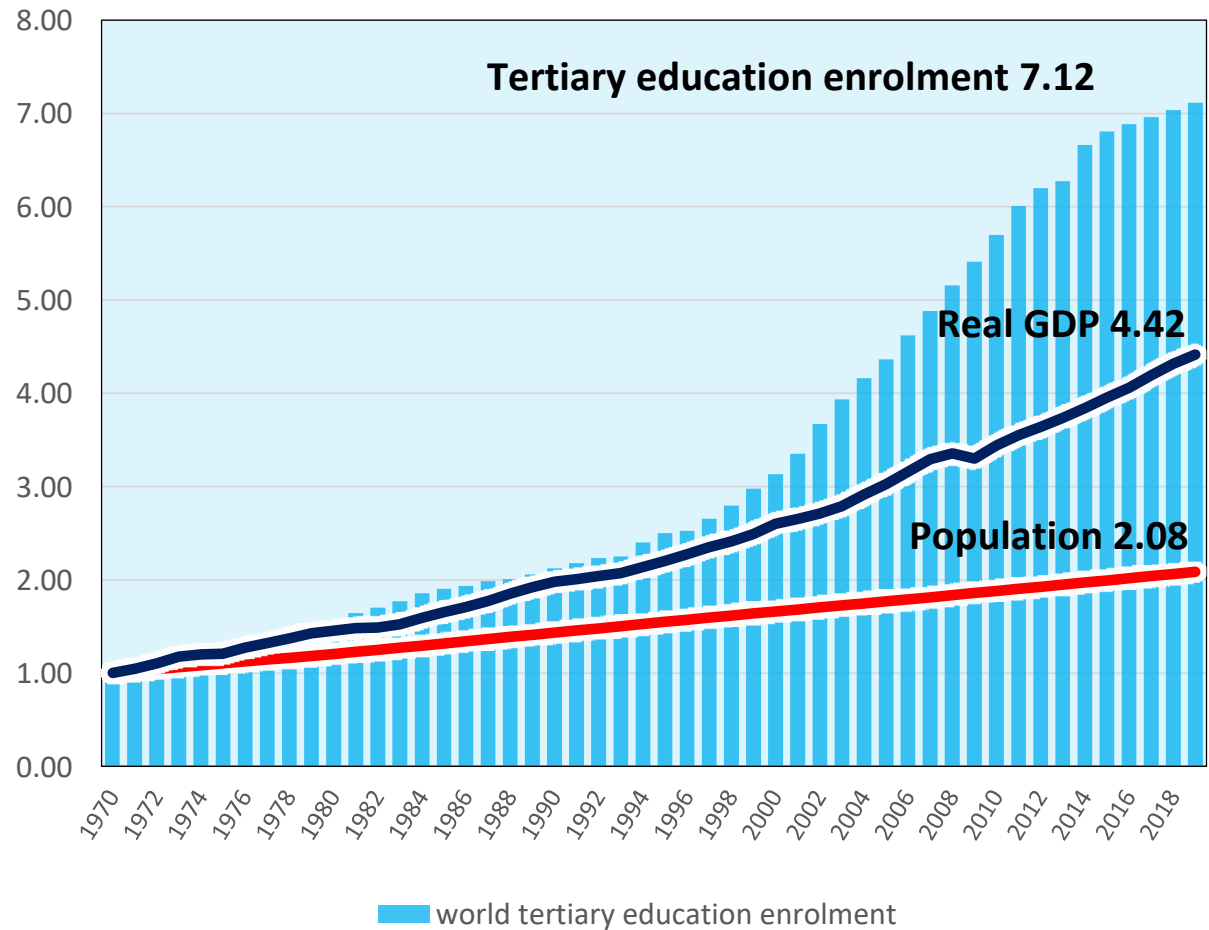
- We are too individualistic. We need to give greater priority to common and collective goals, without losing individual diversity. There are bigger challenges coming down the line (climate change, geo-politics)
- In higher education we should pay more attention to the collective outcomes and goals of the sector
- Higher education is also crucial in that it forms graduates' values, individual or collective. How can we help our society to become more collectively responsible?





What we do in higher education matters! It helps to shape the future

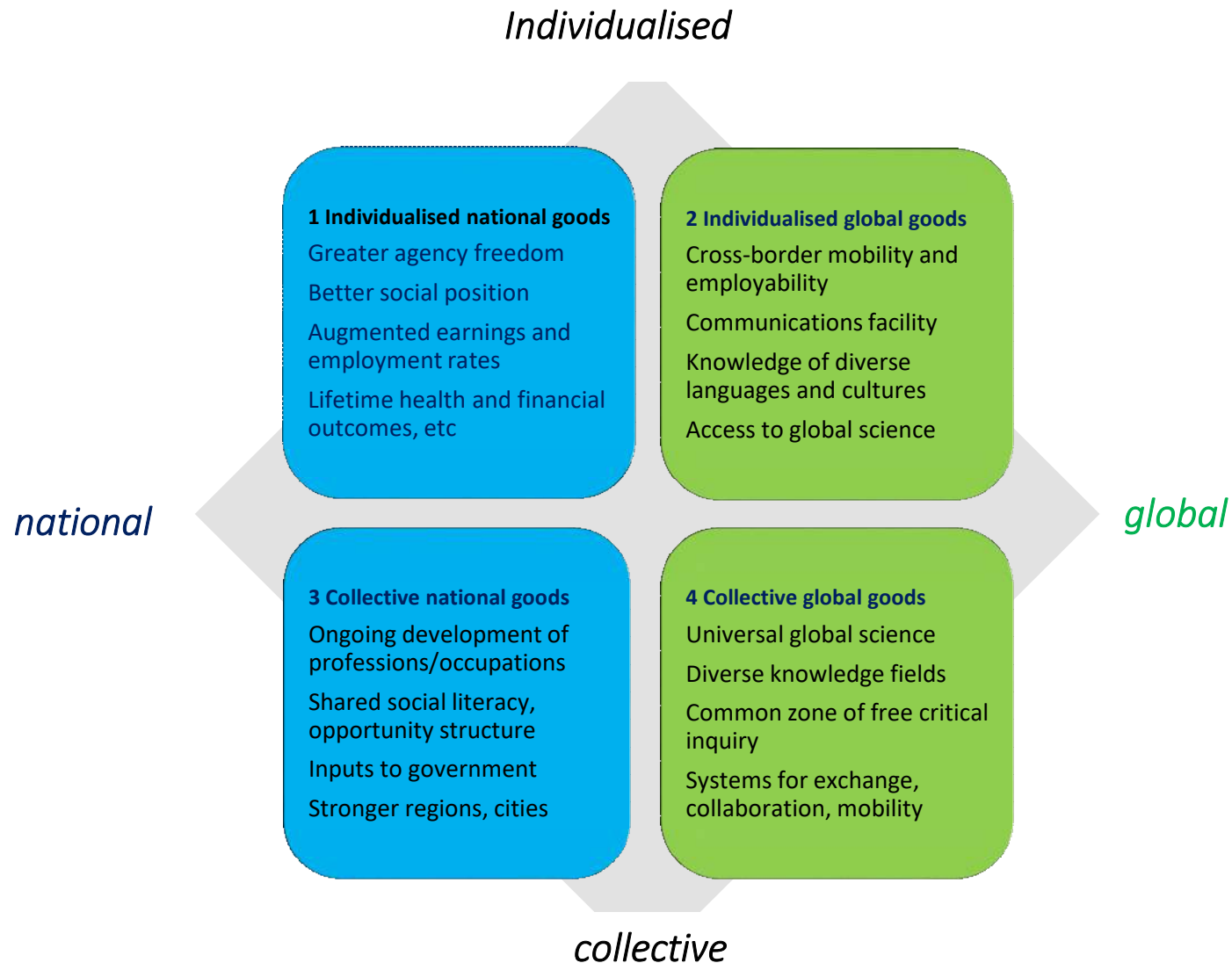
World growth of tertiary enrolment: 1970-2019
compared to world population and constant price GDP *1970 = 1.00*



2. How can we think better about the collective contributions of higher education?

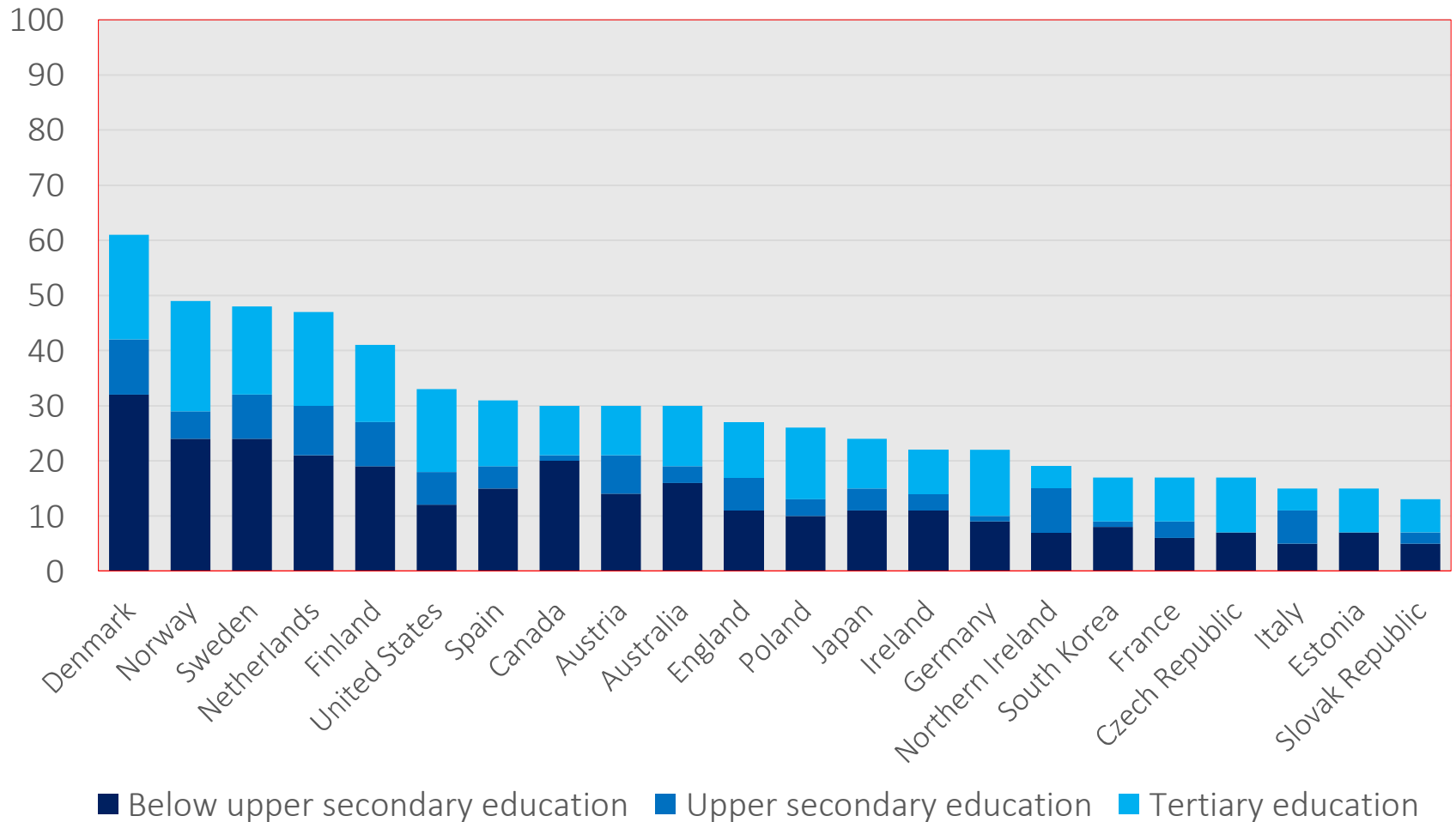


Mapping the contributions of higher education: Individualised and collective



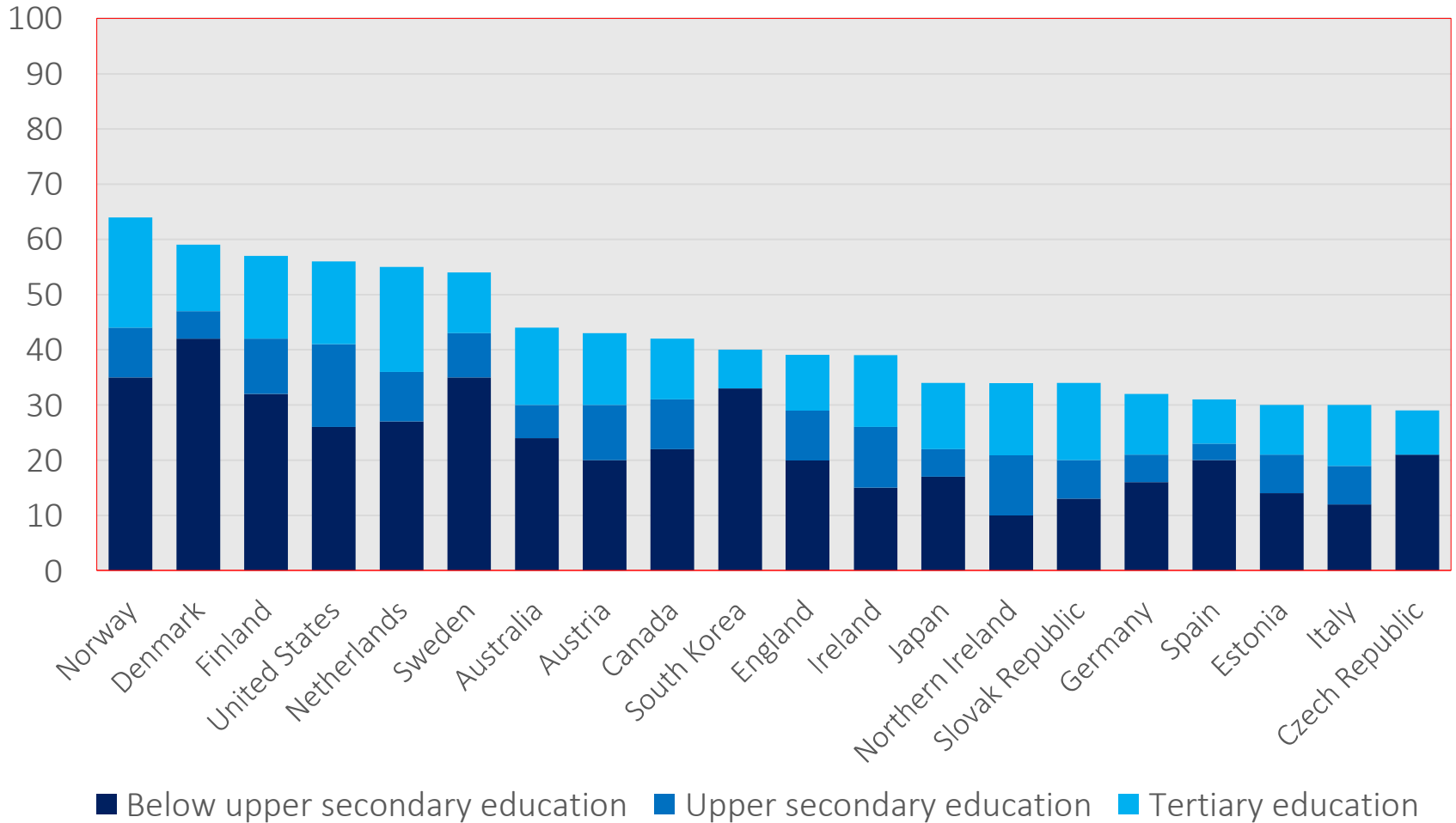
Level of education and interpersonal trust

Q. 'Do you trust other people?' % 'yes' (OECD 2014)



Level of education and political connectedness

Q. 'Do you believe you have a say in government?' % 'Yes' (OECD 2014)



Research finds that people with tertiary education, on average ...

- Have a larger range of employment options
- Are more likely to be in good health, as are their families
- Have more advanced levels of skill in the use of information and communications technology
- Are more geographically mobile, independent of income level (greater personal confidence and agency freedom)
- Report higher levels of inter-personal trust (also = greater personal agency)
- Are more likely to state that they have a say in government (also = greater personal agency)
- Are more positive about migration and cultural diversity



- Walter McMahon, *Higher Learning, Greater Good* (2009)
- OECD, *Education at a Glance* (various years)
- OECD, *Perspectives on Global Development 2017: International migration in a shifting world* (2016)

Towards a common understanding of the collective outcomes of higher education

- A narrow and individualistic economic idea of higher education dominates policy thinking, with little space for collective outcomes
- The idea that higher education is just an opportunity and a benefit for individuals allows governments to set aside their responsibility for collective outcomes (and allows them to make the individuals pay)
- We know higher education generates a broad range of collective outcomes. We have measures for some of them
- We lack a convincing language for describing those collective outcomes, in ways that policy makers and the public will find compelling
- The ways we have for thinking about this problem are
 - Ideas of the 'public good' and 'public goods' in higher education
 - Ideas of the 'common good' in higher education

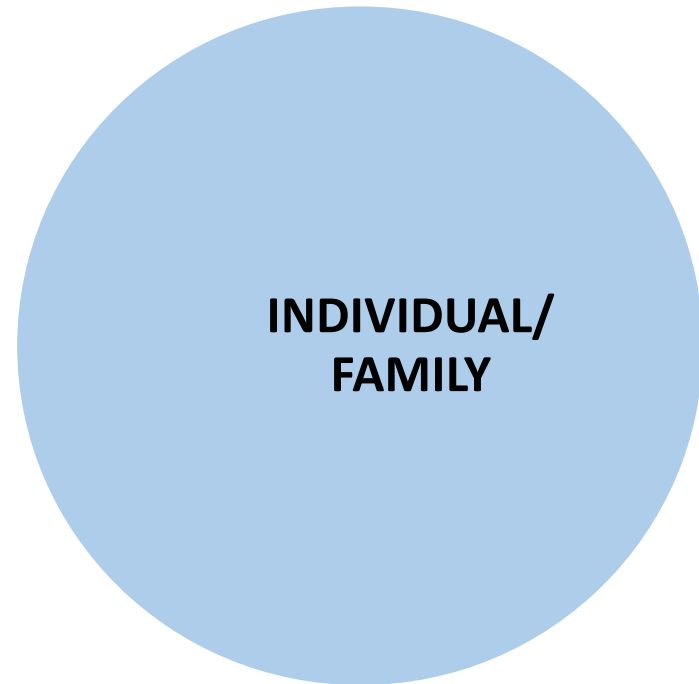
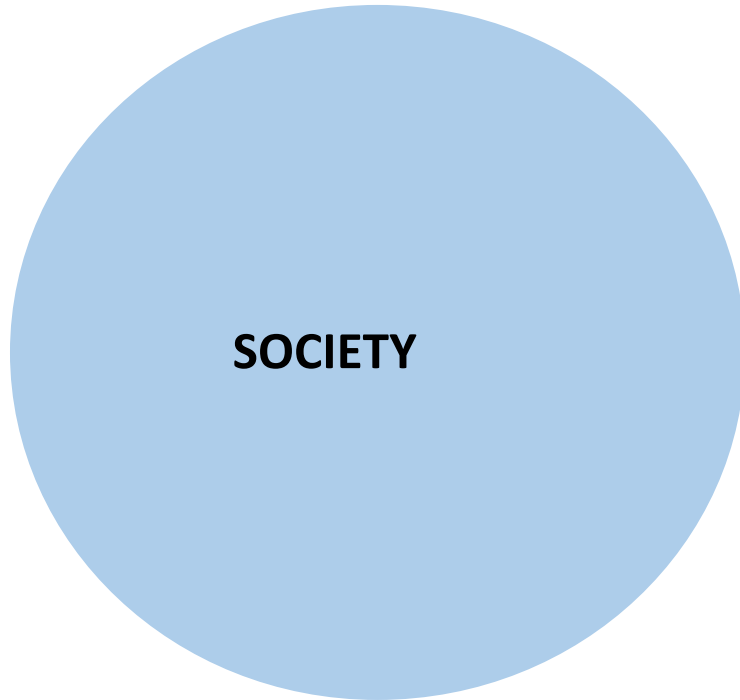


3. Exploring
the
meanings of
'public' in
our
tradition



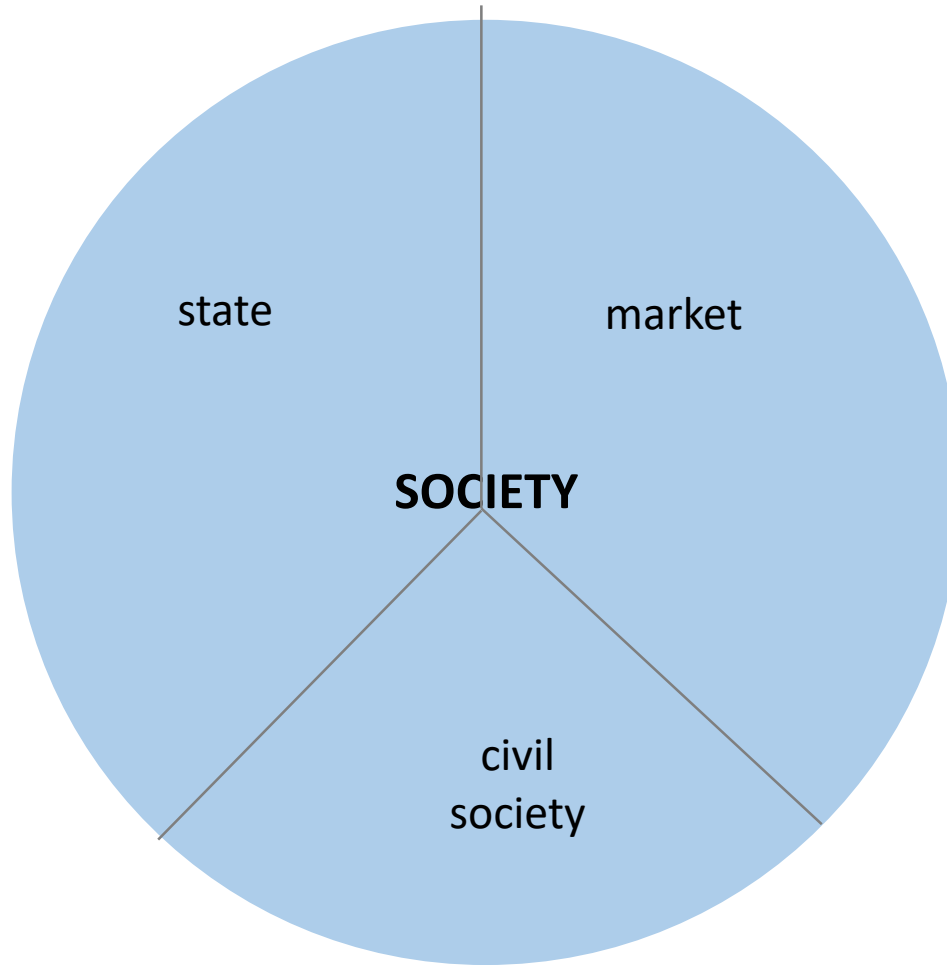
'Our tradition': Western political imaginary 1

separation of individual and society (though one is impossible without the other)

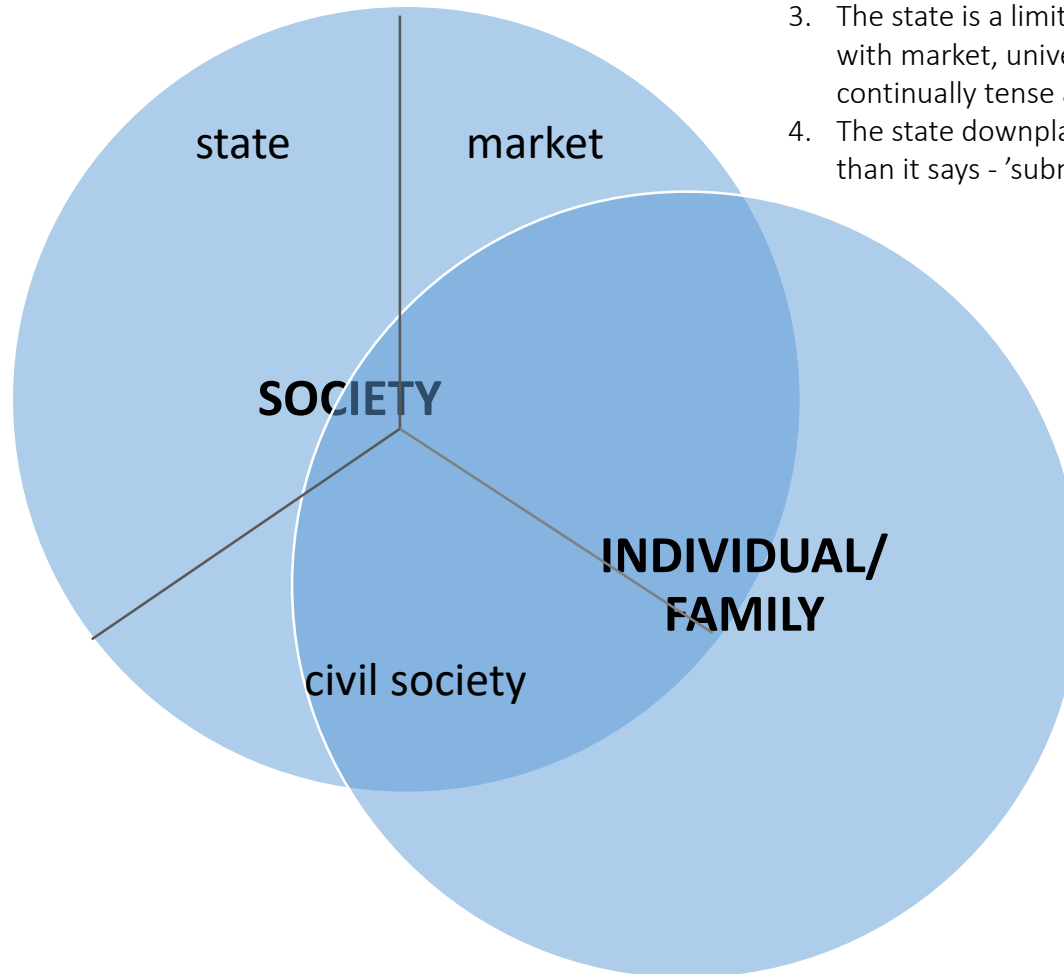


Western political imaginary 2

limited liberal state and division of powers



Western political imaginary 3



1. The individual is more or less normatively primary
2. State, market and civil society each have advocates
3. The state is a limited liberal state. Its boundaries with market, university and family/individual are continually tense and contested
4. The state downplays its role but is more powerful than it says - 'submerged state'



- Analytic/economic:
public *versus* private

Western concepts of 'public' and 'private'

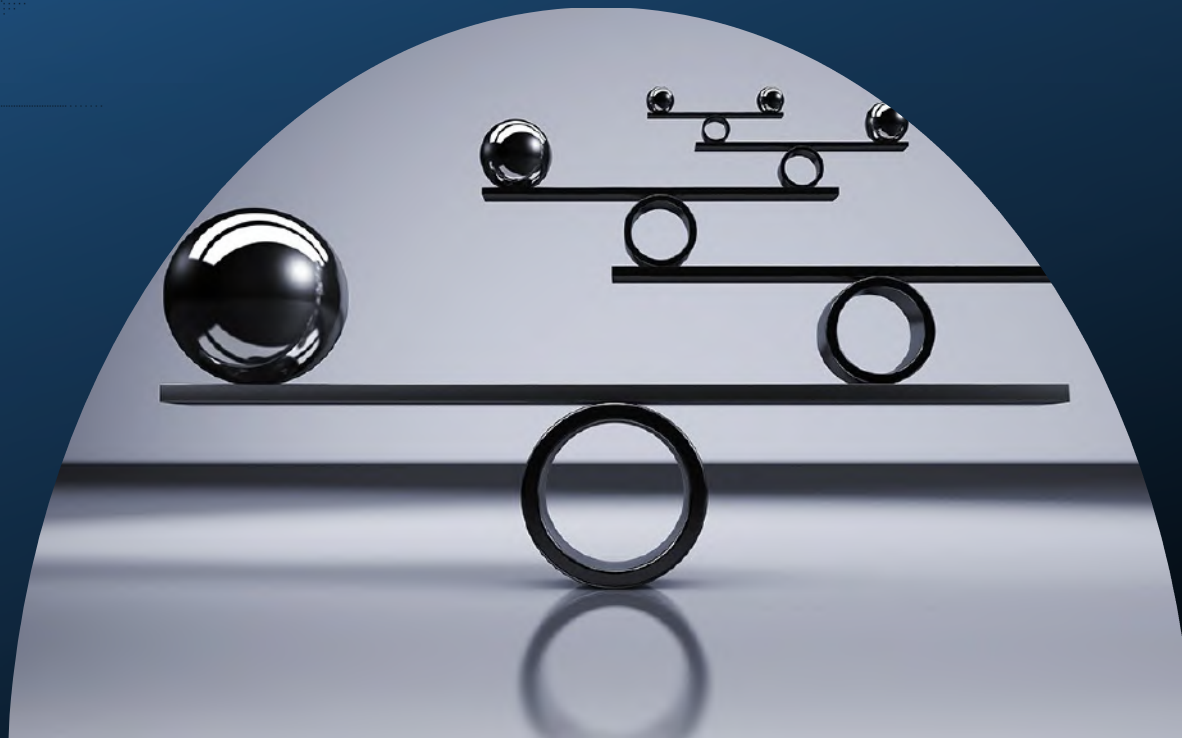


- Communicative-
relational 'public':
public links all the
privates



Universal 'public good':
public contains private

4. Public *versus* private in higher education

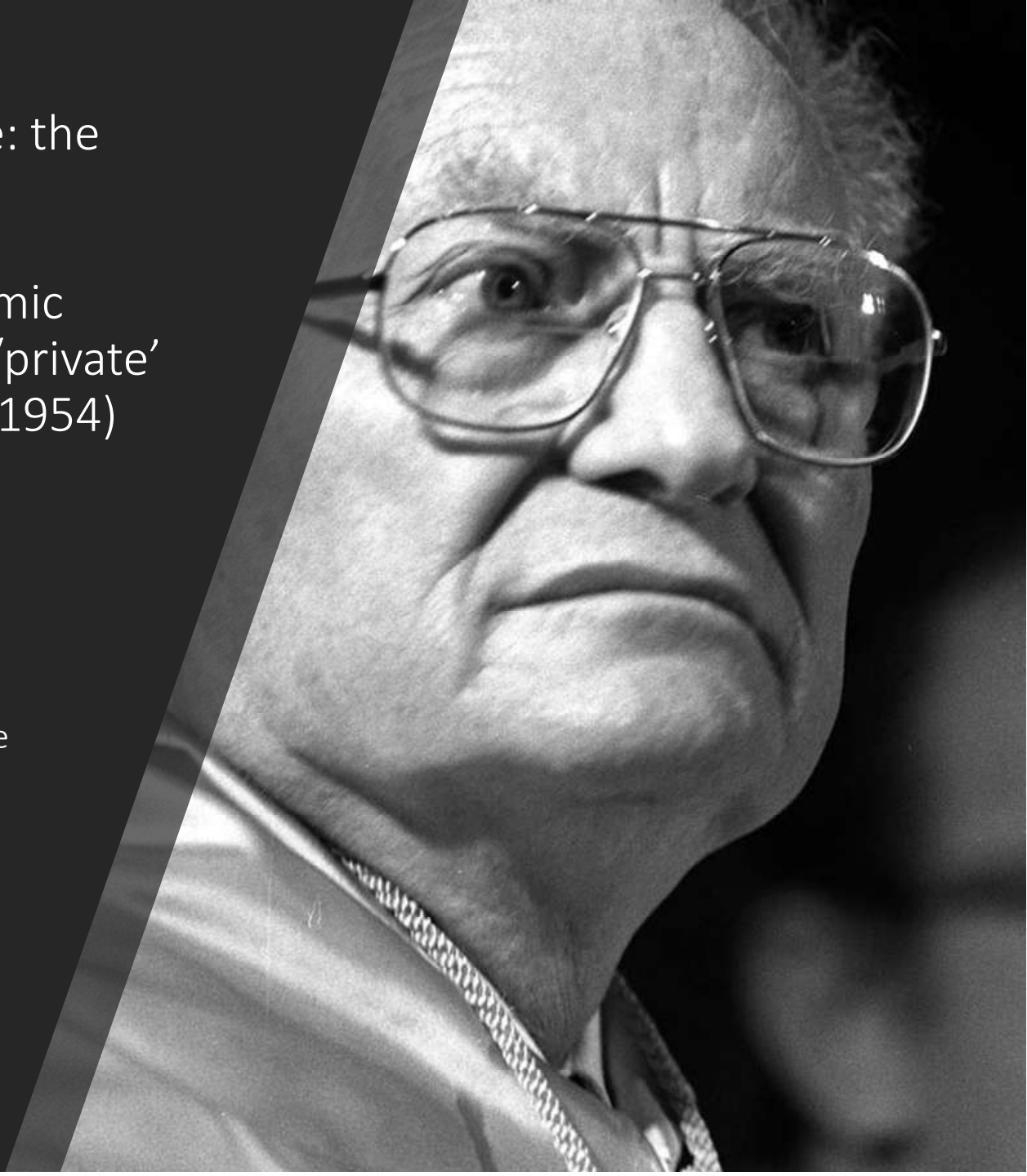


Public versus private: the economic version

Neo-classical economic definition of 'public/private' by Paul Samuelson (1954)

Public goods are non-rivalrous and/or non-excludable.

They are under-produced or unproduced in economic markets. Therefore, the state or philanthropy must wholly or partly fund public goods



Public goods in higher education include collective goods, and attributes of individuals not rewarded in the markets for graduate labour

- Goods are non-rivalrous when consumed by any number of people without being depleted, for example knowledge of a mathematical theorem, which sustains its use value everywhere, indefinitely, on the basis of free access
- Goods are non-excludable when benefits cannot be confined to individuals, e.g. clean air regulation, national defence
- Private goods are neither non-rivalrous nor non-excludable. Private goods can be produced, sold and bought as individualised commodities in economic markets

Here the public/private distinction is a distinction between non-market production and market production. It is designed to maximise capitalism. Markets produce everything except those outcomes which cannot be produced on a market basis.

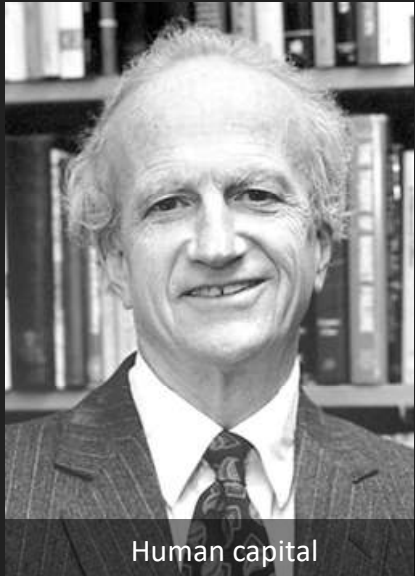
Becoming more private over time

- Basic research is a classic Samuelson public good. Companies won't fund it (much). Governments fund it all over the world, though the Morrison government appears to think that in Australia the private sector can be expected to pay
- Are student places/teaching a public or a private good? Higher education can be made excludable, especially when it is marketized and competitive. The Samuelson logic is to produce it on a market basis whenever possible. This also minimizes the cost to government, while increasing the private good character of higher education. Government then talks up the individual benefits, encouraging a further shift to private financing and private good rhetoric
- Collective outcomes (all Samuelson public goods) are underfinanced and ignored, forgotten

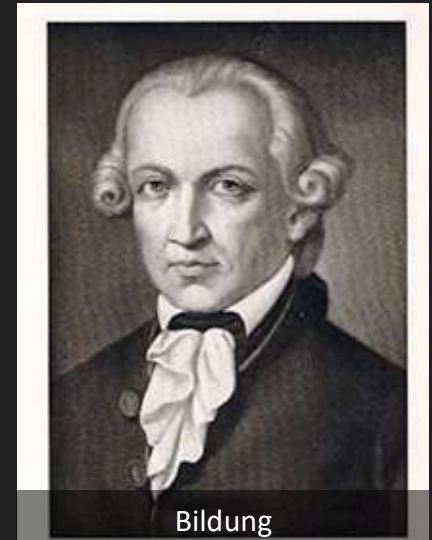


It is not just
collective goods that
go missing.

The economic
framework creates
an impoverished
idea of the benefits
of higher education
for individual
students



Human capital
Gary Becker 1960s



Bildung
Immanuel Kant 1780s

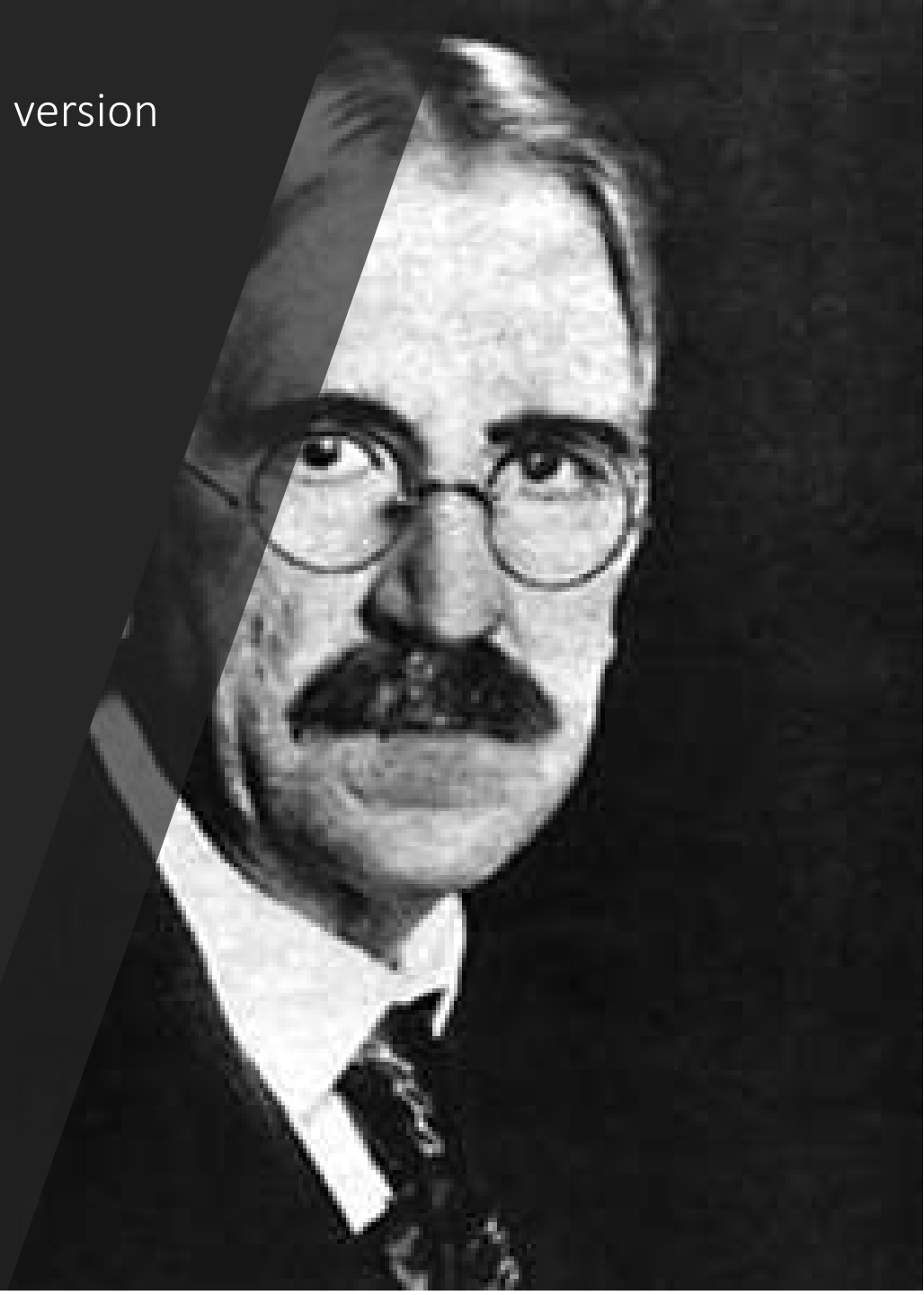
Public versus private: the political version

Nation-state = 'public'
e.g. John Dewey (1927)

Most social transactions/relations are in the private sphere. But some are relational matters of broad 'public' interest, when there are consequences for others not involved in the direct transaction. These matters are public and need to be addressed by politics.

This is the basis for the role of the state, and taxation

This public/private distinction is a distinction between state and non-state production. Hence we speak of 'private' or 'public' schools, universities or hospitals, on the basis of legal ownership



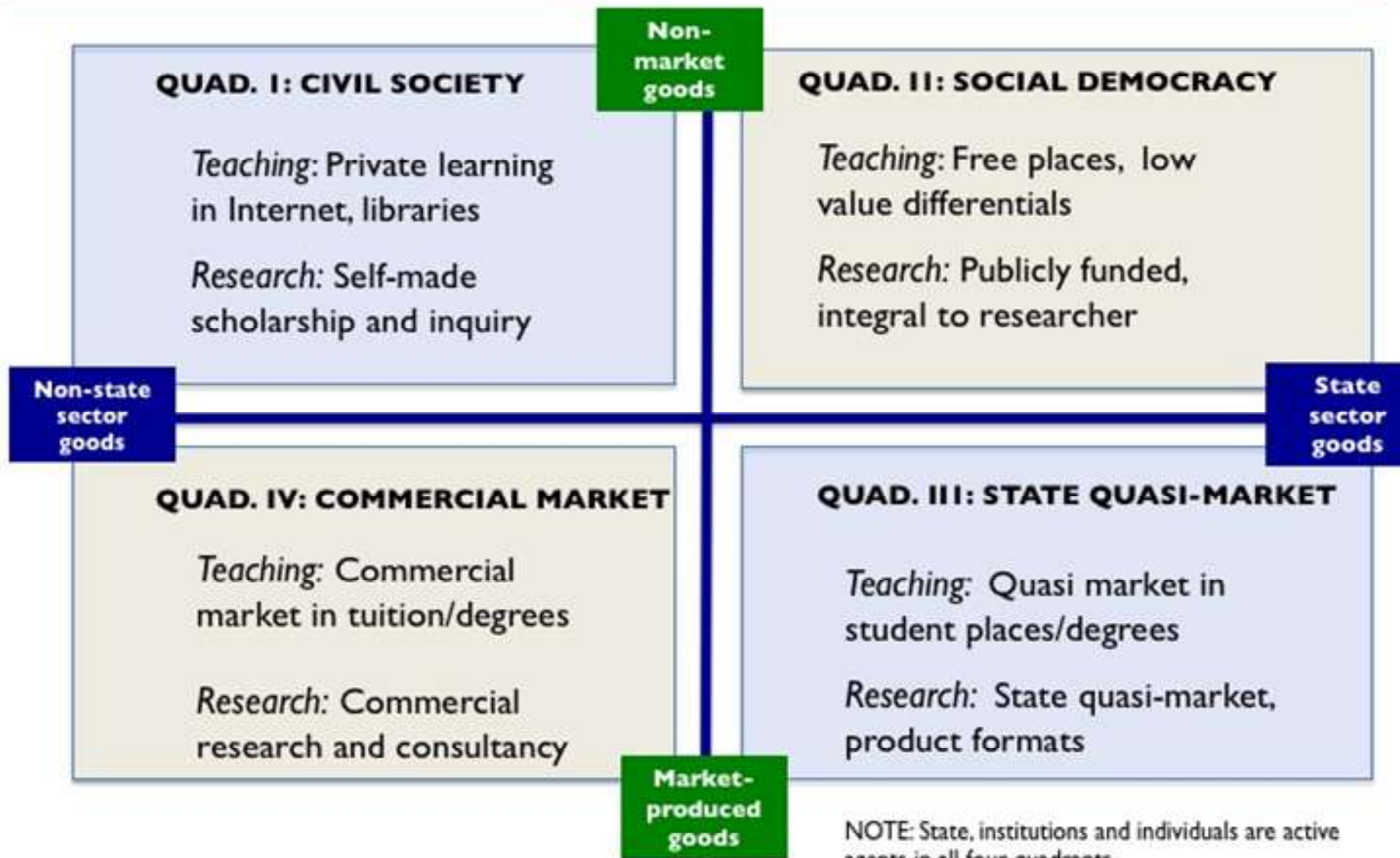
But is the nation-state the sole
custodian
of the public good?

And is it an adequate custodian?

Nation-states that adopt the view
that their role is to maximize
capitalism adopt the Samuelson
economic idea of public/private
and empty out the public good



Public and private goods: the four variations



A person is shown from the back, wearing a white graduation cap with a black tassel. The background features a flag with red, white, and blue stripes, and several gold coins with intricate designs. The text is overlaid on the cap and the background.

In our tradition the economic idea of public/private has become dominant in higher education but it is primarily implemented as state controlled competitive 'quasi-markets' not fully commercial markets.

Far from a separation of state and market, with the state dedicated to public goods, the two are conflated. In this process the state's role in generating collective benefits is marginalized. The state becomes the guarantor of private benefits. Hence the one public social good it clearly supports is fair access (= access to private goods)

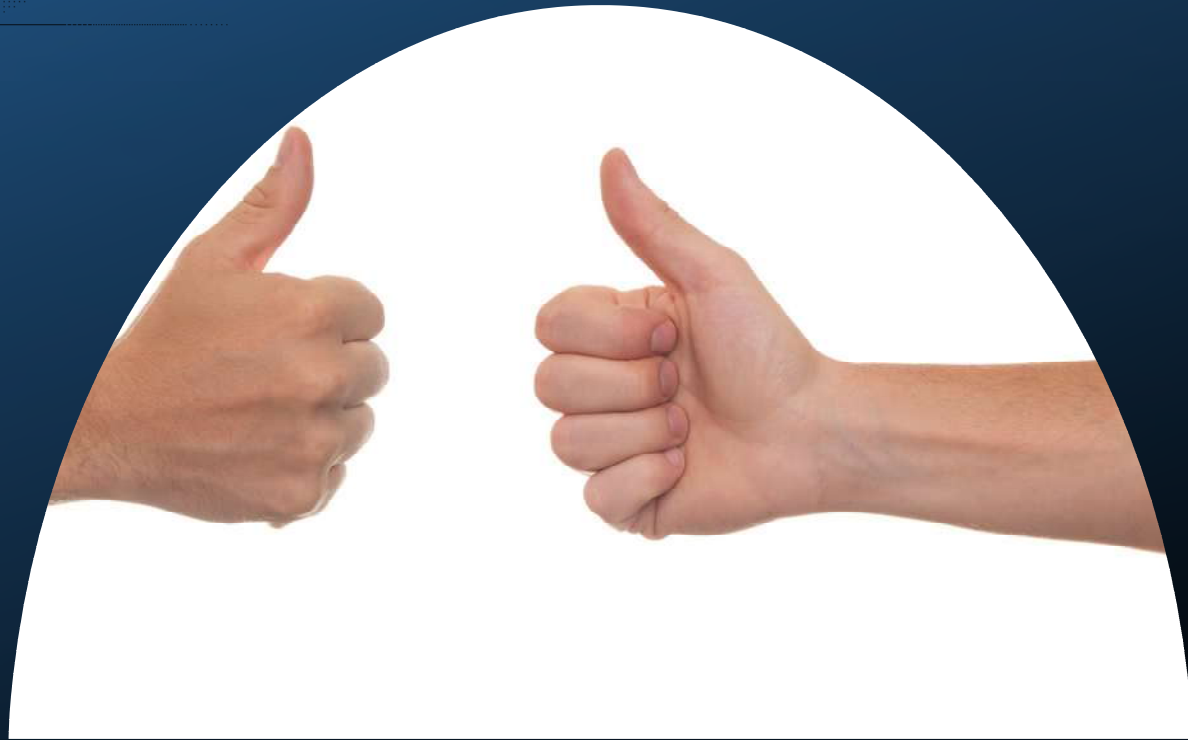
The ultimate problem here

The idea that public and private goods are zero-sum – the more we have of one the less we must have of the other – is inherently problematic

it implies that higher education must be one or the other. Why can't we increase both public and private benefits?



5. The public *and* private in higher education



A. The communicative, inclusive, transparent, social-relational idea of 'public'

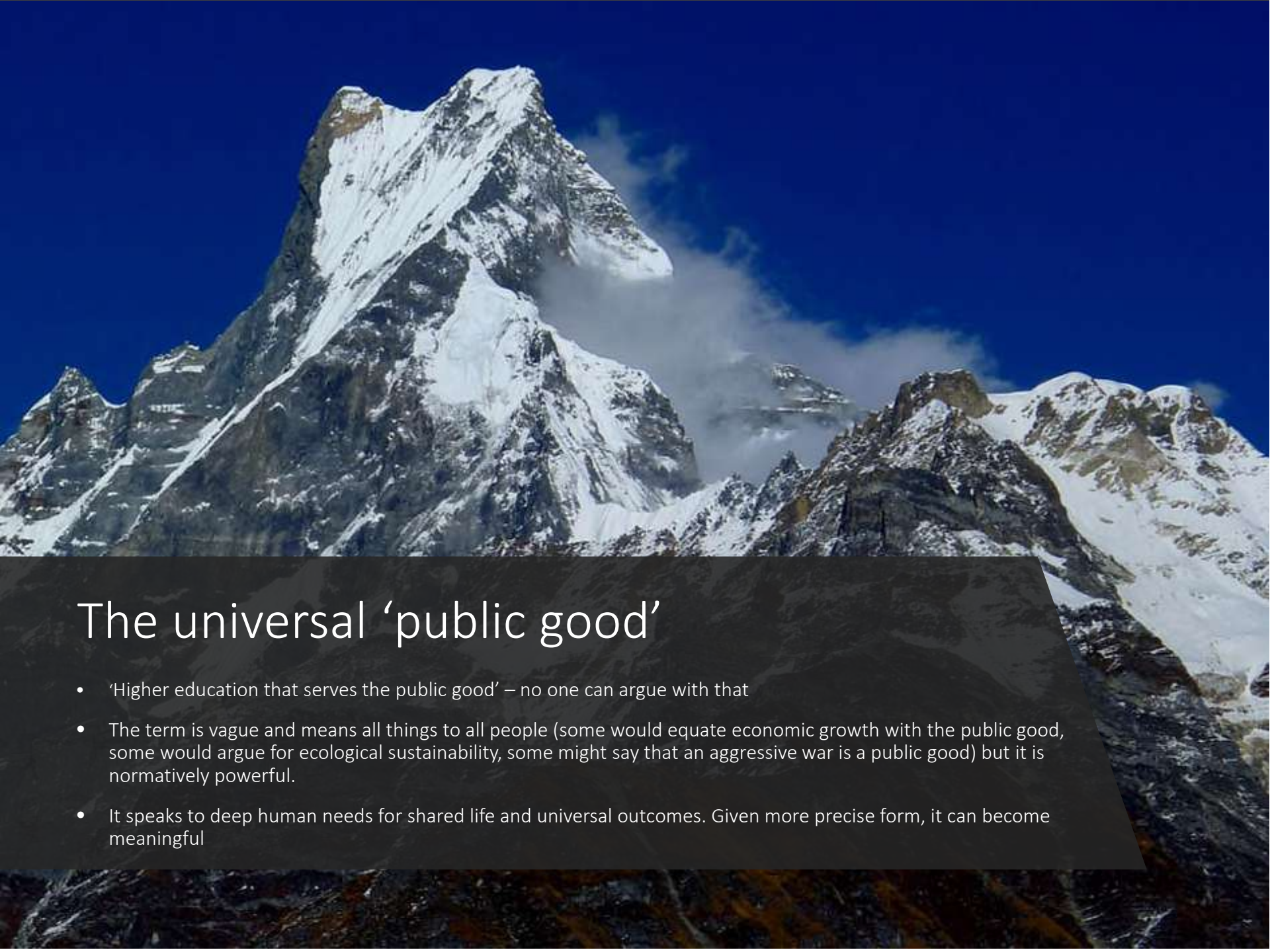
- 'The public', public opinion, public media, 'going public' etc
- This civic public includes all of the private individuals and networks them together - public and private are positive sum not zero sum
- The state has a role in providing common public amenities and rights (especially in the French tradition) but this inclusive public also includes civil society
- The cosmopolitan vision can be international and global in reach
- It is universal (or should be) but it can be captured by powerful private interests such as media and tech companies
- Higher education institutions that serve the whole society are 'public' in this sense – the idea of access and equity in participation is powerfully supported by this idea



Higher education as a 'public sphere' – the critical, transformative social-cultural role of the sector


- Jurgen Habermas's 'public sphere' in late 17th century London—the network of semi-independent sites on the edge of the state (salons, coffee houses, newspapers etc) incubating criticisms and ideas for policy and state renewal.
- Calhoun (2006) and Pusser (2011) apply this idea to the university. At best research and expert information, with their critical thinking capacity, help the public and government to reach considered opinions.
- Because of its capacity to (1) form self-altering agents, (2) engender critical intellectual reflexivity, (3) provide conditions for collective political action, and (4) move easily across traditional boundaries, at times higher education has incubated advanced democratic formations, especially in student movements.
- One test of the public character of higher education is the extent it provides space for criticism, challenge, new forms of organised commonality





The universal 'public good'

- 'Higher education that serves the public good' – no one can argue with that
- The term is vague and means all things to all people (some would equate economic growth with the public good, some would argue for ecological sustainability, some might say that an aggressive war is a public good) but it is normatively powerful.
- It speaks to deep human needs for shared life and universal outcomes. Given more precise form, it can become meaningful

A vibrant, sun-dappled forest scene. A small stream flows over mossy rocks in the foreground, surrounded by dense green foliage and trees. The light filters through the canopy, creating a bright, ethereal atmosphere. A dark, diagonal shape is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the text.

6. The common good approach

UNESCO's 'common good' idea

- The original concept was developed by UNESCO in 2015) 'The commons' calls up a long tradition of cooperation and shared governance, from Roman law to Elinor Ostrom (1990).
- 'Higher education for the common good' draws on West European traditions of solidaristic and participative social relations, as in the Italian city polity— a collective approach in which individuals are important. People share individual rights and collective welfare. In this vision the common good is shaped from the bottom up by self-determining communities, and higher education helps to form and enable democratic communities in which each person has a voice.
- 'Placing common goods beyond the public or private dichotomy implies conceiving and aspiring towards new forms and institutions of participatory democracy" (UNESCO, 2015, p. 78).



Common goods in and from higher education

- Compared to the public good approach, there is a larger role for grass-roots cooperation and non-government actors – ‘education as a public *and* common good’
- *Common goods* are one kind of collective political public good. These are relational social goods. They are about the qualities of a shared community, e.g. social solidarity, equality, human rights, democratic self-determination, social and geographic mobility (freedom of movement), shared knowledge and conversations
- They can only be produced jointly. Some are experienced by individuals (e.g. human rights) and some by groups (e.g. laws)
- ‘The shared action is intrinsic, as well as instrumental, to the good itself and ... its benefits come in the course of that shared action. Goods of that kind are, therefore, inherently common in their “production” and in their benefits’

– Severine Deneulin and Nicholas Townsend (2007). Public goods, global public goods and the common good. *International journal of Social Economics* 34 (1/2), pp. 19-36

Pushing out the scope of the commons in higher education

- Compared to the public good approach, there is a larger role for grass-roots cooperation and non-government and private corporate actors
 - However, state action may be needed to regulate the private contributions
 - The key is democratic control by local communities. This brings collective goods to the fore – goods defined by local collectivities/ This implies a more engaged and community focused higher education sector
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