

Higher Education and Public and Common Good

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Abstract

Higher education institutions generate multiple education, epistemic, economic, political, social and cultural outcomes but theory and policy lack satisfactory frameworks for defining, explaining, observing and regulating the full range of activity. In particular, in Anglophone jurisdictions, outcomes other than individual pecuniary benefits – both the broader formation of individual students, and the collective and relational outcomes for societies – are not well understood. The paper has been developed out of a comparative study of the non-pecuniary outcomes of higher education in ten countries. This non-pecuniary domain is variously understood using the English language terms 'public good(s)' and 'common good(s)', and their lexical equivalents in other languages. This paper does not focus on the comparative aspect, which is discussed elsewhere (e.g. Marginson & Yang, 2022). Rather it probes more deeply into the English language term 'public' and associated usages such as 'public sector', the 'public good', 'public opinion' and 'public/private goods'. These terms are

not universal but are grounded in Euro-American (Western) and specifically, Anglophone political culture.

Interpretations of 'public' in higher education are normative and political rather than solely technical, and shaped by the agents who exercises the judgment. The paper reviews the different Anglophone meanings associated with 'public' and 'common' good(s), in higher education, situating these in the evolution of Western relations between the individual and society, and the impact of neo-liberalism in higher education policy. While the 'public sector' as government is common to higher education in almost all countries, Anglophone economic policy in higher education works with a distinctive understanding of 'public goods' that diminishes recognition of the non-pecuniary outcomes of higher education. In this framework 'public goods' are limited to non-rivalry and non-excludability. This Anglophone reduction means that 'common good', grounded in collaborative practices involving diverse public and private agents, is more helpful than 'public good' in understanding collective outcomes in higher education; though in addition to the contribution of grass-roots communities to common goods, proactive states also have an essential role to play. The paper finds that 'global common good' is again more useful than 'global public good' in explaining worldwide collaboration. Knowledge is a global common good but global science must be opened up to non-English language knowledge. The paper closes with suggestions about lines of further inquiry into public and common good(s) in higher education.

Keywords: Higher education; Theory of higher education; Economic policy in higher education; Research; Public good; Common good; Global common good; National culture

Introduction

Higher education institutions and systems are major concentrations of political, social, economic, intellectual and communicative activities and resources. Higher education reaches freely across locations and populations and connects thickly to government, professions, industry and the arts. Its core is centred on student learning/teaching, the creation and transmission of knowledge, and the certification of graduates. These classic intrinsic functions are the platform for a range of extrinsic social functions in the economy, politics, and local, national and global society (Marginson, et al., 2023). It is a much larger set of contributions than suggested by the model of the university as self-serving firm producing goods for markets in teaching and research. The extrinsic activities of higher education institutions derive from their many connections with other sectors and their continuing direct and indirect effects for students, graduates and the lives of others.

The question is not whether higher education has a multiplicity of missions and functions. Despite recurring neo-liberal claims that the sole or overwhelmingly primary purpose of higher education is the production of pecuniary benefits for individuals – for example in the Browne (2010) report that ushered in a full scale market system in England – its multiple contributions to the relational, social or public dimension of society have been often and widely acknowledged. Rather, the question is what conceptual frameworks can be applied with which to observe and understand those multiple contributions. Individualised pecuniary benefits, such as rates of employment, graduate earnings, or the lifetime rates of return said to be associated with higher education, are measured using quantitative economics and sociology (e.g. Becker, 1964; OECD, 2023, pp. 89-106). There are doubts about the extent to which those individual pecuniary outcomes can be attributed to higher education itself, as distinct from the social backgrounds and networks of students and graduates (Marginson, 2019). However, the larger difficulties for social science arises when moving beyond that domain of measurable individual pecuniary outcomes.

The non-pecuniary outcomes of higher education

As is argued further below, an absolute ontological separation between the individual pecuniary benefits and other outcomes of higher education is meaningless. The two sets of phenomena are inter-dependent. However, the concern of this paper, and of the CGHE project on the public good role of higher education of which it is part¹, is with outcomes other than individual pecuniary benefits. This is because the non-pecuniary dimension is underplayed or hidden in economic policies, especially in neo-liberal Anglophone policy jurisdictions, that imagine social life in exclusively transactional terms and model students as consumers, universities as businesses and higher education systems as competitive markets (Marginson, 2016; 2018). The non-pecuniary or public good domain under discussion here refers to two different kinds of outcomes: (a) shared collective social goods, such as the contributions of higher education to social tolerance, or democratic governance, and (b) non-pecuniary individual goods like the lifetime value of higher education, including its contributions to the subjectification or self-formation of students as autonomous beings with conscious reflexive agency, and to the socialisation of students as citizens in relational settings (Biesta, 2009; Marginson, 2023; Smolentseva, 2023).

The non-pecuniary domain in higher education is a frontier problem in social science. Despite attempts to stretch the boundaries of economics using shadow prices, for example by McMahon (2018), there is no readily accessed set of measures of the contribution of higher education to lifetime personal formation. Still less is there a clear and comprehensive picture of the contributions of higher education to shared communities in local, national and global society, not to mention its positive and negative effects in global ecology (Witte, 2023). McMahon's heroic attempt is stymied by the fact that in his economic framework he must express collective relational outcomes of higher education, such as social tolerance or the political connectedness of communities, in monetary terms as units of individualised human capital. Without a

¹ This paper was developed within the 2016-2024 ESRC Centre for Global Higher Education research project on 'Local, national and global public good contributions of higher education: A comparative study'. See <<https://www.researchcghe.org/research/2020-2023/project/local-and-global-public-good-of-higher-education-10-nation-study/>>. The research has included national studies in Canada, China, England, France, Finland, Japan, South Korea and the United States, with parallel studies in Chile and Poland, together with a doctoral project comparing the approaches to public good in higher education in China and Anglophone countries, and conceptual discussion. The author is the project leader. He warmly thanks all researchers associated with the project for their intellectual companionship and especially the (then) postdoc researchers who worked on it at different times: Aline Courtois, Lili Yang and Elisa Brewis.

conceptual map how can policy makers and institutional leaders make decisions that optimise the non-pecuniary outcomes? To what extent are these outcomes measurable? Can definitions and measures be universal, worldwide?

John Maynard Keynes remarked in his *Treatise on Probability* (1921) that qualities apprehended by social science can be divided into three categories: those that are open to measurement and computation, those to which a precise number cannot be assigned but are nevertheless capable of rank ordering (more/less, better/worse), and those that can be apprehended only through the exercise of expert judgment. All three categories are relevant to the public outcomes of higher education. Where it is possible, quantification provides states and institutions with more direct purchase on public good(s). For example, some aspects of access to higher education can be measured, and compared between places and over time. Nevertheless, such computations are only partial in their reach across the whole material domain of public good. Only some public good outcomes can be measured or even ordered. There is much scope for both expert and policy judgment. But whose expertise, and whose policy?

In Anglophone countries, full recognition of the public good domain in higher education is blocked by the neo-liberal economic imaginary, drawn from Samuelson (1954), of a zero-sum relation of public and private goods – that is, the more higher education is private the less it is public, and vice versa (Marginson, 1997). This mediates policies on student tuition and the funding responsibilities of the state. On the basis of claims that the students are the chief beneficiaries of higher education, and their benefits can be measured in financial terms, so that higher education is firmly positioned as largely or solely a private good, Anglophone economic policy has drawn the conclusion that the public aspects of higher education are relatively limited, especially the collective aspects.

In Samuelson (1954) 'public goods' stands for non-market production, as distinct from 'private goods' that are produced in economic markets. Goods are 'public' when market-based production cannot generate a profit because the goods concerned are non-exclusive or non-rivalrous. Goods are non-excludable when the benefits cannot be confined to single buyers, like clean air regulation. Goods are non-rivalrous when they are consumed by any number of people without being depleted, like a

mathematical theorem which sustains its value as knowledge indefinitely. Because such goods are subject to market failure they must be financed by states or philanthropy. This embodies the norms of a limited liberal state in which the ideological agenda is to maximise the space for market transactions and market agents by minimising the scope of the state. Sectors of non-market state production are privatised to expand the scope for capital accumulation. Relations between persons take the form of market exchange and competition between economic agents, and the graduate of higher education is understood as portable human capital.

Real societies are messier than this, and less regulated by marginalist economic doctrines (Marginson, 2018). The public and private domains provide conditions of existence for each other and continually overlap, and there is a large collective domain of activity that marginalist economics is unable to perceive. Samuelson's attempt to naturalise liberal capitalism as a universal condition, and its echoes in successive policies of neoliberal reform in higher education, beginning in the 1980s Thatcher reforms in England, should be set aside. Marketisation in education and other public sectors has been constructed, driven and regulated by policy: it is scarcely the outcome of natural market forces.

Nevertheless, the neoliberal model of education has been politically potent. The implication for higher education is that teaching and degrees are predominantly private goods and the student should pay the costs. This, the starting position for Anglophone tuition policies, eliminates state responsibility for most non-pecuniary outcomes. They arise only as incidental spill-overs from market transactions. The neo-liberal model is attractive to many states, offering a rhetorical means of defraying the cost of expanding educational systems. In emerging countries, cost-sharing is presented by neo-liberal influenced international agencies as the route to educational massification (Schendel, et al., 2017).

Different lenses

As the example of Samuleson's economics makes clear, the respective nature in higher education of pecuniary individual outcomes, non-pecuniary individual outcomes, and non-pecuniary collective outcomes, and the relations between these three kinds of outcomes, are not solely technical problems. The inquiry is also shaped

by the epistemic lenses used; by political culture and ideology and by the geo-position of states and organisations; and by the interests of those making the judgments about the outcomes of higher education. Multiple disciplines are brought to bear on the outcomes of higher education: not just economics/political economy and policy studies (e.g. Brennan, et al., 2013) but also political philosophy and sociology. There is also another multiplicity: national-cultural lenses.

Over its three-thousand year history, beginning with the first academies for training officials in the Western Zhou dynasty in China, higher education everywhere has been embedded in states. There are national variations in the extent to which relations between states and institutions are overt and instrumental, and in the forms of institutional autonomy and academic freedom. Some individual institutions were not established by government but originated in religious organisations, civil society and profit-making companies. Nevertheless, all higher education *systems* as such have been built by states, and are regulated by states (Scott, 2019). And states differ. National-political cultures, with their relations, ideologies and narratives, have an irreducible diversity. As Szadkowski (2024) notes, ‘one way to view the term “public good(s)” is as an “empty signifier” which we (society, higher education staff, scholars, policymakers) fill with multiple meanings, shaped by differing social relations in our given context and time’. This problematises the universality of both ‘public good(s)’, and higher education (Marginson & Yang, 2022).

The larger CGHE project in which this paper was developed consists of a ten-country comparative study of higher education and public good. Individual country studies indicate the differing understandings of public good(s) and common good(s) in higher education (e.g. see Brewis, 2023 on Finland; Carpentier & Courtois, 2022 on France; Guzmán-Valenzuela, Barnett & Labraña, 2020; Guzmán-Valenzuela, et al., 2020 on Chile; Huang, et al., 2022 on Japan; Marginson & Yang, 2023 on England in the UK; Mun & Min, 2022 on South Korea; Szadkowski, 2021 on Poland; Tian & Liu, 2019 on China). Brewis & Marginson (2024) overview the project, and summarise similarities and differences between countries.

This work suggests that as well as there being distinct national-cultural approaches, there are elements common to all countries in the study. In all countries one understanding of ‘public’ higher education (or its lexical equivalents) is grounded in

the state, so that public refers to public sector. In all countries higher education is seen to contribute to the collective good of national societies under the auspices of the state. In most countries it is seen also to contribute to the common good of societies and communities (the distinction between public good and common good is explored further below). In all countries higher education is seen to generate multiple collective goods, of which the contributions to equitable social opportunity and to collective knowledge through research and student learning are acknowledged in all the systems research. In all the countries higher education is also seen to contribute to collective outcomes through research.

However, the present paper does not explore the variations and commonalities across the countries. Rather, it digs deeper into the conceptual roots of the problem of non-pecuniary outcomes, starting with the English language domain of 'public good(s)'.

Conceptual roots

After a preliminary discussion of the evolution of Western and Anglophone notions of society and the self, the paper reviews the primary meanings of Anglophone 'public', including the universal generic public good, public goods, and the public/private dualism, in general and in higher education. It situates those meanings in the context of the dominant Anglophone political philosophy, which, notwithstanding the many and diverse strands of Anglophone discourse, has cohered in current higher education policies on the basis of liberal capitalism and methodological individualism. The paper also considers the meanings of 'common(s)' and common good, which overlap with the meanings of public good(s), and compares public good and common good as ways of understanding higher education. (Associated meanings in other languages are addressed in the works cited above).

While terms such as public good and common good are mostly applied to national society, they can also be applied to international and global society, and the paper discusses concepts of the global public and common good in higher education and knowledge, and how these might be understood and practised. It concludes by suggesting ways of extending the inquiry into the investigation of non-pecuniary outcomes in higher education.

Anglophone society and the self

Ancient Rome, which was the cradle of the European West, was not an individualist society. People were enmeshed in a lattice of social hierarchies, ties, roles and expectations. Michel Foucault (2021) grounds the origins of Western individualism in the mental journey of the early Christians from day to day life in time and the world to the better world to come, the imagined afterlife. In this journey society became externalised in relation to the self.

All individual selves are shaped by engagement in social relations, beginning with the infant's entry into speech community which fosters a reflexive identity within (Vygotsky, 1978). Conversely, society is comprised of individual members. John Dewey (1927) remarks that it is absurd to place individual and society in antithesis. It is like the relationship between the alphabet and the individual letters: the one cannot exist without the other (p. 186). But the early Christians found a way to imagine an untrammelled self in passage to eternity, freed from the social conditions and obligations of life in Imperial Rome. The result of this deeply felt and momentous separation was that in Western societies 'the general form of moral conduct' came to take the form of 'respect for the law', understood as an external authority, rather than the work of the self on the self as a socially responsible person. Correspondingly, 'the critique of established morality' became couched as an assertion of 'the importance of the self' that was separated from it (Foucault, 2021, p. 13).

This triggered a pattern of recurring rebellion against the social order in the name of the essential self, notably in the Renaissance, and again in the Enlightenment and the French and American Revolutions when the modern Western political cultures began to emerge. The new polities were shaped on one hand by the revolt against post-feudal authority, in which demands for political freedom combined with demands for freedom of markets and property, and on the other by the normative primacy of an individual without the old social obligations. As Bruce Sievers puts it: 'The common good becomes harder to define in our societies, which, starting with the early Enlightenment, have considered themselves to be founded principally upon the free consent of autonomous individuals' (in Symonds, et al., 2022, p. 2). Correspondingly 'the rise of liberal theory diminished scholarly interest in the common good, as many

liberal thinkers contended that individuals best determine their own good without external impositions' (Mazzucato, 2023, p. 3).

While Western societies have differing understandings of the relations between economic and political liberty, mainstream Anglophone liberalism is distinguished by the premise that freedoms to trade and accumulate capital are foundational to all other forms of freedom. Over time this position became more extreme, culminating in the late twentieth century ascendancy of neo-liberalism. It was not always thus. In Enlightenment Scotland Adam Smith sought to constrain the post-feudal state while enlarging the space for both the economic market (Smith, 1776/1937) and civil association (Smith, 1759/2002), while mobilising a modernised state to provide for the common conditions of life. However, it was his statement about the invisible hand, the virtuous outcome of unregulated markets, that became seen as primary, not his emphasis on shared social bonds, or his advocacy of state provision of education. Distrust of the state became endemic, especially in the U.S.

There were and are other strands of Anglophone thought. All political cultures are heterogenous to at least some degree. Anglophone polities were and are affected by socialist, communitarian and other currents, home grown and from Europe. Keynesian liberalism advocated state economic intervention to compensate for macro-level market failure. Following World War II, labourist social democracy created a welfare state in the UK, with a universal National Health Service and nationalisation of key industries. But after the mid 1980s, led by US President Ronald Reagan and UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, market fundamentalism was installed at the heart of Anglophone economic policy. The sole rationale of government became to optimise the conditions for capital accumulation. In this setting public sector production was as an obstacle to be removed, or alternately a new opportunity for capital accumulation via privatisation. Most features of the welfare state were dismantled, with the significant exception of income transfer payments to persons.

In the UK, nationalised transport, utilities and heavy industry were all privatised. The National Health Service had survived (just) until the time of writing in April 2024 as the only Anglophone health system free on delivery to all comers, and state schooling remained universal, but in marked contrast, higher education was fully marketised in 2012, except in Scotland. That year a £9,000 tuition fee ceiling was introduced in

England for all domestic first degree places, with zero government funding in most of those places, so that students financed the public goods produced by higher education as well as the private goods. English higher education was 'hyper-commodified', not only in comparison with most of the world but also in comparison with other Anglophone liberal polities (Boliver & Promenzio, 2024). However, all Anglophone governments model higher education as a competitive market, focusing on pecuniary benefits for individuals but not the non-pecuniary individual benefits, and occluding most of the collective benefits shared with the rest of society.

Neoliberal economic policy is premised on methodological individualism. Steven Lukes (1973) describes this as 'a doctrine about explanation which asserts that all attempts to explain social (or individual) phenomena are to be rejected ... unless they are couched wholly in terms of facts about individuals' (p. 110). In other words, collective relations and collective good as such are impossible. As Thatcher (1987) famously stated, in an interview for *Women's Own*: 'Society? There is no such thing. There are individual men and women and there are families'. However, methodological individualism is not simply an imposed doctrine. Some live it from the ground up. Studies of English student attitudes to higher education identify multiple ideas of the purposes of higher education, in which personal development, knowledge-based learning, and preparation for work all figure strongly, while a significant minority hold to the notion of student as consumer fostered by official policy and ostensibly regulated by the Office for Students (e.g. Tomlinson, 2017; Nuseibeh, 2022). Remarking on social media Clara Miller notes 'an increase in self-actualisation' without any connection to a sense of social obligation. 'One gets accustomed to negotiating one's own reality, losing touch with the notion of the common good' (Symonds, et al., 2022, p. 3).

Perhaps it is another echo of the early Christian journey to the afterlife. In the Anglophone polities, ideas of solidarity, and the state as positive repository of the collective will and pivot of social interdependency, are less apparent than in Nordic social democracy, the French Republican model, and East Asian political cultures. Anglophone questions of the nature of social order and individual social responsibility are mostly reduced to conformity with the law. Shahjahan and Edwards (2022) argue that the compelling attraction of higher education in the U.S. and the UK for non-white

international students across the world is that these countries constitute ‘the whitest of the white’ in a racialised global hierarchy. The Anglophone polities are also the most Western of the West in Foucault’s (2021) sense.

Meanings of ‘public’

The English language term ‘public’ is grounded in Euro-American (Western) and more specifically, Anglophone political culture, which is led by the United States (U.S.) and the United Kingdom (UK) and shared by Canada, Australia and New Zealand.² Because English is presently the only global language, because Anglophone policies and practices are influential in higher education across the world, and because the English language discussion is couched in universal terms, the ‘provincial’ character (Chakrabarty, 2007) of the English language meanings of ‘public good’ and ‘public goods’ in higher education can be overlooked. However, those from outside the Anglophone zone who adopt terms such as ‘public good’ or ‘public goods’ need to know what they are taking on. There is not just one culturally specific meaning, there is a multitude of them. The Shorter Oxford Dictionary entry for ‘public’ occupies two full columns totalling 44 centimetres of the printed edition (OED, 1993, pp. 2404-2405). The usage of ‘public’ is diverse, embedded in the historical-cultural context in multiple ways that are not always consistent with each other. The near equivalent, parallel and related terms in other languages, for those outcomes of higher education not captured by individuals as pecuniary benefits, are likewise both universal in expressive form and culturally nested with their own historically grounded meanings.

Among the multiple meanings of ‘public’ in English are four primary strands: (1) public as meaning state or government, as in ‘public sector’; (2) ‘the public good’ as a condition of universal welfare, well-being or beneficence; (3) the public as the universal inclusion of a communicative population, as in ‘public opinion’, and (4) ‘public goods’ as one half of a dualism with private goods, the term in marginalist economics. In meanings (1) and (4) the dominant Anglophone policy approach to higher education is most apparent. Services such as higher education are seen to be shaped by a

² For reasons of space, differences between the political cultures of the Anglophone countries are not explored in this paper. These differences matter (especially to the inhabitants of those countries) and in the case of Australia are well known to the author. However, the critique in the article focuses on the common Anglophone experience of the non-pecuniary aspects of higher education, and its generalisations rest largely on the countries that have been the ideological leaders: the United States, and England in the United Kingdom.

polarity between market and state, with the market, and only the market, seen to be associated with freedom. Hence the economic imaginary that shapes Anglophone policy is in tension with a universal public good approach to higher education, meaning (3), unless the public good is reduced to aggregated economic indicators such as GDP. The universal communicative form of public in higher education, meaning (3), takes in a larger set of influences than the Anglophone tradition alone.

Each of these four meanings of 'public' in English will now be explored.

'Public' as state

The most straightforward meaning of 'public', common to the Anglophone countries, and paralleled in other countries, is the notion of public as the state or public sector, in which a myriad of agencies, many state funded and all of them state regulated, are coordinated by the central agencies of government. Regardless of the extent of anti-statism and taxpayer resistance in the political culture, in all societies the state operates as the sole and essential repository of the collective will. (Organised religion is unable to hold the collective centre, though in some countries it seeks to do so, and there are instances where it is partly fused with the state). Accordingly, all states are nominally expected to function in the common interest, though in this regard the actual performance of states, and realistic expectations about that performance, are highly variable. There is no lack of examples of states partly or wholly captured by military and police power, inherited property, plutocrats who fund parties and shape elections, religious leaders, or political cabals. There is also much evidence of state machines that secure an autonomous scope to act, by securing a monopoly of the means of coercion, or through the exercise of cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 1971), and/or by balancing the contending social forces. As this indicates, states are not natural formations. State building and functioning requires strenuous and continuous effort.

As noted, higher education everywhere is nested in the state. It mostly sees itself as contributing to nation building, carrying out services for the state, and consistent with national interest, though there is variation in the degree and type of embeddedness in the state. Through the normative authority of the public as state the role of institutions (especially those located in the public sector) is closely tied to the specific political-cultural character of the national state. Hence variations in the history and character

of the nation-state and associated political culture are the main driver of differences between countries in the role of higher education in relation to the public and common good. In certain countries higher education is positioned in nationally-specific narratives of its public role and character which continue to affect the values and behaviour of officials, faculty and students. Examples include France with its state-supervised Republican tradition grounded in universal citizen rights (Carpentier & Courtois, 2022); Finland with the *sivistys* idea, whereby graduates bring self-development and knowledge to society and the state (Brewis, 2023); and Chile with its own Latin American (Cordoba tradition) version of the agentic role of universities in social modernisation and transformation. These national narratives are by no means the only influences at work in each country. In each case, the nationally-specific discourse is being undermined by imported Anglophone ideas of the role of the state and public/private in higher education, leading to the introduction of enhanced competition and in Chile, privatisation, and tuition fees for international students. In China, which again has a potent narrative of higher education and science in nation building, the Anglophone model of corporate universities has been largely annexed by the nation-state without disrupting the national narrative, though there is submerged tension between the competitive and hierarchical education system and a socialist egalitarian reading of that national narrative.

Western polities operate on the basis of a division of powers between the central machinery of state, the economic market, civil society and the domain of family and individual. The machinery of state is further divided into executive, legislature and judiciary. The semi-autonomous university constitutes another piece in the mosaic. Notwithstanding the division of powers the Western state exercises a general supervisory role and responsibility, underpinned by its capacity to make laws and its control of the means of coercion. In Western countries this general supervisory role is a primary source of variation. In the Nordic countries the role of the state is understood as comprehensive: the state can be equated with society. In the French republican tradition the notion of *intérêt général* also speaks to a general mandate. In the Anglophone countries, comprehensive supervision is both present and resisted. There are tightly drawn boundary lines between the state and the different private zones which are normative and also contested. The normative boundaries limit the reach and obligation of 'public' activity and accountability. Yet the state in the U.S. and UK is also

an effective controlling state in the domains of law, economy and international relations: these are large mandates couched in universal terms and backed by coercive power. The boundaries are breached from time to time in the name of public order and security. The lines between the strong state executive and all other social sectors are sites of endemic tensions, including the line between the university and government.

Thatcher's neoliberal watchword was 'free market and strong state' (Gamble, 1988). The combination is secured by the Treasury, which aligns the state with capital ownership and accumulation, and along with the Prime Minister's office is the pivot of government. England is a top-down polity closely centralised in Westminster.³ Although higher education is modelled as a market, and corporatised institutions take responsibility for their own finances, the English state shapes activity by prescribing tuition fees and regulating content through the Research Excellence Framework and comparative data on graduate earnings and student-consumer satisfaction. The Anglophone state avoids a broad public mission in higher education that it would have to fund and fulfil, a larger state responsibility of the kind that it used to acknowledge, before the neoliberal era, one still typical of the Nordic and Chinese jurisdictions today. Instead, the Anglophone state centres public accountability on efficient economic performance in the generation of human capital, measured by graduate employability, and quickly passes that accountability down to the institutions. A limitation of the idea of public as state is that not all states embrace the full potential of the idea.

The universal public good

The generic 'public good', a condition of universal welfare or beneficence (Mansbridge, 1998), which has lexical near equivalents in many other countries, is what social theorists call a 'thin' concept. It has powerful affective appeal. Few would disagree with the proposition that higher education should serve the public good. Nevertheless, as Sievers states 'it lacks the depth of meaning conferred by historically lived experience' (Symonds, et al., 2022, p. 2). The more specific becomes the discussion, the more difficult it is to sustain agreement about the content of the public

³ The other Anglophone jurisdiction with a highly centralised higher education policy is Australia, but Australia has a federal constitution and the states exercise residual authority in some domains. Canadian administration of higher education is largely handled by the provinces. Both are discussed in depth in Carnoy, et al., 2018.

good. A concept imagined as both common to all and including all turns out to be one that is open to an almost infinite number of variations.

This does not rob the public good of meaning. Rather, it opens a conversation and, where there is the opportunity for larger involvement in policy, negotiations about ‘what is the universal public good and how does higher education contribute to it?’, and issues like ‘who decides?’, and ‘how should this be discussed and determined?’. There is also the other side of the normative public good(s) – what about the public bad(s), the downsides of higher education for society, such as research that supports war machines, or the enhanced social inequalities fostered in competitive and stratified higher education systems? Matters of universal public good and bad arise more clearly in discussion on common good (see below).

The normative-universal public good, like also the common good, sit alongside parallel concepts that speak to the organisation of society and its regulatory values and practices, such as the social order, or the moral order, or ecological sustainability. In some countries the large matter of the social or moral order is signified simply by the word ‘democracy’. The question then becomes ‘what are the key elements of the social or moral order that enable persons, groups and localities to flourish together?’, and ‘what is the contribution of higher education to those key elements?’ For example, which of the values seen to be common to society, or necessary to its healthy functioning, should higher education inculcate? To what extent should it seek to socialise students as citizens, and to what extent should they make up their own minds about questions of social-relational values? Countries – and also institutions, and degree programmes, which can vary on the basis of social mission and core values - differ on the responsibilities of higher education in this respect.

The fact that the state is the only possible embodiment of the collective will suggests that *it* should interpret the public good in higher education, if public good is to be understood in common or universal terms. In some countries the state does regulate a shared set of values in education. Moral and citizenship education is widely practised in first degrees in Asia. China has a mandatory curriculum in Marxist-Leninism and Xi Jinping thought. However, Western polities are more reluctant than in the past to prescribe social or political values in higher education, except perhaps in relation to equity and inclusion in higher education itself. This leaves a moral vacuum which some

expect the universities themselves to fill. Only faith-based private institutions seem wholly at ease with that. In the Anglophone world, the reluctance to prescribe the public good in public higher education is compounded by two factors: scepticism about the claim of the state to embody the public good, and, as noted, the reluctance of the state to create a broad mandate difficult to fulfil.

Mainstream Anglophone economics offers its own particular solution to these problems. First, as noted, the generic public good is defined by economic growth and prosperity in the capitalist economy. Then higher education for the public good is seen as measured by its contribution to capital accumulation, and, using methodological individualism, that contribution can be calculated by summing together the additional salary increments associated with graduate degrees. Second, economics prescribes a limited set of specific public goods subject to market failure that become a necessary state responsibility, such as basic research, though research is valued only because it is seen as the starting point for profit making innovations in industry, and research and scholarship with no apparent connection to downstream markets is often treated with scepticism. Basic science is more often favoured than social science. Third, the only values that matter and must be fostered in higher education are those that support capital accumulation in the economy. In this worldview the highly paid finance sector worker is a high value graduate from a high value higher education programme in a high value institution. Institutions producing large numbers of more lowly paid nurses or teachers are running low value programmes that by definition fail to contribute sufficiently to the public good. With the public good understood in economic terms not social terms, programmes explicitly focused on collective outcomes are *less* likely to be seen to serve the public good. That is exactly the implication in some statements of comparative value by UK government agencies (e.g. Augar, 2019⁴). Yet capital accumulation by a few does not necessarily trickle down to higher prosperity for all. It

⁴ The Augar Committee realised that something was missing, however. Its report contains the following paragraph, which was at variance with everything else: 'Successful outcomes for both students and society are about more than pay. Higher levels of education are associated with wider participation in politics and civic affairs, and better physical and mental health. We also understand the social value of some lower-earning professions such as nursing and social care, and the cultural value of studying the Arts and Humanities. The earnings data enable us to make economically defined value calculations, not value judgements. Assessing this wider value is very difficult but government should continue to work to ensure that wider considerations are taken into account in its policy and funding decisions' (Augar report 2019, p. 87). That was as far as it went. The Augar committee knew higher education generated public goods and its 'wider value' should be recognised but had no idea how to do it.

is a blunt statement of the privatisation of the public good integral to the neo-liberal project.

The inclusive-communicative public

By definition the universal public good is shared and inclusive. These qualities also run through relational notions of 'the public' as a collective noun, in which the public is a single body of people, and also adjectival forms such as 'public opinion'. This kind of public calls up the assembly of citizens, which took modern form in the French Revolution and after. There is also the related idea of the public as a communicative space that draws in all people, as in the 'public media'. Various forms of inclusive-communicative public have long-standing presence in the Anglophone world, Europe, Latin America and India, and social media almost everywhere constitutes a more attenuated form of inclusive public.

The relation between the state as public and the inclusive-communicative public is uncertain and variable. The normative public assembly of citizens in France and some other countries is classically auspiced by the state and adds a bottom-up element to governance. There are parallels in the role of local democracy in many parts of the U.S., though less in the UK. However, public opinion as such is independent of direct state control and sits more in civil society; while the communicative publics orchestrated by platforms like Google and Meta, which also tend towards universal inclusion, are controlled by private corporations.

The relation between the inclusive-communicative public and higher education is also uncertain. Institutions find it more difficult than states to address whole populations: higher education includes some but not all of the public, and also stratifies populations between those who access degree education and those who do not, which can be seen as one of the public bads created by higher education. Institutions come closest to an inclusive public role in university towns where they can be the largest local organisations, with many connections into other social organisations. Nevertheless, expectations of broad social inclusion have become normatively associated with massified higher education. The goal of widening participation on the basis of equity in admission reflects deep beliefs that higher education should provide a framework of opportunity that serves whole communities. Arguably, the politics of access are a

quintessentially public and common aspect of higher education. States mostly, though not always, support the widening of access and growth in social inclusion in higher education over time, though equitable access to elite institutions is much more fraught and contested than general access (Cantwell, et al., 2018).

Higher education is also implicated in the inclusive-communicative public in another sense. The 'public sphere' of Jurgen Habermas (1989), Nancy Fraser (1990) and others is a more localised and purposive communicative public than the whole population. Habermas sources the functioning public sphere to late seventeenth century London with its network of broadsheets, salons and coffee houses in which people discussed matters of the day. The public sphere, focused on policy, government errors and alternatives, was a continuing source of intelligence, ideas and talent for the British state. This kind of public sphere, which requires freedom of expression and free media, is typical of West European polities and flourishes in the U.S., though more episodically in China, for example prior to Tiananmen Square in 1989. Post-independence India has nourished communicative political cultures in the major cities, though distorted by religious intolerance in the Modi years.

Calhoun (2006) and Pusser (2011) extend the public sphere notion to higher education. They present research-intensive universities as semi-autonomous adjuncts of government that harbour constructive criticism, policy ideas and transformative social movements. Ignatieff (2018) suggests that within the Western division of powers the critically-minded university is an analogue to a free media and independent judiciary, a counter to majoritarian populism in the polity. Higher education legislation in New Zealand formally enshrines the idea of the university as 'critic and conscience' of society. The role of higher education as a critical public sphere is embodied in the Latin American Cordoba model.

The public/private dualism

The marginalist economic understanding of public/private goods, derived originally from Samuelson (1954) and installed by neo-liberal policy in the Anglophone jurisdictions, was introduced above. As noted, the model is highly normative, skipping over the many interdependencies between public and private. As applied in neo-liberal policy the purpose is to maximise the space for capital accumulation by installing a

minimalist, residual, low cost notion of public goods, consistent with an extreme version of the limited liberal state.

The public/private goods dualism generates differential treatment of research and teaching, undermining the Humboldtian teaching/research nexus in universities. Basic research is seen as a natural public good, non-rivalrous and once published non-excludable. In most countries basic research in higher education is largely state financed – though by fostering national and global markets, in which research outcomes are a source of the status for which universities compete, neoliberal Anglophone governments have ensured that universities sustain part of their research from teaching funding, including international student fees. In contrast the educational functions of teaching/learning and certification are seen as unambiguous sources of private goods. As the Dearing (1997) report stated, in the passage which ushered in the first tuition fees in the UK: ‘There is overwhelming evidence that those with higher education qualifications are the main beneficiaries from higher education in the form of improved employment prospects and pay’ (pp. 288-289).

In a Samuelson universe the sole indicator of value is economic value. Students pass from consumers in the education market to human capital for the labour market without ever becoming self-forming subjects of education, knowledge and society; or if they do, that is incidental to the value equation. Individualised non-pecuniary goods, public goods such as enhanced citizenship which are not rewarded in labour markets and are acquired during the process of education, are seen as externalities or ‘spill-overs’ from the production of private goods in the form of human capital. In most cases there is little effort to measure the value of externalities on an inclusive basis and estimates have wildly differed (McMahon, 2018; Chapman & Lounkaew, 2015). Collective public goods not generated as spill-overs are occluded. Further, Samuelson public goods are not necessarily broadly distributed or democratic in form, in contrast with normative common goods in education (see below). Samuelson public goods provide conditions, such as the rule of law or broader social inclusion, that facilitate capital accumulation in the market economy. There is nothing necessarily democratic or universally distributed about such conditions. Some such public goods, like research, or free places that enhance access, are vulnerable to private capture.

No country implements Samuelson in full. In all Anglophone polities there is some government funding for student places and/or tuition loans, and finance to foster the broadening of access, though policies of positive discrimination in favour of disadvantaged social groups are contested. Nevertheless, the Samuelson model bites deep. As noted, it provides an ongoing rationale for student tuition charges, with each fee hike underpinned by claims about private benefit; and a mechanism whereby any state can limit expectations of government-as-public. Correspondingly, the public/private goods and externalities notion cannot constitute a positive framework for the role of the state or systematically address the process of implementation and distributional equity of public goods (Mazzucato, 2023).

While all meanings of the word 'public' in English connect with higher education and have resonances in the countries in this project, 'public good' and 'public goods' are ambiguous. Arguably, also, the latter has become contaminated by its dualistic usage in neoliberal economics. The limitations of public good(s) have prompted interest in the 'common good' as an alternative framework (Tian & Liu, 2019), together with the 'common goods' that taken together contribute to the common condition.

Common good

Like 'public' the term 'common' is associated with historical layers of meaning. There is a long history of the commons in rural life. Forms of common ownership range from jointly held private property to egalitarian social space (for recent examples in the Catalan Pyrenees see Vaccaro, et al., 2024). 'Common' in economics is associated with shared resources. In 'The tragedy of the commons', Hardin (1968) finds that resources such as grazing land open to unrestricted use inevitably become congested because individuals lacked incentives to restrain their own use: 'Freedom in a commons brings ruin to all' (p. 1244). However, Ostrom (1990; 2010) argues that local communities can manage finite common resources rationally on the basis of negotiated protocols. Further, not all common goods are ultimately non-renewable and rivalrous. Learning, knowledge and social cooperation itself are all examples of common goods not necessarily subject to congestion.

In *Rethinking education: Towards a global common good* UNESCO (2015) proposes the common good concept in place of public good. The public good concept is trapped

in a limiting economic framework and unduly government focused, and says nothing about production and delivery, including equity in distribution. UNESCO's common good idea is designed to address these limitations. Here common good is understood as political rather than economic. Education for the common good embodies local participation in conception and delivery, democracy and equity in distribution, and values of solidarity, tolerance, benevolence, shared individual human rights and freedoms, and collective welfare and facilities (Deneulin & Townsend, 2007, p. 24). UNESCO notes that understandings of the common good are diverse, with differing interests in play: diversity has educational and social benefits and differences are reconciled in negotiation. UNESCO common good is fulfilled by private as well as public organisations and entails public-private cooperation.

Bringing the state back in

Mariana Mazzucato (2023) develops a concept of the common good larger than the debate triggered by Hardin and the solutions of Ostrom and UNESCO. She notes that the 'good' is more than the aggregation of individual utilities (p. 1). As with the UNESCO concept, her common good is relational, embodying mutual interests and concerns. It is supplied only to the community as a whole and yet individually shared by its members (pp. 2-3). However, she sees the state is as important as local communities in achieving collective good.

Mazzucato critiques both the public good approach and a solely communal common good approach. Each is trapped by the same limiting conceptual framework, where options are structured by the rivalry/excludability problematic, 'all embedded in the same notion of either market failure or state failure' (Mazzucato, 2023, p. 9).

On one hand Samuelson public good is focused not on creating public goods of value but on supplementing private markets. Market failure is a poor theory for determining policy intervention because 'the conditions of perfect information, completeness and no transaction costs have never been empirically demonstrated'. In any market, government can intervene to improve the market outcome (Mazzucato, 2023, p. 6). As noted, the model limits the role of the state to compensation for market failure, and its public goods take the form of individualised welfare goods and externalities. 'This concept of the state as a market fixer has led to the idea that government should not

steer the economy but only enable, regulate and facilitate it’ (p. 6); filling the gaps created by markets ‘rather than setting ambitious objectives and promoting collective action towards achieving them’ (p. 2).

Table 1. Comparison of public good and common good concepts

Public good (the various meanings)	Common good
‘Public’ as the state or government sector	DIFFERENT: common goods can be generated in both public and private sectors
The normative ‘public good’ as a universally shared condition of welfare or beneficence	SAME: the normative common good also implies a universal condition of beneficence
‘Public’ meaning socially inclusive and communicative (potentially all citizens)	SIMILAR: though the common good more strongly emphasises equitable distribution
‘Public sphere’ as zone of discussion and constructive criticism alongside the state	SIMILAR: common good approach implies open extensive discussion, but also implementation
‘Public goods’ are economic goods not produced in markets	DIFFERENT: common goods are politically defined and produced both in markets and outside
‘Public goods’ are non-rivalrous and/or non-excludable	DIFFERENT: common goods are not regulated by the rivalry/excludability framework
‘Public goods’ cannot be private goods and vice versa	DIFFERENT: common goods are shared collective goods in which individual rights are advanced
‘Public goods’ can be generated by any political form	DIFFERENT: common good presupposes active local democracy, supported by state

Source: author

On the other hand Ostrom’s (2010) communal management of common-pool resources assumes both market failure and state failure. ‘Relying on this framework of government failure as well as placing the burden of compensating for weak states on communities does not present a view of the good as an objective to be reached together’ (p. 2).

Hence while Mazzucato (2023) strongly endorses the role of local communities in collectively determining and producing common goods, and to that extent agrees with

Ostrom, this is not sufficient. There is also a need for active government that 'promotes and nurtures co-creation and participation' (p. 10), 'pro-actively creating an economy towards collective goals' (p. 9). This larger kind of common good also requires 'an underlying theory of public value' distinct from orthodox economic value. Public value is politically determined and it is 'not thought to be created exclusively inside or outside the private sector'. Mazzucato sees public value as potential unifying across society. Public value would be 'collectively negotiated and generated by a range of stakeholders... While the traditional question defining public goods is one of excludability and rivalry, the key question for the broader concept of the common good is one of public value' (p. 10).

Hence 'common good' overlaps with some meanings of 'public good(s)', but not all (Table 1). It refers to a condition of universal beneficence. It includes all citizens. However, it is not limited to the state sector - civil society and market agents can contribute to the common good - and is not defined by the Samuelson dual and rivalry/excludability.

Common goods in higher education

The foregoing argument suggests that to achieve common goods in and through higher education, it is necessary to combine top-down facilitation by government with bottom up action in diverse local settings, underpinned by collective responsibility and participation inside and outside higher education institutions in formulating goals and organising the production and distribution of common goods. The public and private sectors would share responsibility and the state would intervene strategically on the basis of public value. As Rita Locatelli (2018) notes, 'some kinds of private participation are more defensible than others' (p. 8), and government is essential in ensuring that private agents fulfill the common good rather than capturing common activity for their own purposes. Government has a special importance as the producer of what can be called 'public common goods'.

In higher education, the notion of common good is best understood in relation to research and knowledge (Brewis & Marginson, 2024). Mazzucato (2023) foregrounds shared knowledge 'as a cumulative and collective resource rather than an individual possession' (p. 14). Open science and public spheres in which knowledge is

disseminated can markedly advance the common good. Arguably knowledge constitutes a primary contribution of higher education to the global common good, though this common good is not universal.

Global common good

What are the global public good and the global common good? The Climate Nature Emergency compels these questions (Stein, et al., 2022; Witte, 2023), but they are the most difficult aspect of the public and common good in higher education to theorise and define.

The global scale (Marginson, 2022) invokes two threshold problems. First, for many practitioners and scholars of higher education, methodological nationalism occludes the global scale and any geo-cognitive scale beyond the national, including pan-national regions. Methodological nationalism is ‘the belief that the nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world’ (Wimmer & Schiller, 2002, p. 301; see also Shahjahan & Kezar, 2013; Shahjahan, 2023). It rests on the ‘internalist’ fallacy that the trajectory of nations is entirely determined by their own efforts (Conrad, 2016, p. 88). Methodological nationalism is pervasive, shaping the outlook of governments, national public debate, and social science (Beck, 2007). ‘Methodological nationalism operates both about and for the nation-state, to the point where the only reality we are able to comprehensively describe statistically is a national, or at best an international one’ (Dale, 2005, p. 126). Methodological nationalism does not exclude the world beyond the nation but represents it as an outgrowth of nations, a mosaic of separated nation-states without embedded connections or common systems such as science. Despite the visibility of phenomena that criss-cross nation states, such as like student mobility, or transcend nation-states, such as the pool of knowledge (Marginson, 2022), it becomes hard to imagine the world as a whole. This eliminates the possibility of global responsibility (Massey, 2004).

The second threshold problem is almost the opposite of the first: not whether there is a global scale, but whether that global scale is sufficient to the world as a whole. Chakrabarty (2021) distinguishes the ‘global’ and ‘planetary’. The global is about the convergence and integration of human society at world level. In the planetary

perspective the human element is decentred. The planetary encompasses all humans and their ecological footprint, including technology, and also the rest of nature. The planetary brings new responsibilities to human society, higher education and research. The present paper, and its associated research project, work with the global not the planetary. This is a limitation of the research.

Beyond these threshold issues, the global public and common good in general and in higher education can be approached in several ways.

Global public good

In the last three decades states and non government agents have put much effort into talk around shared goals, especially in ecological matters, but have failed to develop a comprehensive framework that supports collective action by states, autonomous public agents like universities, non-government organisations, and corporations.

One attempt at such a framework is by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which published *Global public goods: International cooperation in the 21st century* in 1999 and a follow up four years later (Kaul, et al., 1999a; 2003). UNDP uses an economic framing of public goods, stretching this to fit the global scale. The main focus is ecology. There is no chapter on education but one on knowledge as a global public good and another on the Internet as a public good. The UNDP argument begins from Samuelson (1954) and Hardin (1968) (Kaul, et al., 1999b, p. xxiii). Global public goods are defined as follows:

Global public goods must meet two criteria. The first is that their benefits have strong qualities of publicness – that is, they are marked by nonrivalry in consumption and nonexcludability... The second criterion is that their benefits are quasi universal in terms of countries (covering more than one group of countries), people (accruing to several, preferably all, population groups), and generations (extending to both current and future generations, or at least meeting the needs of current generations without foreclosing development options for future generations). This property makes humanity as a whole the publicum, or beneficiary of global public goods (Kaul, et al., 1999c).

The UNDP group move beyond Samuelson's public goods in two respects. First, they emphasise broad distribution of public goods, tending towards universality between and within countries. Second, they fill the absence of a global state with international laws, state-to-state agreements and active political participation by non-state actors. Whether a good is public or private then becomes 'a question of political interest and capacity to place a specific good in the public and global domain' (Mazzucato, 2023, p. 7). However, the UNDP authors also maintain the main conceptual limitation of Samuelson: public goods are understood in terms of externalities and provided only when there is market failure.

Kaul et al. identify three constraints on global public goods as they define them. First, 'the jurisdictional gap, that is, the discrepancy between a globalised world and national, separate units of policy-making'. Policy is 'national in both focus and scope' but many of the challenges are global (Kaul, et al., 1999b, p. xxvi). States at global level behave like private actors motivated by national self-interest. 'The risk of state failure is systemic due to the absence of a global sovereign' (Kaul, et al., 1999c, p. 15). Hence global public goods face both market failure and state failure and in that respect resemble Ostrom's (1990; 2010) common-pool goods. As with Ostrom this lacuna highlights the role of non-state agents, but the second constraint noted by the UNDP group is that global agents in civil society and the corporate sector tend to be marginalised because international cooperation is largely handled by states. The third constraint is that incentives to cooperate internationally are weak, unless cooperation is purchased via the aid mechanism (Kaul, et al., 1999b, p. xxvi).

The UNDP enthusiasm for global cooperation conceals the fact that their public good framework, with action confined to market failure and no obvious global agent to fill that role, suggests very limited options. Mazzucato (2023) remarks that 'public good scholarship ... treats some of the most systemic problems in global capitalism (e.g. climate change and inequality) as externalities and the results of failures of an otherwise perfect system, rather than questioning the structures' (p. 6). Again, she proposes that the limitations of public goods can be addressed by moving to the common goods idea which no longer assumes the primacy of the market. This would enable the normative welfare goods advocated by UNDP while also a much broader

range of activity. She supports collaborative global structures involving all parties as Kaul et al. (1999a) suggest but they would have a larger mandate:

In emphasising the need for co-creation and participation, the common good sets out a framework within which partnerships between the state, business, and civil society are a critical component of steering the economy in the right direction. This is not about enforcing top-down or centralised regulation, but about letting collective processes inform public policy and transnational governance (Mazzucato, 2023, p. 13).

The global common goods concept is especially pertinent in higher education and research, given their thick cross-border collaboration outside the inter-state system.

Global common good in higher education

Higher education, research and science could be one key to evolving a global common goods approach. A threshold issue is to sort higher education's potentials for global good(s) from its potential for global bad(s). The commercial agendas of universities dependent on the market in cross-border education, which entails a neo-colonial relation with emerging countries, drawing economic capital and talent from the emerging countries back to old colonial centres, are in sharp tension with normative common good. The hegemonic neo-colonial form of the global science system likewise generates global bads (Marginson & Xu, 2023). The prestige building objectives of universities, which are fundamental to all of them (Marginson, 2006), do not sit easily with the egalitarian relations normed by a common good philosophy, especially in the dominant minority of research-intensive universities which are largely in the Anglophone countries. At the same time, higher education is characterised by an irreducible multiplicity of roles, connections and activities (Marginson, et al., 2023) and its personnel also pursue more high minded agendas. Most cross-border activities are carried out in a manner consistent with global cooperation around shared goals, for example in research, where the shared contributions are immense (Witte, 2023).

Higher education is especially suited to building global common goods, and bads, because it is relatively internationalised and globalised (Marginson, 2022). The last three decades have seen great growth in global communications in higher education,

student and academic mobility, cross-border university partnerships, and global science. The number of science papers in the common Scopus repository rose from 1.0 million in 1996 to 3.3 million in 2022, and the proportion of those papers authored in more than one country rose from 12.2 per cent in 1996 to 23.2 per cent in 2020, before falling slightly to 22.6 per cent in 2022 (NSB, 2024). The number of higher education students crossing borders for one year or more rose from 1.9 million in 1998 to 6.2 million in 2022 (UNESCO, 2024). In 2021, 24 per cent of all doctoral students in OECD countries had crossed the border (OECD, 2023, p. 259).

Codified knowledge itself is an inexhaustible collective common good; like other forms of information it flows freely everywhere, and it contributes to common goods in other social domains. Higher education constitutes a worldwide space of inquiry sustained by joined-up practices of academic freedom in independent-minded universities. It can also foster inter-civilisational dialogues in an increasingly multi-polar world (Yang, 2022). This is not to say higher education optimises its knowledge contribution to the global commons. Leading universities give primacy to English language knowledge and are complicit in the exclusionary policies of the primary bibliometric collections, Clarivate Analytics Web of Science and Elsevier's Scopus. English is the first language of 5.1 per cent of the world's population, equal third with Arabic after Mandarin Chinese (12.3 per cent) and Spanish (6.0 per cent). English is the first or second language of 18.8 per cent of people (CIA, 2024). Yet 98 per cent of entries in Web of Science and 96 per cent in Scopus are in English (Marginson & Xu, 2023). Endogenous (indigenous) non-Western knowledges are almost completely excluded, reproducing the colonial divide. The epistemic communities, corporate publishing, higher education institutions, research institutes, and governments all have roles to play in the development of a more open and inclusive framework of global knowledge.

The fecund collegial cooperation between scientists shows that much can be achieved across distances. In global science informal self-regulated cooperation on the basis of shared agendas and trust is as essential as formal agreements. However, bottom up cooperation alone is no more sufficient in the global scale than it is in the national scale. Universities are not the only agents that affect global cooperation in higher education: the UNDP is right to argue that states may pursue self-interest in the global space at the expense of the common good. The intimidation of scientists in the U.S.

China Initiative (Lee & Li, 2021), and the isolation of universities in Russia since the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, show that large and active bottom-up networks in higher education can be quickly snuffed out by coercive states. Arguably, Mazzucato (2023) does not give sufficient attention to such problems.

The need to protect and advance open global cooperation in higher education suggests that in the absence a global state, an alternative global authority is needed. Such an authority could not rely on coercive power. Rather it would have to rest on moral suasion sufficient to nurture and protect bottom up collaboration both within and outside the inter-state system. Arguably, the global landscape in higher education will not evolve further in the direction of global common good in the absence of such a global authority. Fortunately, however, there are better prospects of developing normative global authority in higher education than in most social sectors. Both universities and research groups demonstrate strong motivations to work together peacefully on mutual agendas on a long-term basis.

Self-regulating global commons

How would a global higher education authority exercise moral weight sufficient to shape the global common good in the sector? As the national studies show, thinking about global cooperation is more advanced in China than elsewhere. Not by coincidence, Sinic tradition includes *tianxia*, the practice of a world without borders that is held together by shared relational values, rituals, a common commitment to self-improvement, and the benefits of cooperation. *Tianxia* is a novel proposition in Western contexts, though more familiar in China. It means deliberately building a practical relational framework in time and the world that rests not on coercive external authority or law but on self-regulation. *Tianxia* is based on the principle of unity-in-diversity, in which differences are normal and valued as a source of mutual learning. *Tianxia weigong* refers to common goods that benefit all and require contributions from all parties on the basis of cooperation (see Tian and Liu in this volume).

Yang, et al. (2022, pp. 12-13) suggest that in a cooperative higher education regime modelled on *tianxia*, participating countries and institutions would be expected to conform to shared relational values such as:

1. **Respect** for the world as a whole; for nature and the environment; for learning, personal educational development, knowledge and inquiry; for diversity in the forms and embodiment of knowledge; for all persons in higher education.
2. **Freedom** of institutions to manage their affairs free of coercion; of academic learning, teaching and inquiry; of sufficient resources; of worldwide flows of knowledge; of people mobility in higher education.
3. **Openness and connectivity** that includes all genuine scholarship and research as part of global knowledge; fosters open access and sharing of knowledge; collaboration with all on a mutual basis, moving from the present hierarchy to equality and justice.

Classic *tianxia* developed two modalities: a China-centred *tianxia* led from the Northern plain, fading at the edges into barbarianism (Zhao, 2021), and a world-centred *tianxia* with no boundary, no barbarians and no priority (Yang, et al., 2022). Only the second can serve the global common good. World-centred *tianxia* breaks with methodological nationalism and frees up nationally-based agents to put collective action first. Given the historical roots of *tianxia* in communion with nature, the framework can be extended also to the planetary. Global common good will not be established on a quasi-imperial basis in which might is right and the world - including both other humans and nature – is understood merely as a source of resources to exploit. A global society based on common good will value all of its members. *Tianxia* can kick-start a process of thinking about that in higher education.

Conclusions

The idea of individuals wholly separated from social relations is an illusion but in societies in which liberal individualism has normative primacy, as in the Euro-American West, collective relations become difficult to discern. The Anglophone polities led by the United States and England are the most Western of the West in this respect, exhibiting a relatively weak understanding of the contributions of higher education to the public good and the common good. With the neo-liberal turn in higher education policy, the focus has become further narrowed to the directly observable creation of economic value for individuals (e.g. the augmented salaries alleged to be

determined by higher education institutions), not the larger formative contribution of education and knowledge to the lifelong learning and agency of graduates, and the many contributions made by their education, and research and scholarship, to the economic, political, social and cultural lives of communities.

To bring this broader terrain into view, it has become essential to move from the limited liberal notion of a separated competitive 'economic person' (e.g. a consumer or investor in education) to notions of collaborative citizenship whereby individuals flourish in, and through contributing their works to, the common good. The alternative is the enhanced enrichment of the few while many others lived stunted lives, ongoing geo-political conflict at world level, the continuing failure of global cooperation, and ecological disaster.

The larger vision is within reach. Ideas and practices of the 'public' role and impact of higher education, and the lexical equivalents in other languages, are acknowledged by many scholars and also practitioners in higher education. There is a broad consensus that higher education has responsibility to the universal public good, though defining this more closely is difficult; that it is connected to the state as public sector; and that it is quintessentially public in the sense of broad social inclusion and its contributions to knowledge, including science and culture. However, within neoliberal policy frameworks, states do not consistently acknowledge a broad public role. In particular, the Anglophone neoliberal economic framing implies that the role of the state in higher education is limited to 'public goods' as externalities that compensate for market failure, and in Anglophone countries the privatisation and part-privatisation of student places, and teaching and learning, is widely practised. While states retain the main role in higher education in most of Europe and East Asia, neoliberal ideas filter into non-Anglophone systems (e.g. Carpentier & Courtois, 2022)

Arguably, though public as public (state) sector, linked to public as broadly inclusive, retains meaning, the neoliberal economic capture of policy discourse has cruelled the use of 'public goods'. These are irretrievably tied to the limited non-rivalry/non-excludability problematic. The terms 'common good' and its constituent 'common goods' are more explanatory. They better capture the combination of broad collective social relations and open-ended student formation that takes place in higher education. The common good terminology defines the social and collective realms in

political rather than technical terms, and factors in collaborative processes in the planning, production and distribution of the common goods. Some ideas of common good limit action to when there is both market failure and state failure, but Mariana Mazzucato rightly emphasises the need for bottom up collaboration to be supported and complemented by pro-active states committed to public value that frame a networked collaborative economy devoted to collective goals. States also have a key role in ensuring that private agents do not capture shared common goods.

Higher education intersects with the common good at many points, across all of the local, regional and national scales. Its potential in global common goods is very significant given the absence of a global state; the importance of knowledge, which is a natural global good; and the already existing fecundity of cross-border activity in the sector. However, the global commons must be expanded to take in all languages and knowledges, including exogenous knowledges currently excluded; and bottom up cross-border collaboration needs the support of a collectively based agency with moral weight that is committed to values of mutual respect and benefit, and learning through diversity (Marginson & Xu, 2023).

Extending the inquiry

This paper has reviewed the different meanings of 'public' in English and the applications to higher education, distinguished the public good(s) and common good(s) approaches, and explained why the common good approach is more useful going forward. It has also drawn attention to two related notions: the use of 'public value' in place of economic value as the basis for political calculation; and 'public common goods', which refers to the role of nation-states in aligning private sector action with the common good. It also suggests a sector-based regulatory mechanism for global common goods in higher education, based on consent and moral persuasion, and shared values including free open exchange and universal inclusion. The key to the common good approach, in both local/national relations and global relations, is negotiated cooperation between all the stakeholders in production and distribution. This approach can build on the existing outreach activities of higher education institutions. Higher education has a developed capacity in both social communications and the formation of individual and collective agency and capability (Sen, 1999; Walker & Unterhalter, 2007; Marginson, 2023). Knowledge is the central

element in the intrinsic core of higher education, in both teaching/learning and scholarship/research, and knowledge is ontologically relational in form, collectively accumulated, like a language and when produced and distributed on an inclusive basis is of universal benefit.

The inquiry into public good(s) and common good(s) in higher education could be extended in a number of ways. Four are suggested here. The first is to expand on comparative studies in diverse countries and diverse higher education sites (see the discussion of limitations of the CGHE project in Brewis & Marginson, 2024).

A second way to extend the inquiry is to more systematically study the range of 'public bad(s)' that are generated in higher education, alongside public and common goods: for example (a) higher education generates not just access to opportunity but also social exclusion, and (b) student and academic mobility are associated with not only fruitful cooperation on common global problems but also economic exploitation in commercial international education and brain drain through one-way cross-border researcher mobility. Systemic stratification in higher education help to reproduce hierarchical order and social closures everywhere, and tends to suppress the potentials of multiple agency and diversity.

A third new line of inquiry is to examine more closely the interfaces between the creation private pecuniary goods for individual graduates, and the collective benefits. How can societies optimise the synergies between these two kinds of outcomes?

A fourth extension is to more systematically probe the potential benefits of open public discourse in and through higher education, using historical as well as contemporary examples. At best higher education institutions, especially research universities, can become key social zones of shared experience, diversity of thought and expression together with the fostering of unity-in-diversity, reflective criticism of state and society, and the creation of fertile new alternatives, as suggested by the democratic 'public sphere' (Fraser, 1990).

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