



# The spectres of Andrés Bello in the Chilean academy

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## Abstract

In Chile, the contemporary form of academic life is irreducible to neoliberalism. There are past experiences and discourses that continue to disrupt the daily routine, dynamics, intensity, and rhythm of academics. They manifest as various epistemological, ethical, institutional, technical, and political mechanisms that produce innumerable images, meanings, and practices. These experiences conflict with the affects and material realities of the neoliberalism. The entanglement of these experiences from the past and present is conflicting, as they attempt to ignore or repress each other. In this respect, this paper addresses the following question: what is the model of academic behaviour that was established during the post-independence period in the Chilean university system? To answer this question, I explore Andrés Bello's texts concerning university and academic life. The conclusion is that Bello established a specific model of academic behaviour that, with some later modifications, reconfigurations, and contradictions, returns to the present. Bello's influence today can be seen through spectres that enable and limit new possibilities for expanding academic critique within and across scholarly settings.

**Key words:** Andrés Bello, spectres, ethics of excellence, critique.

## 1. Introduction: The Spectres of Bello

The University of Chile is commonly referred to as Bello's house or "La casa de Bello". Being an academic in this institution, which is a hub of scientific knowledge and artistic creation, implies experiencing a rich history of continuity and change. Specifically, being a part of Bello's house means identifying with a certain historically-formed identity that values exceptionalism, sophistication, uniqueness, perfection, integrity, and standardization (Sabrovsky, [Universidad de la excelencia, política, cultura, poder](#)). Supposedly, pursuing an academic career in this university requires adopting an attitude and cultivating epistemic virtues. In other words, it is an ethical experience and practice that is based on a particular relationship with oneself, others, and truth. It is not solely based on institutional policies and codes but is also guided by the rules of conduct established by academics themselves. Therefore, the knowledge produced in the form of ideas or technologies must be exceptional and reliable, so as to support the culture of excellence that Bello's house represents for the country, reflecting the spirit of the national university and the needs of the state during the mid-nineteenth and twentieth century (Serrano, [Universidad y nación](#)).

Bello's house is a representation of values and practices that are still relevant today, and there are two examples that illustrate this. The first example involves Claudio Hetz, a well-known neuroscientist who holds an academic position at the University of Chile. In 2021, Hetz was accused of scientific fraud for using altered images in his publications since 2002. The university



commissioned an advisory committee to investigate the case, which concluded that Hetz's behaviour was objectionable and contrary to scientific ethics, and lacked rigor (Rodríguez, [Chilean researchers unhappy following investigation of star neuroscientist](#)). However, there was no evidence of fraud, meaning that Hetz did not deliberately change the findings of his experiments. In 2022, the university suspended Hetz from academic activities for two months. Hetz responded to the controversy by stating that “as scientists, we know that excellence is first; we seek perfection but despite good intentions and seeking to be as meticulous as possible, we fail in this process” [my translation] (Yáñez, [El mea culpa de Claudio Hetz](#)). He also acknowledged that there was room for improvement and learning. However, the academic community rejected the university's conclusions and sanctions, arguing that they set a poor example for researchers. This dispute highlights the tension between institutional norms enforced through administrative processes and the rules of conduct that academics set for themselves.

In 2022, there was a public controversy that caused upheaval in Bello's house. The Faculty of Humanities was criticised for publishing a master's thesis that analysed paedophilia from a philosophical perspective. Critics argued that the thesis was purposely defending paedophilia. The University responded immediately and released a public statement, as well as launching a formal investigation. Two issues were raised: firstly, the question of whether ethical and quality standards were followed when submitting the thesis, and secondly, the politicisation of critical studies in social sciences. Some academics were criticised for a lack of rigor and for political reasons. Critics argued that gender studies, feminism, and critical studies, in general, have been overtaken by ideologized theoretical perspectives, which has affected academic freedom and the credibility of research. Supporters of these approaches defended academic freedom, arguing that theories and ideas should not be forbidden or questioned for political reasons.

These examples illustrate how specific controversies mobilise epistemological and ethical values from both the past and present. Hetz's emphasis on excellence and improvement, as well as the critics of the ideological aspect of critique, can be viewed as evidence of the manifestation of a specific system of values, academic conduct, and intellectual character. When these controversies arise within the university, the question that emerges is: Which model of academic behaviour is being evoked? In this paper, I attempted to address this question by exploring how the spirit of Bello's house was formed and its implications for academic critique.

The paper is divided into three main sections. Firstly, I describe the epistemological and methodological approach that I used to examine Bello's model of academic behaviour. Secondly, I describe Bello's epistemological context emphasising the transition from romanticism to positivism for the construction of the new Republic and the university system. Thirdly, I explore Bello's government of the self and how this form of government both enables and constrains the contemporary model of academic behaviour.

## 2. A genealogical inquiry

To understand the current forms of governmentality in the Chilean university system, it is necessary to examine the historical emergence and organization of a particular model of academic behaviour, i.e., values, epistemic virtues, and intellectual character. I argue that this model both *supports* and *challenges* contemporary academic culture in various ways. In this article, I explore how academic conduct was addressed by Andrés Bello, one of the most eminent figures or 'disciplined intellectuals'



(Ramos, [Divergent modernities](#)) during the establishment of the Republic and the University of Chile. According to Trujillo Silva, Bello ‘became the symbol of a way of being, of a modern republic, and especially, he was seen as the founding father, indeed, *an articulator of many tendencies that seemed completely incompatible*’ (Trujillo Silva 2019:20, my emphasis). Similarly, for Jaksic, ‘Bello remains a familiar yet unknown figure, a *presence* that is recognized but cannot be explained’ (Jaksic 2010:19, my emphasis). Bello played a significant role in the Republic project, particularly in terms of social order and the development of the university system. He ‘considered himself a *defender of order*’ (Jaksic 2010:24, my emphasis).

Although Bello was born in Venezuela, he devoted a significant portion of his life to the formation of the Republic of Chile. After serving as a diplomat in London from 1810 to 1829, where he met intellectuals such as James Mill and Jeremy Bentham (Zea, [El pensamiento latinoamericano](#)), he relocated to Chile and was employed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Santiago. During this time, he contributed to the country's initiatives as a senator, professor, and director of local newspapers. Among his most notable accomplishments are the Chilean Civil Code and the establishment of the University of Chile, where he worked as the first Rector for over two decades, from 1843 to 1865.

In this context, I examine how Bello, seen as a *dispositif* (Foucault, [The history of sexuality](#)), established and embodied a discourse that persists in the current form of academic critique, as a ghostly figure (Schmukalla, [Communist ghosts](#)), despite the ruptures and discontinuities throughout the history of Chilean universities. By placing Bello and his works within the broader context of the academy's history, I suggest that his contributions are best understood not as an attempt to establish a distinct field of research, but rather, as an effort to prescribe a particular set of virtues to be upheld by the members of the academy. The cultivation of virtues was crucial during Bello's time as it occurred before the establishment of a more structured and hierarchical division of labour. According to Ratti and Stapleford, when behaviour is already governed by formal norms and rules, “the personal characteristics of individual scientists, and certainly their moral qualities, could readily be seen as irrelevant to the successful production of knowledge” (Ratti and Stapleford 2021:2). In summary, Bello's contribution to the organization of the Republic and the academic community was both ethical and epistemological. Bello's writings, along with the works of his intellectual rivals, particularly Jose Victorino Lastarria (1817-1888) and Jacinto Chacon (1820-1898), serve as important clues to investigate the historical roots of a model of academic behaviour that still exists today. Bello's writings on language, education, and history provides essential elements for expanding the moral horizons of the population through self-imposed civic virtues.

Through a genealogical approach, I argue that Bello introduced a particular power/knowledge relationship at a capillary level. This relationship ensured the formation of the structures of the contemporary university, including teaching, research, public engagement, and more. This power/knowledge relationship can be examined under the category of *excellence*, which is a form of order that enables the contemporary relationship between the academic community and the market. Excellence can be seen as a cultural nucleus that intersects discourses of truth, forms of governmentality, and techniques of the self. It contains all forms of exclusion, such as class, race, gender, and others. Therefore, the way excellence was exercised during the nineteenth century laid the foundation for producing techniques of management, such as rankings and accreditation, and techniques of the self in the contemporary university. The configuration of a specific relation to self, others, and truth marks the starting point of the history of academic communities in Chile.



Based on Bello's writings, I have identified two ways in which Bello influenced the formation of the academic self within the Chilean academic community. Firstly, he established a government of others, which involved state-building and university-building. This created a specific regime of truth, or epistemological field, which defined the grounds for what is thinkable and spoken. Bello's major contribution was the introduction of positivism in the Chilean philosophical discourse and the unification of the Spanish language. Secondly, Bello brought into play a *government of the self*, which involved certain practices, values and epistemic virtues that defined the grounds for the academic self. He introduced this government of the self by reflecting on personal virtues, freedom, and objectivity. Before exploring these issues, I briefly describe Bello's epistemological context, which was characterized by the transition from romanticism to positivism during the post-independence period.

### 3. Bello's philosophical context: from romanticism to positivism

In the mid-nineteenth century, the Latin American countries gained political independence from Europe. However, the independence of the mind from Europe remained unachieved (Zea, [El pensamiento latinoamericano](#)). In this context, two philosophical and epistemological perspectives were crucial for critiquing the remaining colonial legacies and imagining the new nation-states or 'communities of shared knowledge' (Miller, [Republics of knowledge](#)): romanticism and positivism. The former was used to justify and pursue the autonomy and emancipation of the Latin American mind and cultural independence from Europe, which became known as the Second Independence (Pinedo, [El concepto segunda independencia en la historia de las ideas en América Latina](#)). Positivism played an essential role in state-building from a scientific perspective. Both perspectives agreed on the need to create new ways of thinking beyond Spanish colonialism.

Latin American intellectuals drew mainly from romanticism two elements: the exploration of national values and destiny, both of which helped them to display the historical roots that were preventing the realization of their identity and culture (Zea, [El pensamiento latinoamericano](#)). They conducted multiple historical analyses to showcase the negative reality of the period after the political independence. In 1844, Jose Victorino Lastarria wrote 'Investigations on the Social Influence of the Spanish Conquest and Colonial Regime in Chile'. In this text, Lastarria criticized the adverse colonial effects on Chilean society. Although many sympathized with the criticism of Spanish colonization and its legacy, some took a more moderate position and valued the colony's positive aspects. For example, Bello was convinced that the Spanish colonization had some positive elements, as exemplified in his early poems (Jaksic 2010). According to Bello, negative aspects do not necessarily come from European remnants but from human nature (Zea, [El pensamiento latinoamericano](#)). Commenting on Lastarria's text, Bello pointed out that 'Injustice, atrocity, perfidy in war, have not been of the Spaniards alone, but of all races, of all centuries' (Bello 1957:161).

Likewise, during his lifetime, Bello was part of an intellectual movement that aimed to distance Latin American countries from European enlightenment. The belief was that there was nothing for Latin America to learn from Europe and that a new form of modern knowledge should emerge from these countries (Miller, [Republics of knowledge](#); Zea, [El pensamiento latinoamericano](#)). Many intellectuals wrote books on grammar, literature, and philosophy with the intention of liberating the Latin American mind. Bello was concerned about the fragmentation of culture and language after Independence. There were also institutional efforts to make these ideals a reality. For example, the Faculty of Philosophy and Humanities of the University of Chile tried to create a new grammatical



institution for the Spanish language, opposing the one existing in Spain (Serrano, [Universidad y nación](#)).

In this context, positivism emerged in Chile. While romanticism was used to criticise the cultural and religious legacies of colonialism, positivism was seen as a perspective primarily concerned with state-building and social order (Zea, [Dos etapas del pensamiento en Hispanoamérica](#)). It was believed that positivism contributed to the construction of new nation-states. The introduction of positivism to Chilean society was based on the idea that the practical application of scientific research could help establish social order, which was passionately sought and became the object of most intellectual projects. As a result, positivism became the governing episteme during the Republic period.

In Chile, two different perspectives of positivism were present: heterodox and orthodox. The former aimed to critique the dominance of the Catholic Church in the education system (Jaksic [Academic rebels in Chile](#)) and to progress beyond the society's religious and metaphysical stage, following Comte's Law of Three Stages. Among the early heterodox positivists, Lastarria's goal was to apply a scientific approach, similar to that of the physical sciences, to study the laws of society (Lastarria, [La América](#)). According to Thomas Bader, the early heterodox positivists 'felt that their society possessed a unique potential for the future if they could but determine the Laws to which it was subject' (Bader 1970:380). They considered positivism as not being founded on metaphysical or idealistic grounds, as was the case with Hegelian or Herderian approaches, which they found inadequate for analysing social order. Despite following contradictory ideals such as *laissez-faire* and the absolutism of French positivists, they considered themselves liberals. For example, Lastarria 'tried to find a middle ground between the individualistic, anti-historical and anti-mystical positivism of the English school and the collective, historical and mystical system of August Comte' (Bader 1970:378). Lastarria advocated for an education system free from state control, a principle of liberalism. However, he also believed that the state should intervene when obstacles to progress, such as Catholic schools, remained unaddressed. In adapting positivism, he combined the ideas of freedom and progress as essential components of his philosophy.

Orthodox positivism, also referred to as the 'Religion of Humanity', was centered on providing moral guidance for social order. However, it was controversial and faced criticism, especially from English thinkers. For instance, John Stuart Mill regarded Comte's Religion of Humanity as 'the completest system of spiritual and temporal despotism ever yet emanated from a human...brain' (Quoted in Bader 1970:378). In Chile, most liberal intellectuals rejected the orthodox perspective due to its missionary zeal, including Andrés Bello. Nevertheless, some followers of the orthodox position, such as the three brothers Jorge, Juan Enrique, and Luis Lagarrigue, had significant influence within some intellectual circles. It has been argued that the influence of these thinkers and intellectual projects impeded the total secularisation of Chilean society.

#### **4. Bello's discourse of excellence: the unified academic self**

The demands of scientific and professional expertise extend beyond technical skills. Academics are also required to possess epistemic virtues (Paul & van Dongen, [Epistemic virtues in the sciences and the humanities](#)) collectively formed long before, which continually re-establish academic conduct. These virtues serve as both the epistemic and ethical foundation for scholarly work. In other words, Bello's intellectual project made the problem of the government of others (nation-building and



university-building) dependent upon an *ethical elaboration of the subject* (government of self). In his words: ‘Science and letters, apart from this social value, apart from the varnish of amenity and elegance that they give to human societies and which we must also count among their benefits, possess an intrinsic merit of their own insofar as they increase the pleasures and joys of the individual who cultivates and loves them. They are exquisite pleasures, untouched by the turbulence of the senses; they are pure joys (...) But letters and science, while they give delicious play to intellect and imagination, also elevate moral character. They weaken the power of sensual seduction and strip of their terrors most of the vicissitudes of fortune. Except for the humble and contented resignation of the religious soul, they are the best preparation for the moment of death’ (Bello 1999:263).

In this section, I discuss three themes that I have identified from Bello's ideas related to academic life. These themes are the virtues and skills required to become a knowledge producer, the practice of academic freedom, and the importance of objectivity in research. The focus of this section is to examine how Bello's ideas have helped in developing an academic self that relies on the cultivation of specific epistemic virtues.

#### 4.1. Knowledge producers: virtues and skills

According to Bello, language not only has a unifying power but also provides people with virtues and morality. What is at play in language is order. However, at the time of Bello, ‘the challenge was to move nations from the external imposition of order to an *internalized self-discipline* that achieved social and political stability while ensuring civic and personal freedoms’ (Jaksić in Bello 1999:57, my emphasis). For Bello, achieving this idea of order rested on the cultivation of reason, civic virtues, and humanistic culture (internal order), to which the study of languages was fundamental. That is why Bello fiercely defended the teaching and learning of Latin during a cultural controversy (1842-1843) led by Ignacio Domeyko and Antonio Varas (Rodríguez Freire, [La querrela de la educación pública](#); Stüven, [La seducción de un orden](#)). Bello responded to this controversy and clarified his position in a short text called *Latin and Roman Law* from 1834. According to Bello: ‘All the arguments that are made against study of the Latin language, and which *El Valdiviano Federal* [Chilean newspaper] has reproduced at length in its last issue, can be reduced to only one: that the time spent on Latin can be employed in acquiring other, more useful knowledge’ (Bello 1999:252).

Bello outlines the advantages of studying Latin in this text. According to him, it facilitates the learning of other languages like Spanish, enables access to philosophical texts, poems and compositions written in Latin, and is also the language of the religion practiced in Chile (Catholicism). Bello believes that teaching and studying classical languages, such as Latin, is of great importance for intellectual and mental development. His argument aligns with pedagogical movements that stress the connection between learning in a specific area and overall growth. Additionally, by studying the best works of genius, particularly poetry and philosophy, one can develop personal and civic virtues within the political and knowledge community. In other words, Bello claims that learning Latin contributes to a sense of totality, which in this case is nationhood and university life.

Bello believed that studying Latin or other classical languages is important for developing personal and civic virtues, especially for those working at the University of Chile. He saw a connection between the study of Latin and social order. Bello held the opinion that the defence of Latin within the University was necessary to maintain the symbolic distinction that Latin carries. Although Bello



was influenced by Bentham's utilitarian approach, he thought studying Latin was an essential part of intellectual life. He acknowledged that the application of Latin grammar in Spanish could be problematic but believed it was vital for developing personal virtues that are necessary for creating knowledge.

In this respect, Bello's speech delivered at the inauguration of the University of Chile in 1843 provides a framework that anticipates the contours of a particular experience of academic critique within the university. In his speech, Bello focused on the cultivation of virtues and skills as the key requirements for knowledge producers. He emphasised making education universal for nation-building and insisted on the need for trained 'distributors of knowledge': 'Making education universal requires a large number of carefully *trained teachers and the skills of these*, the ultimate distributors of knowledge, are in themselves more or less distant emanations of *the great scientific and literary depositories. Good teachers, good books, good methods, and good guidance of education are necessarily the work of a very advanced intellectual culture*' (Bello 1999:268, my emphasis).

There are two important issues in this quote. The first issue is that Bello believes that having trained teachers with the necessary skills is crucial for achieving universal education. According to Bello, 'the use of analytical methods [is] the only way to acquire true knowledge' (Bello 1999:275). In other words, being trained in analytical methods provides knowledge producers with the advantage of accessing true knowledge. In another text called *The Craft of History* from 1848, Bello discussed the role of European philosophy in forging Chilean knowledge and insisted that 'European philosophical works do not give us the philosophy of history of Chile. We Chileans must shape ours by the only legitimate route, which is that of *synthetic induction*' (Bello 1999:339, my emphasis). The use of these analytical skills requires an additional effort and hence: 'for the purpose of nourishing the intellect, educating it, and making it think for itself, it would be just as inappropriate to accept the moral and political conclusions of Herder, for example, without the study of ancient and modern history, as it would be to adopt Euclid's theorems without the previous intellectual labor of demonstrating them (...) Herder himself did not try to supplant the knowledge of events, but to *illustrate* them, to *explain* them' (Bello 1999:275, my emphasis).

Thus, for instance, using merely deductions and formulas: 'would mean depriving human experience of the salutary power of advice at precisely the age when it is most receptive to lasting impressions. It would mean depriving the poet of an inexhaustible vein of images and colors. And I believe that *what I am saying about history must be applied to all other branches of knowledge*' (Bello 1999:276, my emphasis).

This is to say that true knowledge or reliable knowledge claims depend on describing and explaining the events as they were. True knowledge rests on acquiring specific analytical skills (I will return to this problem in the following sections).

The second issue at play is that the source of these skills is 'the work of a very *advanced intellectual culture*' [my emphasis]. In other words, to have the status of knowledge producer meant to be integrated into the high culture in various ways. But, at the same time, 'the work of a very advanced intellectual culture' was recognised as such only if it contributed to nation-building. Therefore, as Miller put it: 'During the century after independence, the republic of knowledge was in principle open to all, and in practice a perhaps surprising number of individuals from outside the upper classes



succeeded in establishing a place for themselves, but *the price of admission was acceptance of the imperative to become modern, which came to mean being integrated into a nation-state. Any group of people that preferred to continue as a distinctive community was denied the status of knowledge producers*' (Miller 2020:220, my emphasis).

There was a strong connection between 'high culture' and 'being integrated into a nation-state'. This view was shared by Bello, to whom 'encouragement of the nation's religious and moral instruction is a duty that each member of the university assumes by the mere fact of belonging to it' (Bello 1999:268). Or more precisely, 'all the paths that the work of its faculty and students must follow converge on one center—our country' (Bello 1999:271). This statement is crucial as it indicates the importance of cultivating skills and virtues within the university, which are all devoted to nation-building and therefore social order.

#### 4.2. Freedom and the dangers of imagination

In his speech, Bello problematised the concept of freedom in relation to social order, revealing his concern about balancing tradition and change during the post-independence period's focus on nation-building. According to Jaksic: 'in a context of nation building, freedom must be closely connected with, perhaps even subordinated to, the concept of order. Bello did not think that one concept contradicted the other. Quite to the contrary, it was Bello's conviction that there could be no true freedom without restraints on personal and political passions' (Jaksic in Bello 1999:57).

In *Observance of the Laws* from 1836, Bello sketched his understanding of freedom in general terms: 'Observance of the laws restrains men; it strips away all harmful distraction, leads them to knowledge of their own interests, and places them in possession of a truth which has so much in influence on order, considered under any aspect: namely, that the best way of ensuring the respect of one's own rights is to care religiously about the rights of others' (Bello 1999:469).

For Bello, freedom is subject to the limits defined by legal codes. In other words, freedom is nothing but the realm of the law. In his speech at the inauguration of the University of Chile in 1843, Bello reiterated this same idea, but approached it from a slightly different angle: 'freedom is the stimulus that imparts healthy vigor and productive activity to social institutions' (Bello 1999:260). Bello emphasised the importance of freedom for knowledge producers and university members. However, he believed that this freedom should be balanced with discipline to prevent passionate writing practices driven by *imagination* in letters and science. In his inaugural speech, Bello warned that such practices could be dangerous and emphasised the need for regulation: 'I believe that an art exists that is a guide to the imagination, even in its most impetuous transports. Without that art I believe that imagination, instead of including in its works the type of ideal beauty, will produce aborted sphinxes, enigmatic and monstrous creations. This is my literary profession of faith. Freedom in everything. But *in orgies of the imagination I do not see freedom; I see instead licentious intoxication*' (Bello 1999:278, my emphasis).

Here Bello points to something crucial. He states that academic freedom guided by an irresponsible imagination can result in 'enigmatic and monstrous creations'. It can lead to neologisms or behaviours that do not conform to any established rules. In the case of language, if intellectuals embrace 'all the whims of extravagant neologisms, our America would soon reproduce the confusion of languages, dialects, and jargon, the Babel-like chaos of the Middle Ages, and ten





nations would lose one of their most precious instruments for communication and trade' (Bello 1999:274).

Bello then emphasises that freedom: 'As a counterweight, on the one hand, to the servile docility that receives everything without examining it; and on the other to the unbounded license that rebels against the authority of reason and against the purest and noblest instincts of the human heart, [freedom] will undoubtedly be the university's theme in all its different departments' (Bello 1999:279, my emphasis).

In other words, academic behaviour was accompanied by a lengthy discourse insisting on freedom and its intrinsic value. However, the concept of freedom also required certain boundaries to prevent excessive indulgence in imagination. According to Bello, these boundaries can be enforced through an art of self-government, which is like the Foucauldian notion of government of the self.

### 4.3. Objectivity in historical research

Bello believed that universities played a vital role in defining the social order. This position led him to focus on scientific research methods, particularly the role of history in the construction of the Republic. However, Bello was aware that the study of history could be either divisive or a powerful tool for the construction of national unity. Therefore, he believed that the study of the past should not be politicized, to avoid the emergence of disparate political proposals for the future.

Bello and Lastarria were involved in a dispute regarding historical research methods, where the former represented a *science of events* and the latter a *philosophy of history*. Lastarria wrote an essay titled 'Investigations on the Social Influence of the Spanish Conquest and Colonial Regime in Chile', in which he rejected the Iberian past and aimed to build a truly independent future. He claimed that his conclusions were based on an impartial and objective examination of historical facts. Furthermore, he stated that 'it was his search for objectivity that prevented him from writing about the more recent events of independence, where impartiality was nearly impossible' (Jaksić in Bello 1999:59). Lastarria believed he could achieve objectivity by distancing himself from recent historical events. In his own words: 'I could also, and no doubt more easily, have spoken about the important events of our glorious revolution; but *I have been constrained, I admit, by the fear of not being completely impartial in my researches (...)* In that case my comments would be, if not offensive, at least tiresome and fruitless, and hence *I do not think that I have sufficient instruction and other gifts*, lacking in a young man, to rise to the heights necessary to judge events that I have not seen and have had no means of studying philosophically. Because our revolution is still in process, we are not prepared to construct its philosophic history. But *we are engaged in the task of discussing and accumulating data, in order to transmit them, along with our opinion and the result of our critical studies, to another generation which will possess the true historical criterion and the necessary impartiality to judge them*' (Lastarria 1844:17, my emphasis).

The 'fear of not being completely impartial' or the fear of subjectivity interfering with objectivity was Lastarria's primary concern in this text. Bello admitted the difficulties of studying recent historical events in his reply: 'No doubt it is hard for the present generation to judge impartially the events and persons of our revolution; and moreover, it is almost impossible to do so even impartially and truthfully without arousing denials, without pressing the alarm button of sleeping passions, which it would be desirable to extinguish' (Bello 1999:308).



However, Lastarria's fear of not being completely impartial was unjustified, and, according to Bello, it stemmed from a lack of skills. For Bello, 'There is no lack of materials to consult, if they are sought intelligently and patiently in private collections, in archives, and in trustworthy traditions' (Bello 1999:311). Bello aimed to establish skills and virtues for studying historical events. The key was to master methodological skills such as factual accuracy, judgment, and accountability, regardless of the period being analysed.

Indeed, in his commentary on *Historical Sketch of the Constitution of the Government of Chile during the First Period of the Revolution 1810 to 1814* written by Lastarria in 1848, but whose Prologue was composed by another historian called Jacinto Chacon, Bello considers that 'the first step [to undertake historical research] is to get the facts straight, then to explore their spirit, demonstrate their connections, reduce them to broad and comprehensive generalizations' (Bello 1999:329). And then he continues his argument against the philosophy of history represented by Lastarria and Chacon: 'And may we be permitted to say (though at the cost of seeming antiquated and outdated) that *we learn to know men and social evolution more thoroughly in the good political historians of antiquity and modern times, than in general and abstract theories that are called "philosophy of history."* These theories are not really instructive and useful except for those who have contemplated the social drama that pulses in historical details' (Bello 1999:330, my emphasis).

That is to say, 'getting the facts straight' was the most relevant skill to be mastered for studying historical events. The *evidence* became then the quintessence of the science of events. Bello insisted that '*It is a duty of history to tell the facts as they were, and we must not soften them simply because they do not seem to do honor to the memory of Chile's founders*' (Bello 1999:312, my emphasis).

It is important to note that Bello's concerns about developing certain skills are closely related to his experience conducting historical research at the British Museum. Bello's analysis of the origins and evolution of vernacular Spanish led him to conduct documentary and archival research to gather evidence and make claims and interpretations with great care. This experience seems to have left a lasting impression on Bello's understanding of scientific research and was crucial in his response to Lastarria's *investigations*.

However, Bello emphasised that scientific research required not only the use of evidence, but also the interpretation of such evidence, as he mentioned in his response to Lastarria: 'The picture that *Señor Lastarria* gives us of the vices and abuses of Spain's colonial regime is based largely on documents of irreproachable authenticity and veracity: laws, ordinances, histories, the *Memorias secretas* of Don Jorge Juan and Don Antonio de Ulloa. But many distorting nuances have blurred the picture; *there is something that disclaims the impartiality recommended by the law*' (Bello 1999:315, my emphasis).

In general, Bello's response to Lastarria and Chacon is centred around his refusal to accept a philosophical approach to history, particularly one that prioritises imagination over facts. He rejects the idea of using any philosophy that disregards the importance of factual evidence. According to Bello: 'We must distinguish between two kinds of philosophy of history. One of them is simply the science of humanity in general, the science of moral and social laws, independent of local and temporal influences, and as necessary manifestations of man's intimate nature. The other is, comparatively speaking, a concrete science, which deduces from the facts of a race, a people, or a



period, the peculiar spirit of that race, people, or period, just as we deduce the genius, the nature of an individual, from the facts about him' (Bello 1999:338).

These quotes illustrate an intellectual position opposed to fantasies of imagination, metaphysics, biased judgment, and poetry, which are far from logic and the testimony of facts: 'in the absence of a picture in which events, persons, and all the material details of history appear in rough form, merely tracing general outlines has the defect of allowing scope for many theories, and of partially disfiguring the truth' (Bello 1999:342).

The lack of objectivity affects the truth and the constitution of knowledge aimed at nation-building. Towards the end of the text "The Craft of History," Bello posed some fundamental questions that still resonate in academia: 'With which of the two methods [science of events or philosophy of history; or the *ad probandum* method or the *ad narrandum* method] should we begin to write our history? With the one that provides the antecedents or the one that deduces the consequences? With the one that clarifies the facts, or the one that comments on them and summarizes them?' (Bello 1999:342).

As we may already know, Bello opted for the science of events or the narrative method instead of the philosophy of history promoted by Lastarria and Chacon. Bello believed that the narrative method considered the unique characteristics of Chile, which was crucial in his view. As a result, Bello's decision to choose the science of events led to criticisms that established a new form of academic critique that still influences the academic sphere in Chile. Bello's criticism of Lastarria and Chacon was also intended to caution future generations on how to conduct themselves in scientific research. Bello admitted it towards the end of his text: 'We beg our readers' pardon. We have prolonged somewhat tiresomely the defense of a truth, of an obvious principle, that for many is a trivial one. But we wanted to speak to young people. Our young men have taken up the study of history eagerly; we have recently seen brilliant proofs of their progress in this field, and we could wish that they fully understand the true mission of history in order to study it successfully' (Bello 1999:348).

This is how Bello set the building blocks of a model of academic behaviour attached to ways of working and research practices. I argue that this model was guided by an *ethics of excellence*, which established the criteria for including or excluding individuals from making knowledge claims. This is evident in the debate between Lastarria and Chacon.

## 5. The ethics of excellence as a model of academic behaviour: a discussion of the spectres of Bello

Bello contributed to the early institutionalisation of intellectual labour in Chile (Ramos, [Divergent modernities](#)). That is, Bello sowed the seeds for cultivating a particular academic self (a normative framework of personhood) at the dawn of the Republic of Chile. Following Peter Galison's claim about the history of objectivity and subjectivity, one could argue that 'a kind of historical self a priori' (de Stefano 2015:97), which is not a transcendental or abstract individual subject but a local and contingent one, emerged during this period. Bello played an essential role in this historical task. The question behind these considerations is then: what must be true about the academic self in order for knowledge production to exist? This 'historical self a priori' set the limits of the self in a way that academic life and knowledge production were possible within the University of Chile. Yet, it is not



Bello, the person, that is at stake here, but Bello as a mechanism or technology of power. Bello's house is the contemporary representation (space and place) of this mechanism.

Language, education, and history were all significant elements in Bello's intellectual national unity project. That is why Bello insisted that 'all the paths that the work of its faculty and students must follow converge on one center—our country' (Bello 1999:271). Bello's search for order is crucial to understanding the cultivation of a unique academic self which later in the country's history will support and conflict with new forms of subjectivity. This order, I argue, entailed not only the need for codifying a government of others (epistemological and institutional framework) but also a government of self (ethical limits); that is, the demands of ethical transformation of the academic self that extend beyond institutional framework. This means, in practice, the configuration of ethics concerned with the *best behaviour and knowledge*. Thus, a model of academic behaviour organised essentially around a *principle of ethical differentiation* (the right to exclude to protect the national university project from an unknown other) was brought into play during the creation of the University of Chile.

I have called this principle the *ethics of excellence*. The contemporary form of this ethics is the end result of particular associations, densities, practices and articulations all of which were constituted by exclusionary practices aiming to defend the National University project during the post-independence period: a particular form of *academic freedom* (or curiosity) separated from 'the orgies of imagination'; and a specific mode of *objectivity* attached to a science of facts and distanced from subjective interpretations, utopian ideas or alternative futures. Put differently, a unified, free-of-extravagant imagination and self-restrained academic self was forged for the nation-building project.

To achieve excellence involved undertaking a series of ethical practices that required a particular relation to oneself, others, and truth -or also, the subject's relation to self and others is dependent on a particular form of excellence. It was the search for the 'best behaviour and knowledge' to serve the construction of the nation-state, which, as Miller points out, 'can be revealingly interpreted as a community of shared knowledge' (Miller 2020:218). In other words, and rephrasing Foucault, excellence does not depend on defining an ideal or abstract form of being exceptional or on the moral quality of a distinguished academic but on how academics have formed themselves as ethical subjects; that is, how the ethical elaboration of the academic-subject can bring out in herself and in front of the others the difference of a specific knowledge and practice (Foucault, [The courage of truth](#)). At the centre of these concerns lies *academic freedom*, which determines creativity's and objectivity's dynamic and scope. Thus, academic freedom is not merely a personal virtue, an ideal or abstract condition for the possibility of critique but an activity that demands a particular relation to oneself and others historically and socially situated. For instance, being an active scholar within a university means having the freedom to speak the truth even if it makes others uncomfortable or if one runs the risk of confronting official knowledge. Bello was himself driven by the freedom to speak the truth to his colleagues.

Bello's search for the best behaviour and knowledge was driven by his obsession for national unity and the seduction for social order (Stuven, [La seducción de un orden](#)). He believed that not only the anonymous mass but also the university members, who were entitled to exercise critique and fated to build the Republic, should possess the best behaviour and knowledge. Bello introduced the institutional framework of national unity and social order in the academic life structure. This



framework allowed for the distinction between good and bad academics and between valuable and futile knowledge that could contribute to the nation's progress. For him, a good academic was someone who was preoccupied with the nation's interest and progress by cultivating *unity*, *freedom*, and *objectivity* in scientific research. These elements were put into practice and had a significant impact on creating an ethical differentiation amongst academics. It is not just the level of scientific research that matters, but also the implementation of certain virtues while conducting research that determines the quality of the work. These epistemic virtues created a gap between those who abide by them and those who do not. One of Bello's primary endeavours was to make these distinctions possible.

Bello's critique of Lastarria and Chacon (and others) can be situated within this framework. It was not only an epistemological critique concerning impartiality and objectivity in research methods but also had *ethical implications* for the academic community: it set the limits and possibilities of critique. Bello's concern with historical methods informed what was acceptable to say and do in research, shaping contemporary research practices. As a result, Bello's critique excluded specific modes of critical attitudes within academia. This normative critique established the boundaries of what is possible in academic research. Essentially, Bello introduced a lengthy discourse into a model of academic behaviour, creating an ethical difference within the subject's knowledge and epistemic virtues.

Bello's critique of 'the orgies of imagination' have had a similar result. It was not merely the preoccupation with 'enigmatic and monstrous creations' when telling the history of Chile. He believed that this approach should be avoided as it could lead to absurd proposals for the future. Bello's positivist preference is evident in this point. It is the enlightened reason over imagination. Bello's search for national unity led him to emphasise what is *real* (positive ideas or reality's primary causes) over what is *possible*. The latter would entail a metaphysical position unacceptable to Bello. Bello's critique was concerned with maintaining order and setting limits on the fantasies of imagination or utopian thought. He believed that imagination must be subordinated to reason to create a community of shared knowledge. That is, what he brought into play was a *disciplined imagination*. Without a free imagination as central to the image of the self, nation's interest would prevail over absurd proposals for the future. Bello's emphasis on what is real reflects an ethics of excellence that seeks to maintain order. That is why Lastarria's, but mainly Chacon's, imaginative speculations over the Republic's past and future were the centres of Bello's most furious attacks.

That framework of acceptable behaviour or comportment and what counts as good and valid research or what counts as valuable knowledge still seems to influence academic life today. Bello brought into play a picture of the academic self, like the one he was trained in Europe, combining the English and French traditions, in which independence of thought was crucial, but different from the one prevailing in Chile at that time, at least from Lastarria's and Chacon's perspective. The triumph of Bello's ethical differentiation put the ethics of excellence at the centre of academic life. That is the distinctive element of excellence that still prevails: a model of academic behaviour underpinned by the national unity that excludes in order to defend the university from 'the orgies of imagination' and 'utopian ideas'.

However, the demands of knowledge or ethical formation (epistemic virtues) are irreducible to (traditional) forms of domination. Instead, it has to do with modes of subjectivation and practices of the self that have evolved since the foundation of the Republic. The cultivation of new epistemic



virtues emerging from the neoliberal subject sometimes conflicts with this model of academic behaviour forged at the dawn of the Chilean university system.

The contradictory aspect of Bello's spectres is that they can result in practices of resistance or accommodate the current power relations governing academic life. In other words, Bello's model of academic behaviour is not only reproduced through the exclusion of critical approaches, attitudes, or fissures, sometimes violently (as seen in the case of Lastarria and Chacon) but also through the mobilisation of counter-conducts, especially in the context of neoliberalism. Bello's adherence to national unity and the needs of the state and the Republic might serve as guiding principles and ethical practices to counteract the marketisation of academic life. The neoliberal agenda in education is driven by market demands, which means the reduction of the state's role. Bello's national unity spirit appears as a counter-practice in response. Conservative politicians often attack Bello's house not necessarily because of its existence, but because of the reproduction of a particular critique of academic capitalism. Therefore, the passion for order mobilised by Bello plays a twofold role: it excludes critical attitudes and fissures through the production of images and, at the same time, defines the possibilities of thinking and acting differently. However, this possibility is contingent upon the existence of neoliberalism, which is a central tension in Bello's model of academic behaviour.

## Conclusion

The genealogy undertaken took Bello as a technology of knowledge/power, not as an individual subject or historical object. This means that Bello comes back as a presence, spectre, or ghost (a colonial and anti-colonial one simultaneously) events (e.g., scientific fraud) and academics' contingency of normality. By understanding Bello as a *dispositif*, I suggest he has become a *myth*, or more precisely the 'Mythological Machine' (Jesi, [Materiali mitologici](#)) in university life. This 'machine' is mobilised through innumerable biographies, historical texts (historiography), articles, images, tributes, and references to his figure within and outside Bello's house. Interestingly, the way this machine advances is not because of its content but for its capacity to dismantle the possibility to resist (the right to exclude), or rather, for its capacity to create a form of life embedded in *painful sacrifices* (Bubbio, [Sacrifice in the post-Kantian tradition](#)).

In this paper, I have argued that a model of academic behaviour was forged during the birth of the first university (which coincided with the construction of the Republic after political independence. This model was defined through a government of the self), i.e., the structure of possible actions of others and self (Foucault, [The subject and power](#)), which constituted a sort of ethical limits that defined academics' attitudes toward knowledge. This government established two ethical practices: a form of academic freedom separated from imagination and a form of objectivity separated from utopian ideas. I have suggested that this art of government can be grouped under the category of excellence since it sets the limits to protect the national project from 'the orgies of imagination' and 'utopian ideas'. The way the ethics of excellence is exercised depends on how unity, freedom and objectivity are internalised and cultivated by academics. Thus, excellence can be understood as the myth, or the mythological machine, that reproduces the spectres of Bello within universities.

The legacy of Bello, a prominent academic figure in Chilean history, continues to influence, as a ghostly and repetitive figure, academic critique within Chilean universities. While this unified academic ideal has since fragmented into multiple identities, a fundamental model of academic



behaviour that emphasises order and practicality still shape the academic experience. This model is often invoked during political controversies, social protests, ethical dilemmas, or discussions of academic excellence. However, it clashes with other subjective experiences, material realities, and power relations, particularly the influence of neoliberalism, making it difficult to understand the complex dynamics at play.

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