

# Can the Common Good Be Reduced to My Welfare or Done Together-With-Others?

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*The common good as a universal value, analyzed at the individual and collective or social level, is found in the management of information and libraries. Three common trends are presented: welfare, progress/development and none of the above, by way of individual and collective reflection, regarding the transition at the beginning of 2021. To which horizon should we direct our attention based on what has been done and today's reality? The choice is in the hands of each individual. The personal and individual position influences the performance directed or not towards the common good of a group or community of any size. The results impact the trajectory of the library and information professional: to fulfill for my welfare or to serve beyond myself.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The common good as a political propaganda slogan, as an objective of team “X” and even as an argument to motivate a change, is usual. Undoubtedly, the two words used together have a desirable, appreciated value and, like meaning or common truths, do not require complex thinking to understand their essence.

The world's complexity is current and of all times; sometimes difficult and sometimes very difficult. At any time it is common to evoke the good. The good, it justifies itself.

In the professional field of information and libraries and with a high component of service to someone, surely we have all wondered at some time about **the good** of our work. Then, if we have already made or continued a career in the same field, it means that we have found something good in it.

Does the reach of the good reduce to the acquisition of my individual welfare with a university degree that gives me access to a job/salary/social status? Or, my scope (possibility or action) extends beyond myself.

Among colleagues who have seriously wondered and answered, I like the far-reaching proposal of Lankes (2019) who, in one of his most recent works says, “My goal in this book is to show you the potential of libraries to improve your community and society at large.” (p. 9). I also believe so and therefore I am encouraged to show my journey from the conceptual, with three trends in the public domain and now properly, the development of my answers based on my professional practice complemented with some selected authors of sociology, philosophy and of course, librarianship, around the common good.

It is important to say that my analysis and reflection is based on my professional practice in the field of the research community and postgraduate studies in the Mexican public sector. The academic environment is the determining factor for the discourse herein described, but it is not exclusive to that environment.

## THE COMMON GOOD AS THE BASIS FOR INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

One of the authors who defines the common good in a broad manner, Sánchez García (2015), describes it as follows:

...the common good [...] is the goal to which the community tends: the realization of this [the good of the community]. (p. 138)

Therefore, the community's common good is also that of the person acting in common. Without this good, the person cannot develop and perfect himself/herself, since it implies the use of his/her freedom regarding the inclination towards social life. (p.139)

A few simple examples taken from the working life of a librarian may serve to better understand the definition provided, so let's consider the following:

- The cataloging and classification of documents **for** the integration of an access catalog to the library's collection;
- To organize collections on the shelf **in order to** facilitate the location of the material...

In both activities, the initial activity involves one or more members of the library team, which in turn is part of a university or other organization, and serves a specific community: to train professionals or citizens who can work anywhere in the world.

In other words, the individual activity has a positive or negative impact on both the person who does it and the person who receives it; person to person/person to community/team or group to person or community.

The impact scale of human actions is variable; thus, the librarian who organizes the books on the shelf as a primary and daily activity could contribute significantly to the time management of the University Chancellor. And if, on the other hand, a call from the Chancellor to another Chancellor could generate an attractive program of exchange visits among his/her librarians.

If everything is so clear, why is the common good scarce or not so clear and hidden in the actions of different areas? Has it always been this way or now more than before?

The following section contains three trends of our time in which <<everything is apparently going well>>.

## WELFARE/WEALTH/HAPPINESS/WELL-BEING

Who doesn't like to move around his/her comfortable home that is illuminated subtly or brightly and in shades of color, according to the configuration of the unit? Or any technological development that in the field of information and libraries really makes life easier for all of us, users and librarians. For example, digital collections available 24/7/365 and from anywhere.

For many, individually and even as a society, welfare is the goal. In the documentary film *The Swedish Theory of Love: The Triumph of the Welfare State (2015)*, we talk about the individual and social advantages and disadvantages when all the effort and resources are focused on achieving only material and economic goods: housing, education, health services, employment and entertainment for all.

Some may say: what else can I do if that's all I need to be happy in this world? The United Nations Development Program (UNDP), although in 1990 it considered not only welfare but also human development, which has to do with the use of goods at the discretion of each person, lately, its activity in the world tends to achieve welfare only.

Welfare in our field can even be illustrated by what is sometimes referred to as organizational productivity and integrated with job descriptions, regulations, procedures and reward systems. All these

things are useful and help to meet objectives, goals and tasks, but limiting ourselves to results, to reduce service times, to have data for statistics and reports, it reminds me about the global trend towards the certification of services with ISO 9000. In some of the courses I took, the instructor was insisting that only certified services would survive, but he did not know what to say when I asked him about The British Library or The Library of Congress, which existed before ISO 9000 and are a world reference without ISO 9000.

An example of welfare, but from the user's side? Yes, there are, too. Those that are limited to meet the minimum number of articles published per year, of graduate students per year. And when you're a student and you're focused on getting the highest grade, I think, welfare is the main motivation. This level of welfare, I repeat, is not bad, but even as welfare one can only aspire to another level, as Popcak (2016) states in his chapter 9:

<<Growing>> is another way of referring to <<welfare>>. When we say, "I don't want to just survive. I want to grow," what we generally want to say is that "I don't want to hobble along as a disjointed collection of unmet and conflicting needs. I want to feel peace, fulfillment and satisfaction in all aspects of my life."

So, what do we expect when welfare is not enough?

## **PROGRESS/HUMAN DEVELOPMENT/FLOURISHING**

That human and natural desire for <<more>>, not to be satisfied with the average, of curiosity (or genuine desire to understand) and openness (opposite of closed-mindedness) to try to attend to or fill the existential gap we have left, there are three common attitudes, according to Popcak (2016) in his chapter 2: the addict-like, the stoic-like, or the mystic-like.

In order to continue with the central subject of the common good, it should be said that there are two sides to the progress/human development coin: the individual and the community-based or social side. And if the study of the human person as an individual is complex and broad, a group or community is even more so. Therefore, it should always be kept in mind when reading this paper and any other.

As mankind, the desire for more, approached from sociology, finds in Nisbet (1986) one of its leading scholars and from the perspective of **progress**:

...the perspective of progress is used, particularly in the modern world, to sustain hope in a future characterized by individual freedom, equality and justice. (p. 1)

Like many others, Nisbet is just one of those who think that it is through the exercise of individual freedom, equality and justice that we can best address the shortcomings and go further along the path of evolution.

Miklos Lukacs (2020): among the young people born in the last century and who are living, observing and analyzing world events from sectors such as science and technology and with particular attention to the progress and future of mankind, in 42 minutes he offers an overview of real progress and what it is not; his questions at the end challenge us all. For example, "Is it progress to silence [block] anyone who doesn't think like the majority?"

Let us now move on to specify what could be considered as the proposal (at least in theory) that could best address the human needs, desires or wishes for <<more>>>.

**Human development**, in the 1990 UNDP report, defines it as follows:

...process in which human opportunities are expanded...these opportunities can be infinite and change over time...at all development levels, the three most essential are enjoying a long and healthy life, acquiring knowledge and having access to the resources necessary to achieve a decent standard of living...Other opportunities, highly valued by many people,

range from political, economic and social freedom, to the possibility of being creative, respecting oneself and enjoying the guarantee of human rights.

Human development has two aspects. The development of human capabilities - such as improved health, knowledge and skills - and the use that people make of the acquired capabilities - for leisure, production, cultural, social and political activities. If human development fails to balance these two aspects, it can generate considerable human frustration. (p. 34)

The first section includes what has already been explained as welfare; the novelty, the final one, which refers to the possibility of elevating to a creative level what is received only as welfare and which remains at the person's criteria. In the second section, and as a consequence of the above, he describes consequences such as the frustration of the person if he lacks a minimum of freedom and creativity in the use of his new skills.

Despite this, the cycle of born-grow-produce-consume is still evident; it is progress but not integral human development, so let's see what the Harvard University Program's proposal for human flourishing alludes to.

In The Human Flourishing Program at Harvard's Institute for Quantitative Social Science, conducted by VanderWeele (2017, p. 8151), explains in Fig. 1. Chart that links pathways to several outcomes of human flourishing, where the four important and common pathways that should be supported to enhance and promote human growth are: **family, work, education and community**.

VanderWeele (2017), in his academic profile regarding health sciences refers to human flourishing as follows:

However, there are long-standing traditions that suggest that flourishing consists of something more than one's mental state and how one feels about various aspects of life. (p. 8149)

When the author states that the human being is more than the state of his or her mental health and how this feels in at least six aspects that he identifies as important in human life, it can be seen that the proposed model is broader than the aspiration for material welfare alone.

Thus, the consequences or results for human flourishing would be substantial, in the following domains, which are also common, although not exclusive, as described by the aforementioned author:

Domain 1: Happiness and life satisfaction. Domain 2: Physical and mental health.

Domain 3: Meaning and purpose.

Domain 4: Character and Virtue.

Domain 5: Close social relationships.

Domain 6: Financial and material stability.

The achievement of material welfare is in domain 6; if we remember the pyramid or hierarchy of human needs of the psychologist A. Maslow (1970), we find similarities with VanderWeele: at the base the material and as we ascend, at the top, transcendence/happiness and satisfaction in life.

One of the novelties in VanderWeele's (2017) model of human flourishing is the role of family and community. That is to say, that in such areas of individual and collective interpersonal relationships, the social dimension or relationships with others, through private life and in the encounter with them, there is a valuable potential to reach happiness and transcend.

The other point that does not appear in VanderWeele's chart, but which he discusses in his article, is the role of religion and spirituality. Among Christians, it is recognized as the path to human transcendence.

Up to here, we have to choose from:

- To aspire to mere welfare at different levels, to progress and development/human flourishing;
- Individual and community, and
- The way to reach the summit of life.

Perhaps someone may wonder, with all that has been said, is there anyone in his/her personal life, peer group or belonging to “X” activity, institution, society, etc., who does not at least consider welfare?

## NEITHER WELFARE NOR DEVELOPMENT

Although it seems difficult to be like this, yes, it does happen that, at some point in our lives, due to ignorance or convenience, we do not even consider our own benefit in our lifestyle.

Life, from adulthood onwards, gradually places us in our rightful place; there is no such thing as good luck or bad luck.

Just to invite and motivate reflection, I propose the following phrases, read or heard somewhere:

- It is more common to seek the personal good than the common good.
- Evil is the absence of good. Evil is self-destructive.
- Freedom is not the right not to obey; freedom is not saying no!
- Action is morally good when free choices are in accordance with the true good of man (the person).

Some examples in our scope in which at least some doubt remains as to their relevance:

- To participate in training activities only for the certificate or for fulfilling the commitment/requirement, in order to move up to a higher position.
- To publish just in order not to perish. To collaborate through co-citations (citations between the same members of the working group).
- To collaborate in the formation of human resources with participation limited to “friends and their friends,” rather than to those who know the subject.
- Multidisciplinary directors or any degree thesis/reception paper topic, in order to achieve/maintain popularity.

## CONCLUSIONS

The verbiage of an official style that causes confusion does not help anyone; it is a requirement to call things by their name in order to fulfill our professional commitment and thus, only in this way, build a trajectory that leaves a mark (transcend).

Among colleagues who have worked on the issue of the common good, such for example Solimine (2012), he appeals to the already known alliance between the library with the university or other educational system level to do our part or perish; proposals like this and all those that rather from sociology promote any trend that is directed towards global objectives such as open access, inclusion and others of such broad scope that, to me, they do not give me new light for a strategy that will allow me to get out of the twenty-first century challenges.

Two of the proposals by Lankes (2016) do strike me as inclusive and comprehensive, because of the following:

*Chapter 1.- Librarians are agents for radical positive change who choose to make a difference.*

In other words, in our hands we have the possibility to choose the change in our life, first; and then, to motivate-invite-propose the change in the family, in the work group and for the community. The contrary, staying in my world, does not satisfy me at all. It is comfortable and appropriate at times, while we analyze and choose to make a difference when the time comes, although not as a “rebel without a cause” but, let us remember our professional mission: leaders and people who go ahead of others, pointing out the best way to achieve an immediate or short-term objective.

*Chap. 4.-Knowledge is created through conversation—if you’re in the knowledge business, you’re in the conversation [scholarly] business.*

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Nobel Prize in Literature 1970, says about the way of doing what we do: “There is more than one way of working. If it is for humans, be sure to do it correctly. If it’s for the big or important man, make it look good.”

That “let it look good or sound good” mode, regarding Chapter 4 of Lankes (2016), certainly has an impact from me to others and whatever media I use.

For those who follow trends, for example, regarding the use of social media networks, how appropriate is it to open a profile on each one?

ResearchGate or Academia, just to mention two of the social networks related to scientific work, are used more for exchanging publications between authors, i.e., as a substitute for the land or air mail of the last century. Will the authors discuss or just explain the purposes of the PDF request?

Finally, if this is the case in scientific social networks, how are the conversations on sites such as Facebook and other similar ones, whose target audience is broader and therefore of different topics?

At the time, my Facebook profile was available for my professional and institutional service but not with constant activity from anywhere. I tried to be in the “conversation business,” as Lankes states, “with no highs or lows.” I closed the profile in the same way, without “with no highs or lows.”

On the other hand, where I do consider that something interesting happens, is in every face-to-face encounter with students and/or researchers from my work community. The pleasant feeling of “high-level conversations”, I say, that are achieved, it is difficult to express in words. I am not talking about technical discussions regarding the solidification of steel, the removal of arsenic or the use of video games for the rehabilitation of the hand or others; I am talking about the openness of one and the other to share some recent or past event of the personal life that manifests itself in the joy, sorrow or sadness of the moment and that affects the willingness to devote body and soul to study, teaching or laboratory work.

When individual humanity is exposed, it reveals not only where we come from and what we are moving towards, but who we are at the moment. To become aware of this is very important; if I achieve it as an information and library professional, but before that, as a human being like the user, I will have in my hands the possibility of inviting-motivating-persuading towards a creative and transcendent horizon. My user is already involved in an environment in which not everyone can develop; the rigor, demand and systematicity of scientific work is the vocation of only a few.

I think that information and library professionals who work in the academic and research environment are called upon to keep up with users; in academic training, but more in the development of skills that some call “soft” and that have to do with creative thinking and with all the human faculties (reflection, imagination, memory).

If I am not clear about who I am, where I come from and where I am moving my life, I will be easy prey in any field. I will hesitate, postpone, keep quiet and let opportunities pass me by or not even see them. And I will usually wait for others to say something and then join or not participate. This profile does not belong to leaders, nor to those who dare to start a dialogue about everyday topics such as the ambient temperature, nor to those who manage to promote a simple conversation.

The personal/professional/community position carries a risk: to please or not to please. Self-confidence or esteem solves it.

If the personal and professional position is directed towards the common good, there will be “works well done”; with a job well done, the environment can be transformed. We, unlike those who work on a production line of disposable things, participate directly in the process of training professionals at different levels and indirectly citizens.

It is important to develop a position to go through life, individually and professionally, because it is with what we will develop together with others. Not to do so, says the English writer and novelist Lewis (1965): “Haughty indifference is not a feature of genius, nor proof of integrity, but laziness and incompetence.” (p. 112)

When our attention is focused on the majorities: the community (mass), the students, the managers, the newcomers, the work group, or only on the minorities: the quiet one, the distracted one, the tall one...to place **labels** so that everything works according to a plan, with a lot of objectivity, but without subjectivity, without

taking into consideration the individuality of each person, is incomplete. I consider that to fulfill everybody equally is to leave aside the service's fineness, maybe it is not giving that extra time to the introverted one or quickly dismissing the bad-tempered one so that he/she leaves us alone and we can continue accumulating data that will give us big graphs and many pages in the report of the month-semester-year.

I am not in tune with the marketing of "customized services" that are more about consumption, or rather consumerism. Our work is not just a product but more such a service that, although it can be measured, I do not compare it to a well-made chair; I consider that a smile and a sincere "thank you" is a sign of a job well done but difficult to quantify. Automatically, it can be stated, and rightly so, that smiles are not enough to live on, nor are the million-dollar subscriptions to the platforms of any scientific literature publishing company paid for. Right, that is the reason why I insist on the challenge of **being with each and every one individually and at the same time**. And how to do it?

As I am a woman, Mexican, daughter, sister, neighbor, information and library professional...**with my whole being**, which is not reduced to academic degrees, positions or salary, it is up to me to interact every day with the person (student, researcher, director, etc.) that I have in front of me and that gives me the opportunity to serve, but not only by giving him/her the *paper* or *the impact factor of the journal in which he/she will publish*, but also, with that extra that can motivate, leave doubt, encourage or maybe just receive the books that he/she returns, with the kindness and silence that makes him/her realize that he/she is not in his/her office. And in order to do that I need a self-assurance and self-confidence that is superstar-proof in technology and engineering; I'm talking about an open attitude, of interaction "among peers" but not equals. The analogy of being like "the pinch of salt that gives flavor to the stew", I like and it summarizes the proposal.

At this **time of transition** at the beginning of 2021, to which horizon should we direct our gaze? It is necessary to carefully review how we have done it before. It is always useful to ask oneself whether

is it the best? is it fair? is it wise? Is it the only thing I can do or is it the only thing I want? **Real time is the present**, not the future. So, change simply for the sake of change or change the way things are done, because you don't have the most current model yet or because "it's time to change" ?, it can be done.

Among my changes, which are more a corroboration of proposals that arose as concerns when interacting with others, users, close and not so close colleagues, co-workers and from the observation of my own daily life, I want to continue my professional career working along the lines of the person-to-person encounter in order to motivate-provoke the flourishing of **ideas/human intelligence** (and not so much of emotions/feelings), which is proper to the work environment where the search for scientific truth but also philosophical and other human sciences is a priority.

To continue participating in the front that neither teaches nor promotes the search for popularity over justice or efficiency, but to approach reality in order to intervene and lead to a better horizon, if required and possible.

"Thinking well," says López Quintás (2016, p. 192), "it is not something automatic like seeing." And he also adds: "...there is a generalized tendency to think with little rigor". (p. 193) The scientific work and its method cannot be carried out without thinking with rigor; whoever performs it requires a subjectivity shaped so that rigor does not cloud his/her sensitivity, which is also present and limits him/her, while inviting him/her to try again or to continue.

**To insure, to avoid risks**, it fits in the scientific work. It is not because one thinks and imagines freely that it must be done.

To insure, to avoid risks as a lifestyle makes people unable to take risks and, therefore, there can be no growth or integral human development. It makes us like "ants in a line...obeying the leader who says what to do."

It is the responsibility of all human beings to pursue individually and together with others a higher good, not just the simple good or the common good.

Integral human development includes achieving material welfare with acquired skills and then rising creatively and together-with-others. Finally, in order to incorporate the transcendence level and the higher good to the human, together-with-others, to reach the peak of happiness and that, once the passage through earthly life is over, the work done will continue to bear fruit.

There are many examples of academic life in our professional field that have transcended; at this moment the work of Gloria Escamilla González immediately comes to my mind, as a Mexican pioneer in cataloging and classification of bibliographical materials.

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