Mattering, Wellness, and Fairness:

Psychosocial Goods for the Common Good

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Abstract

Whereas the behavioral and health sciences have been mainly concerned with the private good, there is an urgent need to understand and foster the collective good. Without a coherent framework for the common good, it will be extremely difficult to prevent and manage crises such as pandemics, illness, climate change, poverty, discrimination, injustice, and inequality, all of which affect marginalized populations disproportionally. While frameworks for personal well-being abound in psychology, psychiatry, counseling and social work, conceptualizations of collective well-being are scarce. Our search for foundations of the common good resulted in the identification of three psychosocial goods: mattering, wellness, and fairness. There are several reasons for choosing them, including the fact that they concurrently advance personal, relational, and collective value. In addition, they represent basic human motivations, have considerable explanatory power, exist at multiple ecological levels, and have significant transformative potential. The complementary nature of the three goods is illustrated in an interactional model. Based on empirical evidence, we suggest that conditions of justice lead to experiences of mattering, which, in turn, enhance wellness. Challenges and opportunities afforded by the model at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, occupational, communal, national, and global levels are presented. The proposed psychosocial goods are used to formulate a culture for the common good in which we balance the right with the responsibility to feel valued and add value, to self and others, in order to promote not just wellness but also fairness.

Keywords: justice, collective well-being, mattering, common good.

Public Policy Relevance: For the behavioral sciences to have a strong impact on social, educational, and health policies, there is a need to formulate a clear conception of the common good. Such conception has been lacking. In this paper we argue that the common good consists of conditions of justice, experiences of mattering and outcomes of wellness. We illustrate the applicability of the model across ecological levels of analysis.

Mattering, Wellness, and Fairness: Psychosocial Goods for the Common Good

It is very telling that during the COVID-19 pandemic very few psychologists or psychiatrists were ever interviewed in the media to offer expert advice. This is especially surprising, given that many of the problems associated with contagion have to do with modifiable behaviors such as wearing masks, getting vaccinated, and maintaining physical distance. Whereas other disciplines, chiefly public health, have been extremely well-represented in covering the COVID-19 epidemic, mental health specialists have not been prominent in the public discourse (Karekla et al., 2021). While political scientists, economists, and environmental scientists are often featured in the media to discuss global issues, when it comes to the common good, psychologists and behavioral scientists are apparently perceived as dealing exclusively with the private good.

In recent years, motivated by factors including societal divisions, global crises, and growing inequality, political scientists (Putnam, 2021), philosophers (Sandel, 2020), economists (Ostrom, 1990; Reich, 2019; Tirole, 2019), sociologists (Etzioni, 2018), religious leaders (Sacks, 2020) and public health experts (Christakis, 2020) have revived theories of the common good. We believe that the behavioral sciences have much to offer to the common good, but in order to do so they require a coherent framework that can guide theory, research, and action. In comparison to fruitful efforts to understand and promote individual well-being, with few exceptions (e.g., Diener et al., 2009a; Payne, 2017; Watkins, 2019), work to advance collective well-being within psychology and mental health is in nascent form (Eaton et al., 2021). It is worth noting that certain subdisciplines, such as community psychology (Riemer et al., 2020), community practice in social work (Gutierrez & Gant, 2018), and public health (Heimburg & Ness, 2021; Heimburg et al., 2022; Knifton, 2015; Marmot, 2015), have invoked collective well-being, but they have not formulated an explicit, specific and integrative theory of the common good. Similarly, other subdisciplines such as feminist psychology (Rutherford & Pettit, 2015) and multicultural psychology (Balls Organista, Marin, & Chun, 2018)

have noted the crucial role of justice and equity in women's mental health and the overall well-being of people of color. However, to our knowledge, there has not been in these specialties a systematic and deliberate attempt to formulate a comprehensive and integrative theory of the common good that accounts for the unique mediating role of mattering in wellness. For the common good to flourish within the behavioral and mental health professions, we need to articulate a clear theory and present a coherent framework that takes into account the unique role of mattering in mediating between fairness and wellness. This paper is an attempt to build such a model and articulate its pillars. Our goal is to stimulate further theory, research, and action.

The common good pertains to the well-being of entire groups, workplaces, communities, nations, and the planet. *Common* refers to an object, phenomenon or policy affecting all people in a community, whether they wish to be affected by it or not (Afsahi, 2022; Warren, 2017). Thus, for example, climate change and COVID-19 affect everyone, whether we like it or not. *Good*, in turn, refers to a resource, a process, an object, or a psychosocial phenomenon that advances the well-being of people. The process of reversing global warming is a good; vaccines are a social good. The same goes for science, fresh air, clean water, access to health care, public housing, and policies of inclusion. While there are many potential sources, we believe there are three primordial psychosocial goods in the formation of the common good. The first, *fairness*, may be regarded as a sine qua non *condition* for the common good. The second, *mattering*, may be considered an essential *experience* of the common good. The third, *wellness*, represents the *outcomes* that we, as a human species, seek to achieve. Thus, in this paper we will argue for a conceptualization of the common good based on key conditions (fairness), key experiences (mattering), and key outcomes (wellness). We call it the Mattering, Wellness, and Fairness model (MWF).

Six criteria were used to identify the three psychosocial goods of our model. The criteria call for goods that (a) represent basic human motivations, (b) have robust explanatory power, (c) exist at

multiple ecological levels, (d) have transformative potential, (e) interact in integrative and complementary ways, and (f) concurrently advance personal, relational, and collective value. These criteria ensure a succinct and parsimonious framework which can inform action to promote shared beneficial outcomes for individuals, communities, and societies. Following a brief description of each, we elaborate on the MWF components and their synergy. We conclude with a call for a culture of the common good.

Criteria for Psychosocial Goods for the Common Good

Basic Human Motivations

Psychosocial goods must be responsive to biopsychosocial needs and motivations. In other words, they must attend to needs and wishes required for surviving and thriving, not just as individuals, but as entire communities. Whereas Maslow's motivational theory of needs (1943) includes physiological, safety, belonging, esteem, and self-actualization needs; the capabilities approach endorsed by Sen (2009) and Nussbaum (2011) entails life, bodily health, bodily integrity, thought, emotions, practical reason, affiliation, co-existence, play, and control over one's environment. Both Sen and Nussbaum make it clear that external conditions established by the common good are crucial in either stunting or nurturing the development of these biopsychosocial capabilities.

Explanatory Power

Foundations for the common good must account for varied phenomena, ranging from the psychological (e.g., depression, flourishing, aggression) to the political (e.g., xenophobia, ideology, social movements), economic (e.g., poverty, inequality), communal (e.g., belonging, exclusion), and global (e.g., pandemics, climate change, poverty).

Ecological Dimensions

The common good must take into account intrapersonal, interpersonal, occupational, communal, national, and global dynamics. The fact that we wish to attend to the common good does not mean that we should neglect the personal good. It is not an “either/or,” but rather a “both/and” proposition (Dewey, 1938). Unfortunately, many models of well-being concentrate on the individual and pay minimal attention to the collective dimension. We do not want to commit the opposite mistake of highlighting the collective and neglecting the personal. They are all interconnected.

Transformative Potential

We do not seek to articulate just an explanatory framework of the common good, but a transformative one as well. In other words, we wish to create a pragmatic model that can lend itself to constructive action. Tebes (2017) defined pragmatism as “a constructivist, action-focused basis for understanding human beings” (p. 29) whereas Biesta (2010) observes that pragmatism is not a philosophical system, but a “set of philosophical tools that can be used to address problems” (p. 97). As Flyvbjerg (2001) noted, pragmatic social scientists aim to “take up problems that matter to the local, national, and global communities in which we live” and “effectively communicate the results of our research to our fellow citizens” (p. 166). It is in this spirit of pragmatism that we searched for factors that are malleable and subject to human agency. Our approach is in line with Dewey’s philosophy of pragmatism (Sorrell, 2013).

Complementarity

Above and beyond the singular contribution of each component to the common good, they should complement one another. The whole should be greater than the sum of the parts. Whereas each element of the framework should provide unique insights, the synergy created by their combination should become a heuristic of significant value. Each of the three pillars is a necessary but insufficient condition for the common good.

Personal, relational, and collective value

For a psychosocial factor to be regarded foundational to the common good, it must concurrently further personal, relational, and collective well-being. Some psychosocial goods may promote the personal good, but not necessarily the collective good. For example, high self-esteem may be good for the individual, but not necessarily good for society. Similarly, some goods may be beneficial for the group, but not necessarily for the individual. For instance, sacrifice for family and community to the point of self-abnegation is detrimental to the well-being of the individual. We may also identify a good, such as justice, that without the relational value of caring, may be imparted in detached ways. Our position is in line with the ethics of care as advanced by Virginia Held (2006), who argues that justice and care are complementary. Heimburg and Ness (2021) also advance the notion that relational welfare must be at the core of a just society. Consistent with our pragmatic philosophy, Held (2006) claims that "care is both value and practice" (p. 9).

Some nations may have great social policies and government benefits, but in the absence of caring and compassion in their implementation they may be perceived as impersonal (Heimburg & Ness, 2021). We therefore seek psychosocial goods that can be beneficial to the person, the community, and the relationships among citizens at the same time. We believe that fairness, wellness, and mattering pass that test. For example, fairness in society is good for the individuals experiencing it and for society at large since fairness is conducive to trust and social belonging (Valcke et al., 2020). Mattering, in turn, is good for the people who feel valued by others, and for the community because we create a more inclusive space for everyone (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021). When it comes to wellness, we know that social support promotes personal health and social capital at the same time (Taylor, 2011). These intersections will be elaborated throughout the paper.

Having articulated the six criteria required for psychosocial goods, we now proceed to examine their relevance in fairness, wellness, and mattering. Following a brief definition of each pillar of the common good, we describe how they meet the criteria above.

Fairness

Fairness has been proposed as a constitutive element of the common good by liberal (Rawls, 2001) and communitarian philosophers alike (Sandel, 2010, 2020). Similarly, psychologists (Lind, 2020; Payne, 2017; Prilleltensky, 2012), biologists (Corning, 2011; Sun, 2013), economists (Reich, 2019; Tirole, 2019), and public health experts (Marmot, 2015; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2018), among others, have argued that fairness is a key pillar of the good society. In this section we define fairness and make a case for its foundational role in the common good.

Fairness represents a key condition for the common good. While it is often regarded as a synonym of justice, we suggest that *fairness is the practice of justice*. This definition is in line with Rawls's view of fairness as an instrument of justice (2001). It is also aligned with Corning's (2011) claim that fairness is the main conduit towards a just and good society.

To be fair is to put into practice various forms of justice (Fenton, 2021). Although various types of justice exist, owing to their comprehensive nature and contemporary relevance, we focus here on three: *distributive, procedural,* and *corrective* (Sabbagh & Schmitt, 2016). Distributive justice refers to the fair and equitable allocation of goods and resources; rights and responsibilities; gains and pains; burdens and rewards; as well as power and opportunities in society (Miller, 1999). A classic definition of justice is to each his or her due (Sandel, 2010). Health care, for example, is a social good, due everyone (Ghebreyesus et al., 2018). Questions of access to preventive, therapeutic, and rehabilitative care pertain to fairness in distributions.

The second type of fairness relevant to the common good is procedural. Whereas distributive justice pertains to *outcomes*, procedural refers to *processes* (Lind, 2020). A fair process

is one in which people express voice and choice in matters affecting their lives. Furthermore, it is a process in which decisions are made on an impartial basis. The disability rights movement, for example, adopted the slogan *nothing about us without us*, in protest of decades of paternalistic treatment (Charlton, 2000). Inclusive societies make a point of enabling all sectors to be active participants in communal affairs (Heimburg & Ness, 2021).

The third type of fairness germane to the common good is corrective (Sabbagh & Schmitt, 2016). Corrective fairness has to do with repairing harm and restoring justice. Questions of reparations for slavery, or for the holocaust, pertain to corrective fairness. When individuals or groups treat others with disdain, procedures must be put in place to repair the psychological harm. When material damage is caused, restitution must take place to make the aggrieved party whole.

Fairness is a *fundamental human motivation* (Corning, 2011; Fenton, 2021; Lind, 2020). To feel worthy as human beings, we must feel equal to others, and we must be treated with respect (Gollwitzer & van Prooijen, 2016; Miller, 2001). All human beings yearn to be treated that way (Payne, 2017). According to social neuropsychologist Matthew Lieberman (2013), fairness feels like chocolate in the brain. Lack of fairness, on the other hand, registers in our neurons as physical pain (MacDonald et al., 2005). We are hypersensitive to fairness transgressions because we have a fundamental need to be treated with dignity and respect (Kruglanski et al., 2022). We have highly evolved radars for fairness – we detect right away when someone is treating us dismissively (Fenton, 2021; Sun, 2013).

The motivation for fairness is so strong that we relish its presence and recoil from its absence. This is why fairness has great *explanatory power*. Unfair treatment explains a variety of reactions, ranging from internalizing disorders such as sadness and depression to externalizing symptoms like aggression (Riva & Eck, 2016). Whenever we are dismissed, ignored, or devalued, we feel deprived of our humanity (Williams, 2007).

In cases of exclusion and ostracism, the more unfair the rejection is deemed, the more aggressive the reaction is likely to be. In an investigation into the causes of school shootings, it was found that in 13 out of 15 cases, the perpetrators were victims of social exclusion or bullying (Leary et al., 2003).

At the occupational level, we know that unfair treatment results in psychological pain, disengagement and even sabotage (Ferris et al., 2017). At the national level, countries that enact fair policies report higher levels of health, education, happiness, and life satisfaction (Di Martino & Prilleltensky, 2020; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2018). Lack of fairness, on the other hand, results in higher levels of crime, risky behavior, illness, infant mortality, and social alienation (Case & Deaton, 2020; Payne, 2017; Marmot, 2015).

Part of granting people their due, a defining feature of fairness, is granting them respect (Kruglanski et al., 2022; Nussbaum, 2011). This is an aspect of both distributive and procedural justice, since respect may be regarded as a psychological good as well as the essence of the process of granting dignity to fellow humans. Distributive, procedural, and corrective fairness are ubiquitous in the workplace (Rogers, 2018). When employees are treated fairly and compassionately, a number of metrics improve, including financial performance, collaboration, employee retention, service quality, innovation, creativity, customer retention and ability to cope with change (Worline & Dutton, 2017). Moreover, they report higher levels of commitment and willingness to help. They perform better, identify more with the company, experience belonging, take pride in their work, trust their bosses, and engage at higher levels than those who are treated unfairly (Colquitt & Zipay, 2015).

On the contrary, those who are treated unfairly report low levels of commitment, engagement, performance, and well-being. Ostracism is a particularly painful form of unfair treatment. Ostracized workers have lower levels of well-being (Ferris et al., 2017). Lack of

procedural fairness at work results in people being silenced. In two separate studies over 70% of employees reported being afraid to speak up (Morrison, 2014).

At the community level, when gender-diverse people are exposed to minority stressors related to discrimination, their level of psychological distress goes up considerably (Pease et al., 2022). This is in part due to the lack of fairness they experience in society. Their very identity is denied or denigrated, and their personhood disrespected, leading to high levels of distress. Similarly, Black men who experience more everyday racial discrimination display more depressive symptoms (del Rio-Gonzalez et al., 2022).

We have to experience fairness not just in relationships and at work, but also in the community and society at large. Fairness exists at *multiple ecological dimensions*. There is evidence that unfair treatment in any of these arenas impairs psychological functioning (Payne, 2017), diminishes physical health (Marmot, 2015), causes distress (Case & Deaton, 2020), and can unleash liberatory (Taylor, 2016) or xenophobic social movements (Applebaum, 2020; Fukuyama, 2018). While it may seem obvious that fairness is an interpersonal concept par excellence, we argue that it is an intrapersonal phenomenon as well (Prilleltensky, 2012). People can be fair or unfair towards the self (Neff, 2012).

We concur with Nussbaum (2011) that justice and fairness are preconditions for the fulfilment of human needs and the evolution of capabilities. Fairness has tremendous *transformational potential* to improve self-compassion and self-acceptance (Neff, 2012), interpersonal relations (Dette-Hagenmeyer & Reichle, 2016; Gollwitzer & van Prooijen, 2016; Kawamura & Brown, 2010), workplace culture (Greenberg & Colquitt, 2013; Lawson et al., 2009), community relations (Wilkerson, 2020), and national policies (Di Martino & Prilleltensky, 2020).

Based on the literature reviewed above, we can conclude that the recipient of fair treatment benefits from it, as well as the people involved in the relationship and community at large. Fairness

has *personal, relational, and collective value*. Such is the case in the workplace, communities, and nations. Thus, fairness may be regarded as a primordial psychosocial good for the common good.

Wellness

Wellness is both a means and an end in itself. It is an end in itself because, by definition, it is what human beings pursue (Aristotle, 2004). We seek happiness, health, life satisfaction, and opportunities to thrive. But it is also a means because any one aspect of wellness, such as interpersonal, can enhance other aspects, such as psychological and physical (Adler & Seligman, 2016; Diener et al., 2009b; Huppert, 2014).

Wellness is a positive state of affairs, brought about by the synergic satisfaction of objective and subjective needs of individuals, relationships, organizations, communities, and nations (Diener et al., 2009b; Prilleltensky, 2012). Subjective needs include perceptions of life satisfaction, pleasurable experiences and meaningful activities, whereas objective needs include concrete resources such as nutritious foods, housing, and access to health care (Di Martino et al., 2017). Specifically, we adhere to the I COPPE model, according to which wellness consists of satisfaction in Interpersonal, Community, Occupational, Physical, Psychological, and Economic domains of life (Prilleltensky et al., 2015; Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2006). Our conceptualization is in line with Adams et al. (1997), who included in their definition and measurement of wellness multidimensional aspects such as physical, psychological, social and emotional dimensions. In fact, the I COPPE model follows a tradition of multidimensional scholarly work on wellness. In a critical synthesis of the wellness literature, Miller and Foster (2010) list thirteen different influential theories of wellness which overlap considerably with the I COPPE domains. The various models include physical, psychological, social, intellectual, occupational, economic, cultural and environmental wellness. Furthermore, our conceptualization is closely related to Gallup's multifactorial understanding and measurement of well-being (Clifton, 2022).

There is mounting evidence that the various domains interact in reciprocal fashion, and all contribute to overall wellness (Prilleltensky et al., 2015). For instance, social and community wellness impact physical wellness (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015; Shields, 2008). Occupational well-being affects psychological and physical wellness (De Neve, 2018), and psychological well-being affects physical health (Diener et al., 2017).

Wellness is a *fundamental motivation and human goal* (Huppert, 2014). Most of our behaviors are dictated by the pursuit of one type of wellness or another. We seek interpersonal wellness in friendships and romantic love, just as we seek psychological wellness in spiritual pursuits and flow. These may be considered intrinsic goods but also extrinsic in that they result in higher levels of health. Since wellness is what most human beings pursue, scholars now advocate for wellness as the ultimate goal of public policy (Evans et al., 2021; Frijters et al., 2020).

Wellness is a powerful motivator with *great explanatory power*. People go to great lengths to pursue psychological, relational, occupational, economic and physical wellness (Huppert, 2014). People seek therapy, attend mutual support groups, consume vast amounts of self-help literature, and aspire to improve their lot in life in multiple domains of life. They do so to achieve higher levels of well-being.

A sense of psychological wellness has been found to generate numerous benefits, including better social relationships and self-reported health (Adler & Seligman, 2016). Organizations that promote wellness also experience better work performance, social relationships, and physical health (Davenport et al., 2016). Lastly, at the social level, wellness has been found to be beneficial in terms of public health, social life, employment, education, and the environment (see Clifton, 2022, and Maccagnan et al., 2019).

Wellness is not just a personal attribute, for it can also be found in groups, organizations, communities, and societies; it exists in *multiple ecological spheres*. We can legitimately talk about

the wellness of an organization or a community. Is the organization effective? Do people stay or quit? Is the community safe or dangerous? What is the rate of child abuse in the community? The wellness or goodness of a particular site can be assessed through various components. For instance, individuals tend to experience wellness across multiple life domains (e.g., mental, physical, community, organizational, economic), whereas community wellness depends on social, economic, environmental, cultural, and political conditions (Wiseman & Brasher, 2008). The wellness of nations, in turn, entails ecological and geo-political environments, the healthy functioning of institutions, sustainability, trust, and the protection of human rights (Clifton, 2022; Veenhoven, 2009).

For decades, progress around the world has been measured using GDP (Adler & Seligman, 2016). Wellness can revolutionize our understanding of human progress, and *transform society*, by including measures and interventions that matter most to people: the phenomenological experience of daily living (Clifton, 2022). People's feelings, hopes, aspirations, and sense of worth are crucial constituents of the good life (Huppert, 2014). By paying attention to our lived experience, wellness can focus our collective attention on what most makes us human. And yet, as we shall argue below, a singular focus on wellness can detract from fairness and mattering, which is why we advocate for trifocal vision in this paper.

As demonstrated above, *wellness bestows benefits upon individuals, their relationships, and societies at large*. The evidence documented in this section shows that wellness is an end in itself, a vehicle for better relationships, and an important quality of the good society at the same time. Countries devote great resources to improving the wellness of their citizens, while individuals strive to uphold their own health and happiness in multiple domains of life, including psychological, physical and interpersonal. Since wellness reflects *personal, relational, and collective value*, it meets the requirements of a primordial psychosocial good for the common good.

Mattering

Mattering is a basic human motivation derived from experiences of feeling valued and adding value (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021). While mattering and significance are closely associated terms (Flett, 2018; Kruglanski et al., 2022; Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981), we use mattering to emphasize the phenomenological aspects of the psychosocial experience of social worth.

Although many writers have focused on *feeling valued* through experiences of acknowledgement, recognition, and appreciation (see Flett, 2018), we believe that *adding value* is also a critical component of mattering. That is, mattering requires that individuals contribute, participate, and make a difference. An ideal sense of mattering is characterized by a balance between *feeling valued* and *adding value* (Prilleltensky, 2020).

A number of reasons attest to the fact that *mattering is a fundamental motivation* (Anderson et al., 2015; Honneth, 1995, 2007; Kruglanski et al., 2022). The absence of mattering impacts well-being in a sustained and existential way. One of the most studied correlates of lack of worth is suicidal ideation and behavior (Elliot et al., 2005). The desire for mattering elicits varied goal-directed behaviors (Anderson et al., 2015). In fact, Kruglanski and colleagues (2022) have argued that the quest for significance explains a wide array of behaviors, ranging from political violence to dieting. Without mattering, we feel diminished and despondent. According to Williams (2007),

> Ostracized individuals report a feeling of invisibility, that their existence is not even recognized. In this case, a desire to be noticed may supplant a desire to be liked…. In order to be recognized (either positively or negatively) by the largest audience, it may be far easier to achieve this sole goal by committing a heinous act than by behaving prosocially (p. 444).

Mattering has great *explanatory power*. The presence or absence of mattering has been connected to numerous outcomes, including suicidal behaviors (Elliot et al., 2005); mental health

and distress (Batchelder & Hagan, 2022; Flett, 2018; Taylor & Turner, 2001); resilience and adjustment during life transitions (Flett & Zangeneh, 2020; Froidevaux et al., 2016; Schlossberg, 2009); and persistence, empowerment, and belonging for marginalized groups (Huerta & Fishman, 2014; Palmer & Maramba, 2012). This explanatory power has been demonstrated among adolescents as well as adults, with links to violence (Elliot et al., 2011), hope, and academic self-efficacy (Somers et al, 2022). Under ideal circumstances, feeling valued and adding value form a virtuous cycle. Experiences of recognition and appreciation enhance self-efficacy and engagement, which create opportunities for adding value. Adding value, in turn, creates occasions for further recognition and appreciation (Prilleltensky, 2020). This dynamic underlies the capacity of mattering to act as a multiplier and a source of meaning in life (Kruglanski et al., 2022). In a sense, mattering is both an outcome and a process. It is an outcome because people feel better by adding valued and being recognized. At the same time, that outcome feeds into an upward spiral of even stronger feelings of mattering. That is how an outcome feeds into a positive process or virtuous cycle.

Experiences of mattering are critical in *multiple domains of life* (Scarpa et al., 2021b). While most attention has been on the interpersonal domain, one can also experience mattering to oneself through experiences of self-compassion, self-acceptance, and self-determination (Batchelder & Hagan, 2022). In the occupational domain, mattering has been connected to improved worker engagement, greater job satisfaction, and reduced burnout and attrition (Epstein et al., 2020; Reece et al., 2021). Mattering is also a driving force in the development of community (Zeeb & Joffe, 2021), and has been linked with positive outcomes in university (Schlossberg, 1989) and retirement villages (Froidevaux et al., 2016).

Mattering is easy to operationalize (Scarpa et al., 2021b) and *to translate into action* to enhance both wellness and fairness (Scarpa et al., 2021a). Moreover, mattering reminds us not only of our right to feel valued but also of our responsibility to add value to others (Prilleltensky, 2020).

This dual composition lends a moral dimension and positions mattering as an actionable value for the public good.

Like fairness and wellness, *mattering confers benefits upon individuals, relationships, and entire communities.* As shown above, feeling valued and having opportunities to add value make the individual feel like he or she matters. People who feel that they matter are more likely to contribute to the well-being of others and the community at large (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021). Groups react intensely to feelings of being devalued, as demonstrated by the #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo movements, to name only two.

Synergy of Wellness, Fairness, and Mattering

Based on the foregoing evidence, and emerging empirical findings (Di Martino et al., 2022; Scarpa et al., 2021a), we postulate that mattering is an important experience, mediating between conditions of fairness and outcomes related to wellness. As can be seen in Figure 1, fairness exerts a direct effect on wellness, and an indirect effect through mattering. Figure 1 is a descriptive mediational model of the common good based on emerging data. Scarpa et al. (2021a) demonstrated the mediational model using a representative sample of the US population. Di Martino et al. (2022), in turn, showed that elements of mattering mediate between fairness and wellness in an international study comparing entire countries. This is one of the innovative aspects of our theory of the common good: mattering mediates between fairness and wellness at the level of perceptions of individuals and at the national level as well.

Whereas Figure 1 is based on existing data, Figure 2 represents an aspirational model of the common good which can be used to formulate policies, programs, and practices. Figure 2 basically expands the elements of Figure 1 to include subcomponents of fairness, mattering, and wellness. In an ideal state of affairs, people would benefit from conditions of fairness at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, occupational, and communal levels. These conditions, in turn, would generate a sense

of mattering in individuals and communities, which would enhance wellness across various domains of life. The evidence presented by Scarpa et al. (2021a) and Di Martino et al. (2022) support these claims. To bolster the common good, we would recommend that policies and programs aimed to promote wellness incorporate education about the importance of fairness for the private and common good. The more people learn about the importance of fairness in life, through educational, policy, and programmatic interventions, the higher the likelihood that fairness will be attended to at all levels of social life. This recommendation is manifested through the external arrows of the circumference of the sphere in Figure 2.

Table 1 shows specific ways in which mattering is experienced across types of fairness and levels of wellness. When conditions of fairness obtain, we submit that individuals will experience wellness through feeling valued and adding value. On the contrary, when fairness of any type is lacking, at any level, individuals and groups will experience low levels of wellness through two mechanisms: Feeling devalued and being denied the possibility of adding value.

As may be seen in Table 1, when procedural fairness is firmly in place at the communal level, the common good is enhanced by experiences of *voice and choice*, as well as *participation*, *networking*, and *trust-building* (Ponsford et al., 2021; Putnam, 2021). On the other hand, when procedural fairness is undermined at the communal level, the common good suffers through *exclusion* and *powerlessness*.

If we examine distributive fairness at the organizational level in Table 1, we can see that the common good is enhanced when employees are *recognized* and when they are afforded opportunities to be *engaged*. On the other hand, when employees are *exploited* and *invisible*, they feel devalued and their ability to add valued is hampered. In total, Table 1 lists 58 ways in which fairness can impact wellness through mattering. In combination, Figure 2 and Table 1 offer multiple avenues to maximize the common good and prevent the common ill.

The synergy and applicability of the MFW model can be examined further at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, occupational, communal, national, and global levels.

Intrapersonal

We are used to thinking of fairness as interpersonal, but it can also be intrapersonal (Prilleltensky, 2012). When people treat themselves fairly and kindly, their sense of mattering in the world improves, and their subjective well-being goes up (Neff & Germer, 2017). But when they treat themselves unfairly, self-blame and shame ensue (Neff, 2012; O'Neil, 2022). Self-denigration can be conceptualized as instances of intrapersonal injustice. There is merit in reframing these acts as intrapersonal injustice, for injustice is known to be a powerful motivator (Engstrom et al., 2020).

Interpersonal

People are relational beings par excellence. We have a fundamental need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and to feel significant in the eyes of others (Kruglanski et al., 2022). The quality of human relationships is one of the most important predictors of overall well-being (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010; Pinker, 2014; Van Lange et al., 2021). Since our wellness is so dependent on those close to us, the type of treatment we get from them can lead to elation or depression. When we are treated fairly and respectfully by friends and family our mattering and overall well-being go up (Dette-Hagenmeyer & Reichle, 2016; Gottman & Gottman, 2017). But when injustice and disrespect predominate, we feel devalued and experience negative psychological and physical consequences (Birditt et al., 2016; De Vogli et al., 2007; Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021).

Occupational

People are occupied or otherwise engaged in different aspects of life. Some are full time workers, some are full time students, some choose to volunteer in retirement, and some decide to stay home and take care of their families. In other words, people are engaged in different ways and

not just in paid work. We should acknowledge that people are meaningfully occupied in diverse ways. But regardless of their primary occupation, their main daily activity is going to have an impact on their sense of mattering, fairness, and wellness.

When it comes to workplaces, organizational justice is strongly associated with improved employee well-being (Huong et al., 2016; Le et al., 2018). Feeling valued and adding value at work have been related to improved job satisfaction (Reece et al., 2021), reduced burnout (Epstein et al., 2020), and overall well-being (Worline & Dutton, 2017). Lack of fairness and exclusion, on the other hand, are primary stressors at work. They have been shown to lead to devaluation, emotional exhaustion, fatigue, anxiety, tension, psychological distress, and irritation (Sonnentag, 2014).

Communal

Studies have demonstrated the positive impact of participating in community activities (Beresford, 2021). This is the case because people who participate in them feel valued and add value (Tjora & Scambler, 2020). Empowering communities to fight for justice enhances both their wellness and mattering (Marmot et al., 2020; Ponsford et al., 2020). Equality and justice are precursors of both mattering and overall life satisfaction (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2018).

Neighborhoods can be safe places where wellness and mattering thrive, but they can also be harmful. If the social fabric is characterized by injustice, anomie, individualism, inequality, competition, and shaming, people can feel unworthy and isolated (Case & Deaton, 2020; O'Neil. 2022; Payne, 2017; Putnam, 2021; Sandel, 2020). In cases of discrimination against sexual minorities, for instance, we witness higher levels of psychological distress and lower levels of personal and social well-being (del Rio-Gonzalez et al., 2022; Thorpe et al., 2022). The same applies in cases of discrimination against immigrants (Lincoln et al., 2021).

National

Nations that ensure equality and social justice also enjoy higher quality of life and happiness (Clifton, 2022; Di Martino & Prilleltensky, 2020; Di Martino et al., 2021; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2018). In fairer countries people participate more in social affairs, with a consequent feeling of mattering (Prilleltensky, 2020). Conversely, when nations neglect the common good, they tend to unload the responsibility for wellness, fairness, and mattering to lower-level systems. This is true not only in extreme cases such as oppressive regimes, but also for so called liberal and modern democracies, where the welfare of people is sacrificed for economic growth. In those cases, individuals are held responsible for their own destiny and social injustice is accepted as a natural fact of life (Di Martino et al., 2017). Under such conditions, the most vulnerable members of society, such as people who are homeless and unemployed, suffer not only from adverse circumstances, but also from a dismissive social gaze that questions their worth (Krokstad, 2021; Ryan, 1971).

Global

Critical global challenges can also be understood in terms of the framework we propose. For instance, injustice in distribution of COVID-19 vaccines leads to disproportionate suffering by poor countries. Equitable distribution has been obstructed by vaccine nationalism (Emanuel et al., 2020). Wealthier nations hoard vaccines while others go without. As a result, the end of the pandemic has been needlessly delayed (Katz et al., 2021). To overcome this challenge, researchers have urged individuals and nations alike to think beyond individualism to a concept of shared mattering that embraces public health and equity for all as a common outcome (Contreras et al., 2022; Katz et al., 2021).

Climate change represents another example. Vulnerable communities suffer the most from it. We cannot address this problem without concerns for procedural and distributive justice (Byskov et al., 2021). One way to address this issue is by centering the needs of the most vulnerable (e.g.,

Tong & Ebi, 2019). Those impacted the most must be included in mitigation; their values and needs must be recognized; and they must be given opportunities to contribute equitably to the development of solutions (Graham et al., 2018). In this case, mattering helps to actualize fairness and secure well-being.

Implications for Action

The figures and table may be used to identify what is missing and what is working well in people and systems. For example, we can use Table 1 to identify whether people in organizations feel valued or devalued. At the same time, we can see what is working well in terms of procedural or corrective justice in the workplace. The Mattering in Domains of Life Scale (MIDLS) (Scarpa et al., 2021b) is a validated tool that can be utilized to assess the level of mattering of people across the various domains of wellness shown in Table 1. The results can be used to formulate recommendations for action. The more we are able to create conditions for people and groups to feel valued and add value, and the more we prevent situations in which they feel devalued and incompetent, the more the common good will flourish (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021). Given the important role of mattering, fairness, and wellness in the common good, we recommend the creation of psychoeducational programs where children, youth, parents, couples, workers, and community leaders can learn how to foster mattering, wellness, and fairness in relationships, groups, work teams and society at large. Just like there are social emotional learning programs in schools, and parenting classes in churches, we recommend the creation of interventions dedicated to the promotion of the common good. In his recent book *Belonging: The science of creating connection and bridging divides,* Cohen, (2022) describes successful programs that can get us closer to fostering the common good. These are based on extensive evidence from psychological research.

When it comes to policy making, just like there are requirements to investigate the

environmental impact of new construction projects, it would be important to institute policies where new laws are evaluated for their potential impact on the common good.

It is expected that some groups in society will not wish to relinquish their privilege in order to create a fairer society. Power differentials will continue to play a central role in the creation of fair societies, but we should point out that there are approaches that have proven effective in solving organizational, national, and international conflicts (Hicks, 2011, 2018). Methods based on dignity and mattering, developed by Donna Hicks, have shown great potential in bringing closer antagonistic groups in South Africa, Northern Ireland, the Middle East and many organizational settings. While we are not naïve about the prospect of dramatically transforming society in the short term, we believe that dignity and belonging-based approaches are a very promising pathway towards the common good. If we build just systems and fair policies, and educate the public about their benefit for everyone, there will be less of a need to react to injustices. The more we build distributive and procedural justice now, the less we will need to resort to corrective justice in the future.

We believe that the MWF model lends itself to application across multiple sites and groups, with opportunities to create both psychoeducational programs and policies that honor the importance of fairness and mattering in people's wellness. Given the crucial importance of the common good pillars, and the amount of knowledge accumulated on their antecedents and consequences, we should think about ways to modify cultural and political practices in order to align them with the common good.

Towards a Culture of the Common Good

For the common good to prosper, we need to reshape our culture in significant ways. Most of all, we need to balance rights with responsibilities, the pursuit of feeling valued with opportunities to add value, and wellness with fairness. Many societies are currently driven by the

following unwritten rule: *I have the right to feel valued, so that I may be happy and well.* We suggest, instead, the following motto: *We all have the right and responsibility, to feel valued and add value, to self and others, so that we may all experience wellness and fairness* (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021). Instead of focusing on the self, we would focus on the collective; instead of fostering just rights, we would also cultivate responsibility; instead of obsessing about feeling valued and our popularity, we would dedicate more attention to adding value to others; and finally, instead of promoting only wellness, we would pay equal attention to fairness. Perhaps we should replace the notion of the welfare state with the *wellfair* state.

We are not advocating for the elimination of rights or the need to feel valued. We are simply calling for a balance between the private and the common good. We are not suggesting that wellness is unimportant; we are calling for more attention to fairness. Some societies excel at some aspects of the good but neglect others. In many Western nations, the collective is forgotten in favor of the individual, fairness is obscured by wellness, and the responsibility to add value to others is undermined by the pursuit of likes in social media.

The tripartite MFW model presented here would safeguard against biases in favor of any one component. Too much attention to personal wellness would be counterbalanced with attention to fairness and the need to add value to others. An exclusive focus on sacrifice for the collective would be attenuated by the imperative to promote personal and relational wellness at the same time. A singular focus on the mattering of any one group would be tempered by the need to be fair to all groups and foster solidarity across identities. To achieve the necessary balance and creative tension among personal (wellness), relational (mattering), and collective (fairness) needs, the three components of the model must be present.

Conclusion

In this paper we suggested that a key condition (fairness), a key experience (mattering), and a key set of outcomes (wellness), are essential psychosocial goods for the common good. Each one of them represents a basic human motivation, has considerable explanatory power, operates at multiple ecological levels, and shows great transformative potential. When acting in concert, they foster the common good.

Our framework may be used to analyze diverse social issues. When it comes to inequality, for instance, the dominant discourse of the *American Dream* has been that everyone can add value to themselves or others if they only want. The narrative of meritocracy focuses on how individuals can matter but ignores conditions of fairness (Sandel, 2020). It assumes, wrongly, that personal will is stronger than conditions of injustice that create an uneven playing field (Payne, 2017). A similar rationale applies to health and wellness. The regnant discourse is that people should take personal responsibility for their wellness (O'Neil, 2022). While this is partly true, it is also true that health habits are highly influenced by social determinants of health, principally fair access to objective and subjective resources for wellness (Marmot, 2015; Nussbaum, 2011). It is worth noting that the helping professions are not immune to the ideological influences of individualism embedded in the meritocratic ideal. Therefore, we can expect some resistance from certain professions. Psychology's unwitting support for the status quo, for instance, has been amply documented (Fox et al., 2009; Prilleltensky, 1994, Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002).

In the case of pandemics, far too much importance has been given to personal freedom at the expense of collective responsibility to wear masks, get vaccinated, and protect people with vulnerabilities. When it comes to climate change, fairness towards future generations would be balanced against the wellness of present generations bent on consuming the earth's resources. Whose mattering is more important, current or future generations? Our model can address these questions by counterposing the wellness and mattering of our contemporaries with fairness towards

our children and grandchildren, thus highlighting intergenerational justice. The racial reckoning the United States is experiencing derives from the neglect of corrective fairness towards Black people and its attendant disregard for their wellness and mattering, captured in the #BlackLivesMatter movement (Taylor, 2016; Wilkerson, 2020).

Our framework may be used to evaluate whether new policies promote the common good. Just as environmental assessments are required for new construction and infrastructure projects, we recommend that initiatives involving the collective well-being be evaluated for their fairness, mattering, and wellness. Some questions to consider include: (a) whose wellness and mattering are being privileged, and whose are being ignored; (b) is the project fair towards minority populations; (c) does the policy improve the sense of mattering of marginalized communities; (d) is the focus on wellness minimizing attention to fairness? It is our hope that researchers, practitioners, community leaders, activists and legislators will ask these questions and employ the framework in making decisions.

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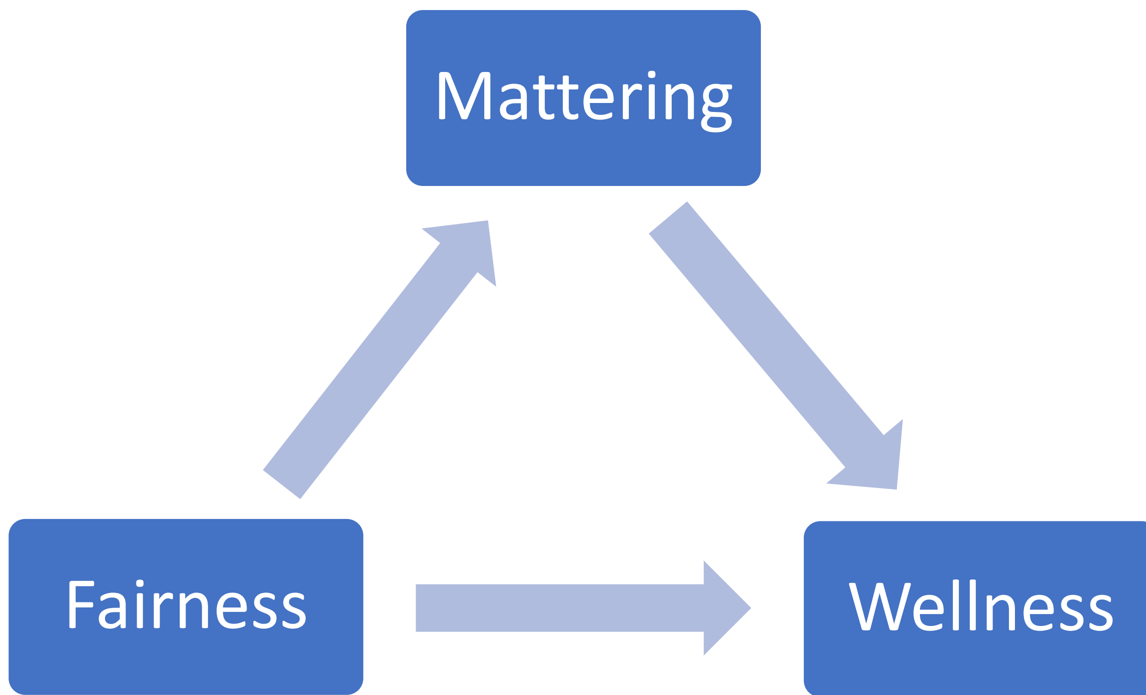
Figure 1

Descriptive Mediational Model of the Common Good



Note: Based on empirical studies there is evidence that fairness affects wellness directly and indirectly through mattering.

Figure 2
Prescriptive Aspirational Model of the Common Good

Note: In an ideal state of affairs, the common good would be advanced by high levels of fairness, across multiple domains, which would foster mattering (represented by arrows from four levels of fairness to mattering). Mattering, in turn, would enhance wellness across four domains (represented by arrows from mattering to wellness levels). High levels of wellness would support intrapersonal, interpersonal, occupational, and communal fairness (represented by arrows around the circumference of the sphere going from wellness to fairness. The presence of fairness would enhance various types of wellness (represented by arrows around the circumference of the sphere going from fairness to wellness). The experience of feeling valued, in the center of the sphere, would encourage people to add value, which, in turn, would generate more feelings of being valued.

Table 1

Mattering Across Types of Fairness and Levels of Wellness

Types of Fairness	Types of Mattering	Levels of Wellness			
		Intrapersonal	Interpersonal	Organizational	Communal
Distributive	Feeling Valued	self-regard	secure attachment	recognized	belonging
	Feeling Devalued	self-harm	rejection, neglect	exploited	discrimination
	Adding Value	self-efficacy	assertiveness, support	engaged team player, contributes	social mobility
	Adding Value Denied	helplessness	contempt	stereotype threat	inequity
Procedural	Feeling Valued	self-compassion	celebrated	earned respect	voice and choice
	Feeling Devalued	self-denial	ignored	invisible	exclusion
	Adding Value	self-determination	celebrating, loving, listening	leadership role, building on strengths, relational value	participation, trust-building, networking
	Adding Value Denied	avoidant behavior	criticism	stereotype threat	powerlessness
Corrective	Feeling Valued	growth mindset	getting apology	recognition of courage	empowerment
	Feeling Devalued	fixed mindset	denial of wrongdoing	bullying, impunity	denial of history, identity, and rights
	Adding Value	self-forgiveness	conflict-resolution	demanding accountability	liberation, reconciliation
	Adding Value Denied	self-blame	stonewalling	silencing	oppression