

THE GOOD FLOW: HOW HAPPINESS EMERGES FROM THE SKILLFUL
ENACTMENT OF MORALITY

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THE GOOD FLOW: HOW HAPPINESS EMERGES FROM THE SKILLFUL ENACTMENT
OF MORALITY

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In this paper, I will argue that 'being good' positively correlates to 'being happy.' First, I will clarify how I'll be using the word 'morality' and the phrase 'being good'. Second, I will claim that moral goodness is developed and exercised as a kind of practical skill. This will allow me to propose that 'being good' – like other complex and engaging skills – entails the elicitation of a kind of flow experience. Third, I will propose that 'being good' involves achieving what I'll call 'vertical coherency' within one's life and that this provides sustained engagement ('flow') and meaning while exercising moral goodness. Lastly, I will show why the kind of happiness that we truly want for ourselves and those we care about emerges from a moral engagement – a 'good flow' – of the sort described.

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This work was written for many reasons: in general, because morality and happiness seem to be the most important concepts to fall within the purview of philosophy; more specifically, because the view articulated in this paper is a sincere expression of what I believe to be true.

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Part 1: Introduction

The main conclusion of my paper is the following: ‘being good’ positively correlates to ‘being happy’. If you’re a sincerely good person, you’re more likely to be genuinely happy; if you’re genuinely happy, this is indicative of your being a sincerely good person.

I acknowledge the unfortunately common circumstances where this does not seem to be the case. For example, when a good person is unhappy or when a bad person is happy. Yet, my position can accommodate most these ostensible counterexamples by insisting that these cases don’t exhibit the kind of goodness or happiness that we truly want for ourselves or those we care about. As one would expect, this paper will be providing a restricted or thin account of ‘morality’ and ‘happiness’ that I will qualify below (Part 2 and 5 respectively). This is — in part — meant to lessen the notorious ambiguity that is present with these two terms to begin with. There will be legitimate counterexamples (in Part 4) that I will address once this ambiguity is averted.

In general, my approach is meant to avoid pedantry and to propose a realistic and comprehensible way that morality and happiness can be strongly related. I will not put forward a moral theory of my own but I hope to show that modern psychology and careful appeals to common sense reinforce my claim that moral goodness and happiness are positively correlated. The paper itself makes use of substantial engagements with positive psychology and cognitive science in order to provide empirical support for some assumptions that I may have left untreated.

Part 2 of the paper will clarify how I’ll be using the word ‘morality’ and the phrase ‘being good’. In Part 3, I will claim that moral goodness is developed and exercised as a kind of practical skill. This will allow me to propose that ‘being good’ — like other complex and engaging skills — entails the elicitation of a kind of flow experience. In Part 4, I will propose that ‘being good’ involves achieving what I’ll call ‘vertical coherency’ within one’s life and that this provides sustained engagement and meaning while exercising moral goodness. The convergence of engaging flow experience and meaning is called ‘vital engagement’. In Part 5 and 6, I will show why vital engagement of this sort is the kind of happiness that we truly want for ourselves and those we care about. Thus, I conclude that ‘being good’ positively correlates to ‘being happy’.

The conception of happiness I discuss is adapted from L.W. Sumner’s notion of happiness presented in his book *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics* (1996). There, he concludes

that 'being happy' "means having a certain kind of positive attitude toward your life, which in its fullest form has both a cognitive and an affective component" (pp. 145-6). This working definition of happiness might be helpful to keep in mind as my argument unfolds.

Part 2: Morality & Virtue

In the interest of developing a plausible way of showing that 'being good' positively correlates to 'being happy', I start from a thin account of 'being good' that, although controversial in contemporary philosophy, is nevertheless widely shared by people past and present. Although it goes beyond the purview of this paper to defend this thin account, I think it counts in favor of my view that the view is widely shared, seen not just in historical moral traditions (e.g., Buddhist, Confucian, and ancient Greek traditions) but implicit in moral intuitions of many people today. This thin account puts greater emphasis on goodness as a state of character or a description of agents (what I term 'being good') than on right action (what I term 'doing good'), and it assumes that being good demands, in some sense, a kind of sincere, wholehearted orientation toward the good, so that one's cognitions, conations and broader ethical commitments are aligned. Some might recognize this account as being among the core commitments shared by virtue ethical theories, which is to say most moral theories before the rise of modern moral philosophy. But in the interest of being more ecumenical, I would like to maintain my usage of 'good' and 'being good' so that I can better appeal to non-virtue ethicists — philosopher and non-philosopher alike. Furthermore, I intend to exploit common sense and common usage in regard to my terminology as much as possible.

That being said, this section is meant to present a congruity between what most people mean when they speak of 'being good' and what advocates of an agent-centered virtue theory mean when they speak of 'being virtuous.' I hope this will provide more justification for my particular use of 'moral goodness' in this paper and my appeal to discussions on virtue ethics as presented by various philosophers, ancient and modern.¹

¹ This section of my paper is heavily influenced by Julia Annas who who presents similar claims in two of her works: "Ancient Ethics and Modern Morality" (1992) and Ch. 2, §7 of her *The Morality of Happiness* (1993), pp. 120-31.

2.1. *'Being good' is a kind of disposition*²

An agent seems more morally developed if her good actions are sincere, if they come from an effortless expression of what she is already *disposed* to do.³ Imagine an infant who strays away from her parents and starts crawling into a busy street. A person who instantly rushes in to save the child without any deliberation seems more morally developed than a person who rushes in to save the child after quickly deciding that it would be the right thing to do. The difference seems to come from the former's already-established disposition to perform such an action in such a context.⁴ To be sure, both individuals are praise-worthy and good, but they are good to the extent that they have cultivated the disposition to perform good actions in such morally-salient contexts. The less they need to struggle with enacting such behavior, the better.

2.2. *'Being good' entails performing good actions.*

Despite the above statement that 'being good' is a disposition of the agent rather than a quality of her actions, no one could deny that 'being good' entails 'doing good' at times;⁵ being a 'good person' means being sensitive to circumstances that demand appropriate responses. More importantly, exposing oneself to such circumstances is crucial for moral education and moral development. The person who deliberates before rushing in to save the child would presumably require less deliberation in the future if confronted with a similar circumstance. Eventually, this individual would cultivate a sensitivity to such circumstances that would dispose the agent to act freely without inhibition — I'm taking this kind of sincerity paired with spontaneity of action to be a mark of moral development.

² I acknowledge that the metaphysics of dispositions is a current area of contention. As I use 'disposition' here, it is simply a condition in virtue of which one is disposed to act. It can be deemed a 'stable disposition' that results and is maintained by intelligent practice. (Annas, 1993, pp. 50-52; see also Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* II.5)

³ Aristotle makes this point by comparing the *enkratic* individual with the truly virtuous agent (see the *Nichomachean Ethics* 1142a 26-29; VII.1-10). The highest ideal is not consistent self-restraint but a state where no self-restraint is necessary. (Annas, 1993, pp. 89-91)

⁴ The former has acquired a *dispositional* belief that such an action is appropriate and, apparently, there are no conflicting feelings that would obstruct her acting on such a belief. The latter either 1) has the dispositional belief but is temporarily obstructed by feelings; or 2) does not have the dispositional belief and must quickly acquire an *occurrent* belief to provoke her subsequent response.

⁵ As Annas (1993) notes, "no sensible [moral] theory could consider merely acts or merely agents" (p. 125)

2.3. *'Being good' has an affective dimension.*

If the enactment of a good deed comes from an effortless expression of one's disposition, the concurrent feelings would likely endorse the action. Moral deliberation is not isolated to merely a rational consideration of possible actions; it involves overcoming fear, disgust, shock, apathy, lethargy, and the like. A good person — disposed and ostensibly *compelled* to act — is not meeting resistance from such feelings that would otherwise undermine or impede an appropriate response. Considering the developmental aspect of morality, it seems right that becoming a good person must involve, not just learning how to deal with our feelings, but bringing our feelings into harmony with our thoughts and actions.⁶ As Aristotle is known to insist, this harmony involves balance (striking a mean between two extremes): the savior of the infant — like a fireman in action — should have an appropriate level of fear — not so little that she is foolhardy but not so much that it would preclude the appropriate action from the outset.⁷ Additionally, there are obviously feelings that assist the good person in performing good actions: a volunteer at a homeless shelter can do more good if she has a certain amount of compassion, loving-kindness, and sympathetic joy; in some cases, indignation and anger is appropriate in order to harden one's resolve for a righteous cause.

2.4. *'Being good' has an intellectual dimension.*

This seems to me a less controversial statement but some clarification is necessary in order to show its relationship with the previous statements above. Being good involves performing good actions, but it involves performing actions *for the right reasons*.⁸ If, after interviewing the savior of the wandering child, she is found to be motivated purely by the thought of a hefty cash reward (or by media celebrity or by the accolades of her peers), the action is still considered good but the person is not — or, rather, the person is less good because of her motives. Even the person that instantly rushes in must provide reasons — if

⁶ "Our development, and especially our moral development, consists in our getting (more or less) control over these feelings and training them in some ways rather than others [...] it is important to respect in ethical theory the everyday contrast between someone who does the right thing, but has to battle with his feelings to do so, and thus acts reluctantly and with a sense of pain and loss, and the person who does the right thing and whose feelings endorse the action, and who thus acts gladly and with pleasure." (Annas, 1993, p. 53).

⁷ See Aristotle's popular notion of 'The Golden Mean' (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II)

⁸ See *Nicomachean Ethics* 1140a 20-21

asked after-the-fact — that seem appropriate for a ‘good person.’ We want an *educated* reaction to morally relevant situation (Annas, 2011, p. 29). If the agent cannot provide any reasons, then her sincerity can be questioned; for example, she could have rushed in so quickly because she mistook the child for her own child. I will not suggest what the appropriate reasons a good person would provide in this context but I will discuss how one develops an educated response to these situation in Part 3 of this paper.

2.5. *Some additional remarks on moral goodness*

I’ve been dwelling on what being a good person amounts to. Regardless of the moral theory one adopts — be it a version of consequentialism, deontology, or ethical egoism — I believe one would accept the above statements to a lesser or greater degree. The morally developed consequentialist would not spend time performing so-called ‘hedonic calculus’ while the child wanders into the street. The morally developed deontologist would not spend time consulting her set of principles or applying Kant’s ‘categorical imperative.’ The morally developed egoist would not hesitate to act when confronted with an opportunity that would benefit her. This is because extensive training as assiduous moral agents would make them receptive to the morally salient elements of a given circumstance and they would *already* be disposed to respond in the way their theory demands. To be sure, they would respond only if they were not too afraid or apathetic to commit themselves to their respective theories.⁹

Thus, actually ‘being good’ — according to common sense and philosophy — seems to be a kind of disposition to act in appropriate ways, to which the moral agent’s intellectual and emotional life conform. If someone has decided to perform good actions in accordance with values she rationally endorses, or if someone has decided to perform good actions in

⁹ The proposal I will present in this paper is not committed to any one theory of the good. That being said, it may discourage a *pluralism* about the good insofar as such theories introduce incommensurable beliefs about the good life and how a good person should behave. The cognitive dissonance introduced by embracing different notions of the good would involve feelings that undermine or impede a successful enactment of morality (see 2.3) and would discourage the internalization of a stable moral disposition. In general, embracing pluralism would make a *sincerely* good person less likely or impossible. My proposal is more suited to a *monism* about the good. Specifically, it is suited to a so-called ‘naturalistic’ theory defined *in the living of* a human life rather than by *transcending* human life (the later theory is exemplified by Platonism). Because my proposal specifies the good life in terms of certain circumstances (insofar as a moral agent needs to address current socio-cultural values), it is comfortable with Aristotle. But I believe my proposal could also be reconciled with less circumstantial theories like Stoicism and Epicureanism (insofar as moral agents can reappropriate ideas of “society” and “culture”).

accordance with values she feels passionate about (regardless of whether she fully understands them), both decisions may be evidence that she is starting to bring her intellect and feelings into conformity. The agent is on her way to becoming good in the sense I'm concerned with. The key is that she is continually making *decisions* and this entails an intellectual engagement that gradually allows one to internalize a coherent network of beliefs and corresponding behavior.

Continuing in this vein, a way to approach morality is developmentally. That is, we can look at how one *becomes* a good person and we can look at the different apparent levels of moral cultivation in order to extrapolate and see what the full-fledged good person might look like. In the next section, I will defend a modified version of the so-called 'skill analogy' which Annas uses to motivate this process of extrapolation. Using her discussions and the four statements that I've presented above, I will propose that *moral goodness is developed as a kind of skill* — one becomes a good person as one would cultivate a skill and one exercises moral goodness as one would exercise a skill. A consequence of this is that there is a kind of satisfaction or enjoyment that comes with being a good person in the way I've suggested. We will have to explore what this enjoyment amounts to before I argue my main point that 'being good' positively correlates to 'being happy'.

Part 3: Moral Goodness As a Skill: A defense and expansion of the "skill analogy"

In this portion of my paper, I will adapt what Julia Annas calls the 'skill analogy' which exposes similarities between the development of a skill and the cultivation of moral goodness (in the context of Annas' discussions, this is the cultivation of *virtue* but I will maintain my own terminology throughout). After briefly presenting this in the context of my discussion on 'being good' I will explore a potential objection to the "skill analogy" and respond to it accordingly.¹⁰

In the context in which I'm using the phrase, the "skill analogy" is the idea that the practical reasoning undertaken by a sincerely good person shares important features with the practical reasoning undertaken by someone exercising a practical skill (Annas, 2011, p. 2). Upon reflection, this will be especially obvious in the developmentally early stages of moral cultivation (we have more intimate knowledge of these early stages and less so of

¹⁰ Much of my discussion in the section has been adapted from my own unpublished paper "Virtue as the Skill of Living: Inducing the Good Flow" presented at Loyola University Chicago on April 11, 2014.

very high developmental stages of moral cultivation). By confirming the similarities at these early stages of moral cultivation and then extrapolating the findings using the skill analogy, I argue that the phenomenology of being a *highly developed* moral agent would be similar to the phenomenology of the *expert* at a practical skill.

3.1. Early stages of moral development

The skill analogy is most helpful in comparing how a person *becomes* good with how a person *becomes* adept at a practical skill. At the early stages of moral and skill development, we can see how both require the monitoring and targeting of our dispositions as well as significant intellectual and affective engagement.

First, since — as discussed above — ‘being good’ is a kind of disposition (a disposition to perform good actions well and when appropriate), like any disposition “it requires time, experience, and habituation to develop it” (Annas, 2011, p. 14). It makes sense that morality must be consciously attended to in order to either foster incipient good habits of behavior or else to override and replace ostensibly immoral tendencies. Regardless of your moral theory, to become a sincerely good person requires time and effort, much like any other complex skill.

Second, since ‘being good’ is a *practical* disposition — it entails performing certain actions — like any skill, “it can be learned only by practice, by actually doing what needs to be done” (Annas, 2011, p. 16). We can read about moral principles and precepts in books and classrooms, but real understanding comes from applying these principles in actual situations. Likewise, this can also be said of skills which tend to involve learning curves that can only be ameliorated through practical engagement with the task in question. As Aristotle observes, “what we need to learn to do, we learn by doing; for example, we become builders by building . . .”¹¹ An individual cannot become an expert builder by reading books and remaining indoors — she must gradually develop specialized practical dispositions and habituate herself to specialized tasks.

Third, since there is a distinct intellectual dimension of being a sincerely ‘good person,’ this learning cannot be done mindlessly. Our sincere and spontaneous responses to morally-relevant situations must be *educated* responses. Likewise, as Annas (2011) observes,

¹¹ *Nicomachean Ethics* 1103.32-3 (trans, Crisp, 2000)

“[b]uilding is not what we think of as a particularly intellectual skill, but there is still no such thing as learning to be a builder mindlessly, by rote copying” (p. 17). This is the same with all skills worthy of the name — skills that require time and effort to learn. We first need to abstract the relevant features of the task and the intermittent goals; formulate rules or maxims based on those features and goals (usually with the help of an instructor or a manual); then carefully apply those rules in real situations so we can understand *for ourselves* what the best ways to perform the task involve (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1991, pp. 232-36). This procedure is undertaken by the child learning to tie her shoes, by the apprentice builder learning to build well, and likewise by the person learning to be a good.

Finally, since there is a distinct affective dimension of being a sincerely good person, this learning cannot be done emotionlessly. The difference between more simple skills and the more complex and dynamic ones (like moral cultivation) involve what Annas calls the “drive to aspire.” This affective component involves continually finding motivation to keep improving — to stay engaged in the activity long enough to achieve expertise. (Annas, 2011, p. 16ff) If this minimal affective dimension is not generated, then “we lapse into simple repetition and routine” which often precludes mastery of a skill (Annas, 2011, p. 18). A sincerely good person is one who aspires to become better.

3.2 Later stages of moral development

We would expect such intellectual and affective engagement to carry-over into expertise — both non-moral and moral — and serve as a means to sustain and improve one’s competence in the activity. So the kind of habituation we would find in moral expertise as a result of moral cultivation “is not routine but the kind of actively and intelligently engaged practical mastery that we find in practical experts such as pianists and athletes. . .” (Annas, 2011, p. 14):

When we see the speed with which a skilled pianist produces the notes we might be tempted to think that constant repetition and habit have transformed the original experience, which required conscious thought, into mere routine. But this is completely wrong. The expert pianist plays in a way not dependent on conscious input, but the result is not mindless routine but rather playing infused with and expressing the pianist’s thoughts about the piece. Further, the pianist continues to improve her playing. The way she plays exhibits not only increased technical

mastery but increased intelligence — better ways of dealing with transitions between loud and soft, more subtle interpretations of the music, and so on. (Annas, 2011, pp. 13-4)

Due to such active engagement with their respective activities, enjoying both non-moral and moral expertise — when adequately developed — will exhibit what psychologists call *flow experience*.

3.3. Flow experience

When an agent is completely engaged in an activity (oftentimes, a very challenging one) and exercising a highly developed skill therein, she can experience what psychologists call ‘flow’ — the agent becomes “completely involved in something to the point of forgetting time, fatigue, and everything else but the activity itself.” (Csikszentmihalyi, Abuhamdeh, & Nakamura, 2005, p. 599) Some phenomenological characteristics involve

intense and focused concentration on the here and now; a loss of self-consciousness as action and awareness merge; a sense that one will be able to handle the situation because one knows how to respond to whatever will happen next; a sense that time has passed more quickly or slowly than normal; and an experience of the activity as rewarding in and of itself regardless of the outcome. (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2001, pp. 88-9)

One of the most important factors in the elicitation and preservation of flow experiences is how the experience engages one’s conscious attention — the agent becomes “completely involved in something to the point of forgetting . . . everything else but the activity itself” and there is “an experience of the activity as rewarding in and of itself regardless of the outcome.” That is, flow is elicited and preserved only when the motivation behind the activity takes the activity *itself* as its direct object; the agent finds the activity *intrinsically motivating*.

As the phrase is used in the psychological literature, experiencing ‘intrinsic motivation’ means that the agent is operating “solely out of a sense of interest and enjoyment, as

opposed to for the sake of their ends” (Besser-Jones, 2012, p. 96).¹² Classic examples of activities that often include intrinsic motivation include physical sports (e.g. basketball, soccer), mental ‘sports’ (e.g chess, go), musical events (solo and concert pieces), and a variety of other activities ranging from rock-climbing to giving an engaging lecture. All of these activities demand skill and when these activities are both skillfully enacted and enjoyed for their own sake, flow is experienced.

Drawing on the previously established similarities between ‘being good’ and exercising a practical skill, I propose that ‘being good’ can be considered a special kind of skill that — when adequately developed — entails the elicitation of *flow*. This claim is crucial for how I’ll be defending my overall thesis so I would like to anticipate a potential objection and quickly address the mistaken assumptions upon which it is based.

3.4. *Objection: The absence of intrinsically motivated moral goodness*

I find that the greatest potential objection to the claim that moral goodness entails the elicitation of flow when adequately developed is in regards to the requirement that moral action involve intrinsic motivation. As stated above, such motivation seems to be necessary to initiate and maintain the high level of engagement that the agent enjoys in flow experience.

There seem to be moral actions that produce a flow experience (for example, when the brave firefighter is wholly engaged in the act of putting out a fire). That being said, taking the phenomenon that arises from the exercise of certain *discrete* moral actions (i.e. the flow enjoyed while being brave) and then extending that to the exercise of moral goodness in general (i.e. the flow enjoyed while ‘being good’) is unwarranted. There seem to be examples of moral actions that cannot *engage* the agent to the extent that they would generate flow. The firefighter may experience flow but the philanthropists donating to charity would not. The activity of writing a donation check is not structured in a way that could engage the agent and elicit a flow experience. Are we excluding those kinds of activities in our picture of

¹² Although term ‘intrinsic motivation’ might connote a different phenomenon in philosophy, it has been well-established in positive psychology since its coinage by Koch (1956) (see also Deci & Moller, 2005; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Reiss, 2004; Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2000b; Waterman, 2005). As Besser-Jones (2012) explains, “the construct of intrinsic motivation was developed as a means of describing the enjoyment we find in pursuing challenges, in pushing ourselves to learn and to try new things” (p. 95). It’s easy to see why this is an important element of flow experiences.

'being good'? If so, not only would this seem *ad hoc*, but it would cause us to diverge from what common sense includes in the notion of morality

A source of engagement is often the sense of harmony, unimpeded enjoyment, and pleasure involved in the activity. A moral agent could take pleasure in writing donation checks but such pleasure is not enough to determine that she experiences intrinsic motivation (Besser-Jones, 2012, p. 96). To establish that the sincerely good person is intrinsically motivated, "we need to determine whether or not she finds the *activities* enjoyable and so pleasant, apart from their connection to separable outcomes" (p. 97). This would undergird the kind of engagement exhibited in flow. But, again, such intrinsic motivation seems unlikely in the case of writing checks. Similar cases are ready-at-hand: "keeping one's promises, helping someone pick up papers she has dropped on the sidewalk, being a whistleblower, loaning money to a friend, raising money to help victims of natural disasters, and so on" (p. 100). All these 'mundane activities' do not seem to have the kind of structure to produce the kind of engagement necessary for flow experience. They are only performed because of the separable outcomes ["...only because they fulfill a promise, only because justice requires it, only because raising money will help others..." (p. 100)]. My proposal that 'being good' entails the elicitation of flow experiences seems to be incorrect since it implies that 'being good' is intrinsically motivated. The motivation one derives while performing such 'good' yet mundane activities like writing checks, etc. *cannot* be derived from the activities themselves.

My response will point-out an understandable yet mistaken assumption made by such an objection. I will insist that it does not properly address the notion of 'being good' that I am utilizing.

3.5. Response: *Being good is intrinsically motivated*

If 'being good' is considered a practical skill, one must first consider how this skill is exercised. The objection I presented above makes the assumption that 'being good' is exercised through *local* events in which the agent performs discrete and isolated actions

that reflect discrete and separable moral traits (for example, the writing of a check as a reflection of the agent's generosity).¹³

Instead of assuming that 'being good' is exercised within local events that demand different local skills to negotiate, one should interpret 'being good' itself as a 'higher-order' or *global* skill. Thus, 'being good' is exercised by the agent in all areas of her life as a reflection of her way of being in the world.¹⁴ 'Being good' is the skill and one of the many manifestations of that skill is in context-sensitive, circumstantial instances of 'doing good' (like writing a check or making a promise, etc.). A helpful way to describe 'being good' is as an enactment of a variety of disparate 'lower-order' activities united by their common source in the agent's moral disposition. Writing a check is not engaging in itself but if performing such 'mundane activities' is required to properly express one's moral disposition, the agent enjoys the engagement and flow experience entailed in expressing that disposition regardless of the activity. Again, the practical disposition of 'being good' is the skill and can be exercised in a variety of ways.

At this point, a dissimilarity becomes apparent when comparing 'being good' to a normal skill. If we claim that 'being good' is the skill (as opposed to discrete activities) and that 'being good' is a *disposition* to do good, there is the potential absence of any overt exercise of this skill. Although one has a disposition to behave a certain way, the circumstances may prevent one from manifesting such a disposition in *overt* action. We would say that a sculptor is exercising her skill only while she is chiseling into rock and producing a sculpture or that a pianist is exercising her skill only while she is producing beautiful music. But we would not say that the sculptor and the pianist are exercising their skills while sitting on the couch. In contrast, the good person's skill is always exercised (even

¹³ This may conform to common sense: one can 'be good' in one context (when being a good father or husband) but not in another (when being a bad boss or colleague). In response to this, I would insist that we dwell on the earlier claims of the paper. If 'being good' is a practical disposition, then in order to learn and instill such a disposition one needs to practice — one learns by doing. This learning always takes place in an *embedded* context and thus, realistically, 'being good' cannot be abstracted from that context if it is to be useful. Morality is only compartmentalized to the extent that our lives are compartmentalized and this is probably not very much (Annas, 2001, p. 21). I'll have more to say about this in Part 4.

¹⁴ I take the term 'global skill' from Julia Annas — the earliest use I found is in her book, *The Morality of Happiness* (1993) in the context of Stoic ethics (p. 378; see also pp. 53-7). A great exploration of the idea is found in her book *Intelligent Virtue* (2011): "In the case of skill, this is obviously a local matter; someone might be a skillful skater while having all kinds of unresolved issues in other areas of her life. In the case of virtue, the person's global state is what is relevant to the performance of the action . . ." (p. 75)

on the couch) insofar as they are expressing their moral disposition sincerely and without internal conflict (sometimes, sitting on the couch might be the moral thing to do). Again, if the good person were never confronted with the opportunity to perform any overt acts of bravery or generosity, the good person would still be good and this inability to act on her disposition would be merely circumstantial.¹⁵

In response, I would say that this is not as strange as it seems when we discuss activities and skill as involving a variety of several local (or, 'lower order') activities. Imagine a highly skilled rock climber exercising her skill on a challenging cliff-face. Any thoughts external to the activity itself — even thoughts about the summit — hamper the skill being exercised during the climb. We would say that the expert rock climber is experiencing intrinsic motivation insofar as she is rock-climbing. But, while traversing up the cliff-face, the rock climber often *stops moving* in order to survey the rocks for potential handholds, to adjust a carabiner, or to put more chalk on her hands. These lower-order activities — as it were — are part of the more global (or, 'higher-order') activity of rock climbing despite not involving overt acts of climbing. Although it seems like inactivity, the climber is still receptive to opportunities and is consciously engaged with her terrain. Likewise, if we could imagine the *fully* developed good person — a moral expert — she would be moving through life and exercising her moral goodness continuously, surveying her terrain, and clearly perceiving any actions she might have to undertake. Actual overt moral activities may be few and far between (and the agent may not be successful in these activities if contingencies disallow it) but that does not discredit a sincerely good person. The good person is good because of an excellent *disposition* built-up through intelligent practice that allows her to respond to a situation instantly, without deliberation, and in accordance with that moral disposition.¹⁶

¹⁵ This scenario seems unlikely unless we entertain the notion of moral savants. Common sense insists that to be a good person you must *learn* to be good. This learning requires responding to and reflecting on real opportunities to perform overt acts. On a related issue, moral luck may play a factor in the early developmental stages of this moral cultivation — I don't see this as problematic.

¹⁶ The skill in which I'm presenting could be designated a 'stochastic skill' — one "in which a failure, because of contingencies, to achieve the outcome is different from a failure in the exercise of the skill itself" (Annas, 1993, 400). If an apparent failure in 'being good' occurs, it would either be a result of a) poor conditions or b) a defect in one's disposition. The former *would not* be an actual failure insofar as the agent acts in accordance with her disposition. The latter *would* be a failure but it also reflects the need for further moral development so that one's dispositions are more stable and reliable.

Both the expert rock-climber in the above scenario and the expert moral agent is engaged in flow insofar as they are exercising their respective skills (Annas, 2008, p. 24). In the case of what I deemed ‘mundane activities’ (writing a check to charity, keeping one’s promises, helping someone pick up papers, etc.), it is true that they by themselves may “lack the coherence and structure found in activities associated with flow experience” (Besser-Jones, 2012, p. 100). But the good person may nevertheless engage with them *while* enjoying the flow brought on by the activity of ‘being good’. One might consider the act of putting chalk on one’s hands mundane *in itself* but the rock climber would still be enjoying flow due to the already-present flow brought-on by the global activity of rock climbing. In a similar fashion, the sincerely good person would go through her days — mundane activities and all — while concurrently exercising the highly developed skill of *‘being good’*.

In the following section, I will elaborate on what this coherency looks like in regard to morality. The discussion of flow experience, though, should be a helpful starting-point in understanding the phenomenology of moral expertise. For example, if you have experienced flow in an localized case while playing an engaging game or sport, extrapolating that experience to all aspects of your life might provide some insight into what will be discussed next. After introducing the notion of ‘vertical coherency’, I will discuss concrete examples and counterexamples to my proposal.

Part 4: Morality & Flow — Enjoying the Good Flow

I am claiming that ‘being good’ is a practical disposition that amounts to a skillful navigation of one’s moral landscape. In the morally developed person, this skill is exercised well insofar as one is responding appropriately to opportunities that activate this disposition.¹⁷

In order to enjoy a sustained flow experience while exercising this skill, the moral agent would have to strive to perform optimally within her so-called ‘moral landscape’. Unlike that of the rock-climber, the landscape of the moral agent admittedly involves many more dimensions that interact with each other in complex ways. Elaborating on the different dimensions or levels that the moral agent needs to operate within would allow me to illustrate how ‘being good’ not only provides experiences of *flow* but how ‘being good’ is

¹⁷ Again, note that if circumstances don’t allow for any opportunity for good action, then the appropriate response would perhaps be inaction [see Annas, 1993, p. 70 concerning the Stoic notion of virtue].

positively correlated with a very *meaningful* type of flow experience. By the end of this section, I hope that my current proposal — that ‘being good’ is a global skill — entails a special kind of flow experience that is not only inherently enjoyable, but also meaningful. Part 5 of this paper will then explore the relationship between this kind of experience and common notions of happiness.

4.1. ‘Vertical coherency’

There are several levels (or, ‘dimensions’ or ‘spheres’) to consider when discussing moral goodness and its successful enactment. Much like how the expert rock-climber successfully scales a cliff-face by bringing her local activities into alignment (gracefully coordinating her legs and arms; accurately identifying proper hand and footholds; quickly adjusting the carabiners, smoothly slipping her hand behind her back to get more chalk, etc.) or how a master pianist successfully plays a concert piece by bringing her local activities into alignment (coordinating her torso, arms, hands and feet; quickly and accurately reading the sheet music; striking the keys accurately and precisely; articulating the keys and pedals to suit the tempo; etc.), *likewise*, the genuinely good person successfully acts on her highly developed moral disposition by bringing her local activities into alignment. We will need to explore these activities and how they relate to each other in order to appreciate *what it’s like* to be a cultivated moral agent.

Such ‘local’ morally relevant activities should be subsumed under the overall activity of being good person (that is, acting effortlessly on one’s moral disposition). These activities themselves should be separated into a hierarchical yet irreducible multi-level model.¹⁸ Each level has corresponding moral standards or values towards which a good person would strive to meet. Thus, being a good person would potentially involve the following:¹⁹

¹⁸ The following model is adapted from McAdams’ (1995, 1996) proposals of the four tier personality as well as further contributions by Sheldon (2004) in his discussions on multi-level nature of subjective well-being. [see also Haidt (2006), pp. 141-45, 226-29]

¹⁹ It seems like you would be able to provide a moral theory using any one of these levels as your point of reference. For example, you can say that our psychology demands that society and culture be organized in order to suit our evolutionary adaptations. Or, you could say that our religious (cultural) values demand that we slowly reshape our psychology in order to conform to those higher standards. My notion of ‘being good’ is a higher-order property that describes how an agent can skillfully bring *all* these levels into alignment. I’m not particularly concerned with what the best way to do that is although I suspect that our psychology informs our higher standards and puts constraints on what kinds of societies and corresponding norms could evolve.

'Being good' means skillfully bringing these levels into alignment or 'vertical coherency' with each other. This reduces impediments and frustrations while acting on one's disposition and allows for the spontaneity that we're looking for in truly good people.²⁰ At the subjective level, the more 'vertical coherency' is achieved, the more likely that the global activity of 'being good' feels like flow (i.e. effortless and enjoyable). The person who instantly rushes in to save the wandering child is acting in conformity with her personality [Level 1-4] and also her socio-cultural values [Levels 5-6]. There is little or no conflict between any level and this is what *allows* the activity to be performed spontaneously and effortlessly. Again, note that the skill of 'being good' refers to a global (or, 'higher-order') ability in making *all* of these levels cohere for the purpose of manifesting freely one's dispositions. The more skillful this ability is executed, the more sincerity and spontaneity is entailed in the activity of 'being good.'

This proposal is influenced heavily by the hierarchical model of causal influences upon

- [Level 1] acting in conformity with one's *basic psychological needs*;
- [Level 2] acting in conformity with one's *personality or character traits*;
- [Level 3] acting in conformity with one's *immediate goals and intentions*;
- [Level 4] acting in conformity with one's *self-image or self-narrative*;
- [Level 5] acting in conformity with *social norms or values*;
- [Level 6] acting in conformity with *cultural norms or values*.

human behavior as presented by Dan P. McAdams (1995, 1996) and Kennon M. Sheldon (2004). These models — in turn — were influenced by cybernetics or 'control theory' which recognizes that "optimal functioning" occurs "when multiple, simultaneous, separate processes of a system work under control of centralized decision making, towards a common purpose or goal" (Miller, 1978, p. 89). In the context of this paper, the "system" would correspond to the holistic phenomenological experience of the moral agent; the "centralized decision making" comes from the agent's intellectual and affective engagement with her experience; the "purpose or goal" of this engagement is intrinsic — the goal of bringing coherency among the different levels and allowing one's disposition to act freely.

²⁰ "Vertical coherence exists when lower level goals are consistent with or regulated by higher level goals" (Sheldon & Kasser, 1995, p. 531)

There are certainly different goals when restricting ourselves to different local levels (the ‘goals’ pursued in the service of one’s personality must be articulated differently than the goals of the society or culture with which one identifies) but optimal functioning is achieved when these goals are made consistent with each other. Optimal functioning in the context of morality will manifest when the activities relating to our personality [Levels 1-4] are consistent with and, thus, reinforced by the activities relating to our socio-cultural context [Levels 5-6].

‘Vertical coherency’ of the kind I’m discussing is the mark of a morally developed agent. The kind of integration and effortless engagement this skill entails has all the criteria for eliciting what I’m calling a ‘global’ flow experience. Achieving this coherency and ‘being good’ is a global skill that concerns one’s life as a whole. The rest of the section will be an elaboration and defense of this proposal. I still need to explain why and how this experience is positively correlated with ‘being happy’.

4.2. The good flow

We can easily imagine how Levels 1-3 can produce flow by comparing it with a skill as we have been doing. One’s psychological needs, personality traits, and immediate goals are often discussed in a non-moral context within the literature on flow experiences. [...]

Integrating Level 4 (self-image or self-narrative) requires engaging in a skill that imposes personal meaning on one’s activities. I can produce an isolated instance of flow by engaging in a crossword puzzle while sitting in a hospital waiting room. This engages my need for mental stimulation [Level 1] while catering to my ability to work through puzzles [Level 2]. Games prototypically involve intrinsic motivation (Nakamura & Csikszentmihayli, 2002, p. 90) so engaging in the crossword puzzle quickly aligns with my immediate goals [Level 3]. Yet, it’s harder to integrate the crossword puzzle into my robust image of who I am — it surely would not play a strong role in my ‘self narrative’ (my self-attributed ‘life story’) — and this is why I can be painlessly taken out of the experience when my name is called by the nurse.

As I stated above, bringing into alignment Level 4 with Levels 1-3 require the activity that I perform to be imbued with personal meaning. The best example of this is in moments of what Nakamura & Csikszentmihayli (2002) call ‘vital engagement’: “a relationship with the world that is characterized both by experiences of flow (enjoyed absorption) and by

meaning” (p. 87). Yet, sources of meaning — commonly perceived — are often thought to transcend one’s own self-narrative and the endeavors that are informed by one’s self-image. Thus, the experience of ‘vital engagement’ should increase the more one’s activities include the sense that they serve a *larger* purpose. The more one brings into alignment Levels 1-4 with the additional Levels [5 and 6], the more meaningful the engagement will be experienced by the agent.

‘Being good’ is easily characterized as an instance of meaningful engagement with the world when we understand that what we normally deem moral behavior is that which conforms to the values held at these various levels. Our personal values [Level 4] are often taken for granted, procured in early childhood by virtue of family, culture, and history. But they can also be actively formulated in response to crises or traumas in which ‘push’ us to create new understandings (*ibid.* 95, Cf. Haidt, 2006, pp. 145-49). Thus, bringing Levels 1-4 into alignment in this way can resolve some internal conflict — procuring a degree of psychological health and well-being. But, if we can act in accordance to our personal values while also conforming to the values apparent within our socio-cultural context [Levels 5-6], we may act in the world essentially without any internal conflict and with the sincerity and spontaneity that we find in a morally developed persons. At the subjective or phenomenological level, moral actions will be experienced by the sincerely good person as a flow experience; “however complex and hard to navigate the circumstances are, there is no felt resistance to acting good, no interference with the expressing of [moral] responses — that is, with the expressing of one’s moral disposition (Annas, 2011, p. 75).

Given what I have said here about the importance of integrating certain personal features of one’s life (e.g., personal narrative, personality or character), one might worry that this invites a kind of subjective relativism. Perhaps, one might suggest, my account suggests that we achieve “good flow” by acting in conformity with our personal narrative and character, whatever they happen to be. To address this worry, we might start by looking at the roles played by levels 5 and 6 in moral development, which are the requirements that one act in conformity with social and cultural norms and values. First, socio-cultural values and the agent’s personal values *inform* one another. At a common sense level, someone is considered ‘good’ when they act in accordance with social and cultural values. They’re even better when they act on these values sincerely and without internal conflict. Thus, vertical coherency — bringing one’s personality [Levels 1-4] into alignment with one’s socio-

cultural values, *or vice versa* — allows for a more skillful navigation through the many spheres of one's life. But more importantly, socio-cultural values are not only influential, they are 'in the air' throughout our entire moral development. Our personal values are entangled with our higher-level values — they are necessarily framed using the 'language' provided to us by our society and culture.

The second reason why Levels 5 and 6 are crucial for moral development is due to the parameters that society and culture provide for morality. A serial criminal may not experience any qualms or internal conflict when repeatedly committing crimes but there is conflict and instability when she becomes frustrated as a result of municipal laws, condemnations from peers — in general, social stigmas and religio-cultural prohibitions (I'll have more to say about this in §4.4). Because of these 'invisible lines', so to speak, certain behaviors preclude the enjoyment of effortless and meaningful navigation through certain swaths of conceptual space. The 'lines' also serve to guide and reinforce the feeling of effortlessness within global flow experiences.

In sum, I'm not only characterizing 'being good' as a kind of subjective psychological health (enjoying the psychological health that is entailed in vertical coherency) but also reconciling one's personality with the values already-present in one's socio-cultural context — either conforming to them or striving to change them.

Although there may be many objections to such an ambitious proposal, my concern from now on will lay with addressing ostensible counterexamples to it. In doing so, I can address some potential concerns with moral relativism at the individual and cultural level. In regard to my counterexamples, I will briefly explore 1) ostensible examples of moral goodness without flow or without such cross-level integration and 2) ostensible examples of immoral goodness that could produce the kind of integration and flow-like experiences that I am claiming are the mark of moral development. I hope to show how my model can accommodate these circumstances.

4.3. Moral goodness without flow: The case of Angela (objection 1)

In this section, I will present a couple hard cases — examples of moral goodness apparently absent of the vertical coherency and global flow that I proposed a sincerely good person would exhibit.

The following is taken from Haybron's *Pursuit of Unhappiness*:²¹

Consider then the case of a high-ranking career diplomat, Angela, who is contemplating an early retirement at the age of 62: having served her country with great distinction for many years, Angela has come into a good deal of money through some canny investments and a bit of luck. She has all but decided to retire with her husband to a villa in Tuscany, and could do so very comfortably on her earnings. (They have a number of good friends in the area and it would bring her much closer to her daughter and grandchildren, who reside in Milan.) She correctly envisages that a life there would be tremendously satisfying, occupied largely with good company and food and drink, walking the countryside and catching up on her reading — in short, kicking back and just enjoying life. . . Before she can settle on her plans, however, a political crisis arises overseas and she is asked to take an important post where her considerable wisdom and skills would be of great use. . . Naturally, the assignment would be taxing and heavy on travel, and frequently would involve dealing with unwholesome individuals about matters of extreme gravity, often calling for a fair measure of anger and indignation on her part. . . No one would dream of begrudging her the comfortable life she had begun to set before herself. Yet she accepts the assignment without regret: the stakes are high enough that she feels they are probably worth it. She goes on to serve admirably and with a good deal of success in sustaining the peace, but another six years pass before she can take her retirement . . . (pp. 161-2)

Although Angela seems to be a better person by taking the assignment, the decision seems to introduce more discord into her life. If that's the case, being a better person would not seem to put her in a better position to integrate the different activities that correspond to the different levels of her life; she does not seem to be able to enjoy the kind of flow that results from such vertical coherency. In contrast, living in a more peaceful, more accommodating atmosphere like Tuscany would allow Angela to pursue the sorts of activities that appeal to her and would presumably allow her to successfully integrate the different levels of her personality in a satisfying way.

In response to this counterexample, I would note that it is difficult to judge which Angela is a better person (Tuscan Angela or Diplomat Angela) since 'being good' cannot be dictated merely by the choices she makes but more so by *how* she makes those choices. I will assume that a good person would take the assignment if given the opportunity, knowing that it is the best option in that context. If being a good person is a global skill that is exercised as a result of integrating the levels of one's personality and socio-cultural values, we have to explore whether or not Angela is allowing for more vertical coherency when she takes-up the

²¹ See also, Neera Badhwar's response (2014, p. 207ff)

assignment. If that's the case, I would insist that she would be exposed to more opportunities for flow experiences than she would be in Tuscany. If it's not the case, then this serves as a legitimate counterexample to my proposal.

An evaluation of which choice provides more vertical coherency must take into consideration Angela's personality [Level 1-4] and how it conforms to her socio-cultural values [Level 5-6]. The key to answering the former is in Haybron's characterization of Angela's decision: "she accepts the assignment without regret: the stakes are high enough that she feels they are probably worth it." Although we don't know how sincerely she initially responded to the opportunity, her choice was made without subsequent regret. Haybron needs to convey this fact in order to assure the reader that Angela was sincere in her convictions and was not met with internal conflict. If the story went "she accepted the assignment *with* regret," Angela would seem less good. I agree wholeheartedly with Haybron that "no one would dream of begrudging her the comfortable life she had begun to set before herself," but if forced to compare the two hypothetical portrayals, the Diplomat Angela with *no regrets* seems to have achieved more vertical coherency. Regardless of her success, she endorses the decisions she makes and this is the sincerity that we appreciate when evaluating whether someone *is* actually good.

As Annas notes

an action won't be performed easily and enjoyably if there is interference from attachment to goals that are in tension with what the person is doing in the action. An action will then not be fully generous, say, if accompanied by felt regrets about the money or time spent, and thoughts about how else the money or time might have been spent more gratifyingly. (p. 75)

Even if the *action* is good, the *agent* is good only to the degree that she has achieved vertical coherency and can act in conformity with the values exhibited at each level of her life.

This does not mean that 'being good' always demands the kind of supererogatory action that Angela seems to be performing. Indeed, if Angela were not such a talented and experienced diplomat, the decision to leave her family and return to such demanding work at her age would seem foolish. The less her talent area would help her, the more foolish the choice would be. Since Angela "goes on to serve admirably and with a good deal of success in sustaining the peace," it's apparent that she was cognizant of her talent area and how to successfully implement it. We can draw a parallel with a volunteer firefighter who is asked to help rescue people from a burning building. If the firefighter is not trained for the specific

circumstance, she might be admirable but the choice was not a good one. She would rush in and encounter difficulties which would impede a successful rescue. Acknowledging her talent area and being able to reconcile it with her higher values is what allows Angela to find diplomacy engaging.

Finally, it's likely that Angela experienced a high degree of 'vital engagement' in the context of her work and how it contributed to her society or culture. It's not enough that she finds that diplomacy aligns well with her temperament, developed talents, immediate goals, and self-image [Levels 1-4]. To function optimally — so to speak — she needs to find her work meaningful in the context of her self-image *and* in the context of her society or culture [Levels 5-6]. Work can be experienced as a 'job,' if the goal is financial rewards; a 'career,' if the goal is opportunities for advancement; or a 'calling,' if the goal is itself the "enjoyment of fulfilling, socially useful work" (Wrzensniewski, McCauley, Rozin, and Schwartz, 1997, p. 21). Since Angela was able to exercise her talent related to diplomacy *and* she found her work important in a larger sense, it is likely that she enjoyed a high degree of vertical coherency between her personality [Levels 1-4] and the socio-cultural context [Level 5-6] in which her work is deemed important — a "calling." If she moved to Tuscany, it is possible that her daily activities are not going to fall within her talent area. Moreso, her daily activities will seem less important in a larger sense and alignment with her strong socio-cultural values will be less likely. Longitudinal studies show that people "still committed to involvement in their talent area were more likely than their less committed peers to have found the activity both absorbing and important" — both criteria for vital engagement (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002, p. 96 citing Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993). Thus, since Angela is 'good,' she enjoys a meaningful and persistent global flow experience as a result of achieving vertical coherency and acting freely from her moral disposition.²²

4.4. Flow without moral goodness: The case of Unscrupulous (objection 2)

There is another hard case that is related to the brash diplomat, the brash firefighter, or — for that matter — the brash child savior who could achieved a kind of personal coherency and yet may have been motivated by immoral or just wrongheaded intentions. Aren't there

²² As noted by my Justin Tiwald in a personal correspondence, there is another way of Angela achieving vertical coherency even while enjoying her retirement in Tuscany: by adjusting her values, revising the personal narrative, etc. I also would acknowledge that option.

examples of immorality that could produce the kind of absorption and flow-like experiences that we say are the mark of moral development? Simply put, my answer is no. This has mostly to do with the inability to abstract oneself from a larger socio-cultural context. Any coherency that exists *solely* at the level of personality is plagued by frustration and instability. Moreso, I would insist that purely personal coherency is highly unlikely.

In order to articulate the objection, I will devise my own counterexample adapted from those presented by Bernard Williams (1985), Brad Hooker (1998), and Neera Badhwar (2014). Consider a person we'll name 'Unscrupulous' (Hooker, p. 149ff) who is very, very bad and also a very successful mobster (Badhwar, 2014, p. 189ff). Because of his immoral success and non-moral skills, Unscrupulous is not miserable at all but, "by any ethological standard . . . dangerously flourishing" (Williams, 1985, p. 46). He perhaps has non-moral skills that are "justifiable objects of admiration to others, and a source of pride for the person who has them." For example, clever repartee, ingenuity at planning heists, daredevilry and physical prowess while escaping the law, ambidextrous gunmanship skills, etc. (Badhwar, 2014, p. 192). Furthermore, Unscrupulous' success as a mobster and his intimate role within the mob 'family' affords him values to which he can conform while also insulating him from the opposing values society at-large hold. Thus, it seems that he can enjoy a degree of vertical coherency not only involving his personality but also his more localized socio-cultural values. This would seem to provide him with meaningful and persistent flow experiences that I have previously described as the mark of *moral* development.

The purpose of presenting this counterexample is to show how our intuitions seem to endorse the view that someone can be well-off, "flourish," and enjoy non-moral achievements without being moral — without 'being good'. But regardless of the intermittent and unstable moments of pleasure that Unscrupulous might enjoy, I will insist that he cannot attain the degree of vertical coherency and meaning — that is, the degree of 'vital engagement' — that a moral person could attain. This is primarily because of two reasons.

First, although Unscrupulous may be able to find meaning in his mob 'family' by conforming to the values that it collectively endorses, it would be impossible to abstract himself from the larger socio-cultural context (as mentioned in §4.2). I suppose it could be possible to be enculturated solely by the 'family' if Unscrupulous was "born into the mob" in

some strong sense and subsequently indoctrinated by it over his early developmental years. Nevertheless, the mob itself exists dependent upon its larger law-abiding community. Much like how a person who achieves coherency *solely* at the level of personality is plagued by frustration and instability, a mob ‘family’ collectively is plagued by frustration and instability. Being a member of this organization would mean to experience the negative effects of mob values in conflict with those of the larger community. It seems highly unlikely that Unscrupulous and any member of the mob ‘family’ could navigate freely within the parameters that the larger society and culture provides while being insulated from reprimands, stigmatization, and confrontations with other organizations. Thus, it seems very likely that his experiences of flow as a result of non-moral expertise would be constantly thwarted and frustrated.

Second, even if the mob ‘family’ and its members thrive and excel as, say, ‘a meaningful counterbalance to the values of the larger community,’ I would insist that vertical coherency is still highly unlikely. This is due to the need for ‘horizontal coherency’ at each level of our model. I will dwell a little on this point since it also serves as a response to a kind of cultural relativism.

4.5 ‘Horizontal coherency’

As Sheldon and Kasser (1995) insist, ‘horizontal coherency’ is necessary in order to make ‘vertical coherency’ feasible:

In addition to lower-to-higher level connections, systemic [vertical] coherence also implies connections among elements at the same level of a hierarchy [i.e. ‘horizontal coherency’]. . . Speaking from a bottom-up perspective, connections at lower levels presumably make vertical coherence easier to achieve. Speaking from a top-down perspective, higher level synthesis can help forge connections among lower level elements (p. 532).

So, if Unscrupulous does not have a coherent self-image or self-narrative (for example, he wants to be a mobster but also thinks of himself as an artist), he is less likely to maintain vertical coherency (due to the fact that his mob ‘family’ values would probably discourage or conflict with his artistic aspirations).

But regardless of Unscrupulous’ aspirations, there seems to be a systemic incoherency within any immoral organization like the mob. That is, it seems that mob ‘family’ values must necessarily reflect incoherent beliefs — at least when it comes to honesty, fairness,

respecting property, open-mindedness, etc. That is, the kind of moral decency that these values convey are not only important to *promote* when maintaining harmony within a group like the mob ‘family’, they are also the values that must be *opposed* when pursuing immoral endeavors.²³

Even in basic college ‘critical thinking’ texts, this is the kind of incoherency that is portrayed as an unbeneficial feature one’s worldview. If our beliefs and theories about the world are inconsistent with each other, we are less likely to succeed at our endeavors:

a theory helps increase our understanding by fitting our beliefs into a coherent pattern. When some of our most fundamental beliefs conflict with one another, the relevant theory is in trouble and our understanding is decreased. . . To achieve true understanding, we must somehow resolve the inconsistency. Likewise, if the theories that make up our worldview are inconsistent with one another, there is obviously something wrong with our worldview. At least one of our theories must be flawed and some of our beliefs must be wrong. Our understanding of the world is decreased, and our prospects for success (however we define it) are dimmed. (Vaughn, 2016, p. 441)

As we would expect, there are some worldviews that are better as a result of their beliefs and theories about oneself, one’s social values, or one’s cultural values being coherent at their respective levels. Being a criminal exhibits less horizontal and, thus, less vertical coherency because the worldview of a criminal is plagued by inconsistencies that manifest as frustrated motives and intentions. This frustration, in turn, precludes any real enjoyment of sustained and meaningful global flow experiences.

4.6 A hard case: the successful slaveholder

The following scenario is mentioned in-passing by Daniel Haybron (2008):

[Consider a] successful Southern slaveholder who enjoys the approbation of his community and a comfortable existence with a loving family[. This person] has obvious moral shortcomings, yet it is hard to see in what sense his life must be ‘impoverished.’ Why must he be in *any* way worse off than he would be were he more enlightened about human equality? Why must he be worse off than a morally better counterpart who enjoys as much wealth, comfort, success, love, and reputation, but without ever wronging anyone? (We can assume that both are well-settled in their moral convictions, equally convinced of their righteousness.) (p. 159)

²³ I think that Neera Badhwar (2014) does a good job making this point for her own purposes (in defense of a kind of eudaimonism).

The case of the slaveholder can be formulated as a response to this paper's proposal by insisting that the slaveholder has achieved vertical coherency between his personal values, goals, and self-image along with the surrounding socio-cultural values. The slaveholder "enjoys the approbation of his community" and is perhaps insulated from the insinuations of Northern abolitionists.

Although I acknowledge this objection as a hypothetical scenario, I would like to consider further the historical context of such a character. For this objection to be effective, it would be helpful to imagine a slaveholder that enjoyed his success well before 1860. The closer to Abraham Lincoln's campaign and election, the more anxiety slaveholders felt. They were continuously challenged to reconsider their assumptions about slavery; the more exposed to the national dialogue, the more ambivalence was expressed in their correspondences and diaries.²⁴ Furthermore, regardless of when he lived, it would be helpful to imagine our successful slaveholder closed-off to the national dialogue altogether. This is because, even in the 18th century, there were organizations who called for the abolition of slavery or the 'repatriation' of African slaves and who thus challenged the ideologies of slaveholders. We would have to suppose a moderately isolated — yet successful — slaveholder living in blissful close-mindedness. I don't think this is difficult to imagine.

Furthermore, regardless of being sheltered from opposing ideologies which expose inconsistencies in his own, there was never a time when slave unrest and rebellions were not a concern. Such an ever-present threat to the slaveholder enterprise would understandably be cause for anxiety and would itself challenge the legitimacy of the

²⁴ A fascinating illustration of the mounting anxiety and ambivalence of Southern slaveholders can be found in Moore (1993). There, we find a widowed slaveholder, Keziah Goodwyn Hopkins Brevard writing in her diary after the election of Lincoln: "I have never been opposed to giveing [sic] up slavery if we could send them out of our country — I have often wished I had been born in just such a country — with all our religious privileges [sic] & liberties with none of them in our midst — if the North had let us alone — the Master & the servant were happy with out advantages — but we had had vile wretches ever making the restless worse than they would have been & from my experience my own negroes are as happy as I am: — happier." Just to note, the proposal of colonizing blacks (in particular, to what is now Liberia) was proposed by Americans since the Revolutionary War. As for the fantasy of her "happy" slaves, Brevard — in a later diary entry — exposes her own view as wishful thinking. She relates how she become angry "when I find out their feelings to me — with all I have done for them . . . I am every now & then awakened by the fact that they hate me." She wishes she could "cast them off without scruples of conscience," but believes she cannot "without a rebuke from my Heavenly father." She acknowledges that all slaves "would aim at freedom — 'tis natural they should & they will try for it." It is not difficult to imagine the discordance present in the mind of the average antebellum slaveholder.

slaveholder's beliefs. All these factors jeopardize the horizontal coherency of the slaveholder — the consistency of the slaveholder worldview — at different levels. Horizontal incoherency, in turn, would make vertical coherency unstable and short-lived.

Now, to be even more charitable to the objection, we might assume a successful slaveholder who is not concerned with unrest or rebellion; he would not be plagued by anxiety or ambivalence towards his enterprise. In responding to this, I will address two types of slaveholders that could potentially establish this state-of-mind: the active slaveholder and the passive slaveholder.

An active slaveholder would be one who embraces the slaveholder role and who would play an active role in the management of the 'property' alongside his overseer. The slaves would be monitored; their motives would be anticipated; unrest, laziness, and dissension would be appropriately discouraged; and potential rebellions would be successfully quashed. The question is whether these activities could provide both absorbed enjoyment (flow) and meaning as a result of vertical coherency. I suspect not.

The activities involved in this active slaveholding (monitoring the slaves; anticipating their motives; appropriately discouraging unrest, laziness, and dissension) would have to conform to the slaveholder's basic psychology [Level 1] and character traits [Level 2]. In response to this, I find it unlikely that these unsavory activities would be endorsed by a healthy human psychology. Although meaning might be provided, I would expect the unsavoriness of the activities would effect the enjoyment gleaned from this work — thus, making vital engagement (enjoyment and meaning) unlikely. For example, to enact some of these "unsavory" activities with proficiency would require an intimate familiarity with the human beings that the slaveholder and overseer is subjugating (e.g. anticipating the motives and intentions). Concurrently, it would also require an absence of any *empathy* on the part of the slaveholder that might undermine the enactment of other activities (e.g. discouraging unrest, laziness, and dissension). Taken together, these two criteria seem to demand a deviation from a healthy psychology [Levels 1-2].²⁵ Thus, there is less likely to be horizontal

²⁵ Basic empathy as a result of mirror neurons is especially active in response to the intentions or motives of other human beings. The "deviation from a healthy psychology" could be merely non-conscious suppression of any emotions towards slaves (as a result of, say, the dehumanizing portrayal of black africans at the time). On the other hand, this lack of empathy could be the result of sociopathy. Whatever the deviation, there is less likely to be horizontal coherency at the more basic levels of the personality [Levels 1-2] and, thus, there is less likely to be vertical coherency at the personal level [Level 1-4] despite there being an alignment between any higher levels [i.e. Levels 3-6].

coherency at the more basic levels of the personality [Levels 1-2] and at the levels of personality in general [Level 1-4]. Meaning might be found in the work due to the larger society and culture apparently endorsing the institution of slavery, but the work itself would become tedious and grueling since one's psychology would not allow an absorbed enjoyment.²⁶

In contrast, the passive slaveholder would *not* actively participate in the management of the 'property.' He would be relatively aloof and hands-off with his enterprise; he would not interact personally with his slaves — leaving it to his overseer. If we assume that such a slaveholder can be "successful," then he would insulate himself not only from other ideologies but also from the "unsavory" activities — those activities that otherwise would corrode his presumably healthy psychology. In response to this scenario, my view would seem to allow this hands-off slaveholder to enjoy much more vertical coherency — and, thus, vital engagement (absorbed enjoyment and meaning) — than his more active counterpart. I think this makes sense. But note that *how* he is able to achieve such vital engagement — *by not playing an active role in slaveholding*. That is, a slaveholder could only be said to exercise moral goodness as this paper is defining it only insofar as he is not embracing the activities involved in slaveholding. Instead, it would be more accurate to say that he achieves vital engagement with his non-slaveholding activities — those involved in his role as a father or husband or community member.

This might be disappointing for those that prefer a more black-and-white picture of the moral landscape but it's helpful to dwell on the conclusion of this thought experiment. The proposal presented in this paper provides the language to articulate why slaveholders exhibit *less* moral goodness the *more* they play an active role in the morally repugnant aspects of slavery. This is because the actual activity of slaveholding is not something with which one can achieve vertical coherency. My proposal acknowledges that slaveholders were able to enjoy intermittent, episodic cases of pleasure or satisfaction — this seems realistic. But a slaveholder who actively engages in the immoral institution of slavery cannot

²⁶ Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2002) comments on how difficult it is "to sustain prolonged involvement in an endeavor that is experienced as significant if a person does not find enjoyment within the activity itself" (p. 96). See also Colby and Damon (1992) and Ebaugh (1988) on the likelihood of burnout in meaningful yet unenjoyable activities.

enjoy global vital engagement. Because of this — as I'll discuss in the next section — they are barred from what most people would recognize as authentic happiness.²⁷

Part 5: Morality & Happiness

So far, I've presented an argument where 'being good' involves sustained and meaningful global flow experiences. This experience is sustained by far-reaching coherencies cross-level (vertical coherency) which is sustained by consistency at each level of one's moral life (horizontal coherency). This experience is global because 'being good' is a disposition that is informed ultimately by the vertical coherency of the whole system — it does not reside at any one level but as a higher-order property of *all* the levels. That is, 'being good' is a disposition that can manifest freely and sincerely when 'vertical coherency' is achieved. The more coherency, the more an agent can 'be good'

As implied in previous sections, 'being good' can also be described as involving a kind of 'vital engagement'. As expected, this kind of 'vital engagement' is global. It is a relationship with the world that is characterized both by *global flow* experiences (enjoyed absorption or engagement) and by *meaning* (at the levels of one's personality [Levels 1-4] and one's socio-cultural context [Level 5-6]) (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002, p. 87).

It will not take much to argue that this is the kind of happiness that most people mean if pushed on the subject of 'authentic' or 'genuine' happiness. At this point of the paper, I will argue for my main conclusion: 'being good' positively correlates to 'being happy'. 'Being good' is a practical disposition that demands intellectual and affective engagement. 'Being happy' is just what I've described as *global vital engagement*. This is authentic happiness.

²⁷ Perhaps one can respond to contemporary cases similar to the slaveholder problem using my proposal. For example, we could ask ourselves whether factory farming is allowing its active participant to achieve vertical coherency. If not, there may be something inherently problematic in the institution. Factory farming is a less obvious case of moral propriety (compared to slavery) and so it is supplemented with discussions of health, environment, and economics. But in terms of being consciously confronted with distributive injustice (in regards to the resources wasted in factory farming) and animal injustice (which demands more sensitive, perhaps less universal capacities for empathy), our goals, self-image and the values we endorse as a community may not be as coherent as we would like. Despite being agnostic about a specific theory of the good, the developmental picture presented in this paper allows for new generations of mentors to alter the 'trajectory' so-to-speak of moral development. And although I do not suggest any robust conception of the good (i.e. the *telos* of our 'trajectory'), my proposal insists that a consequence of successfully enacting the good should be cognitive and social harmony.

5.1. Authentic happiness

In this section, I will be presenting a conception of ‘genuine’ or ‘authentic’ happiness’ adapted from L.W. Sumner’s book *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics* (1996). I hope to show that this notion of happiness conforms to common sense and usage. I will also show that this is identical to the notion of ‘global vital engagement’ that I previously argued was positively correlated with ‘being good’. This will effectively show how ‘being good’ positively correlates to ‘being happy’.

Sumner (1996) presents ‘being happy’ as endorsing and being satisfied with one’s life as a whole:

Being happy in this sense means having a certain kind of positive attitude toward your life, which in its fullest form has both a cognitive and an affective component. The cognitive aspect of happiness consists in a positive evaluation of the conditions of your life, a judgement that, at least on balance, it measures up favourably against your standards or expectations. This evaluation may be global, covering all of the important sectors of your life, or it may focus on one particular (your work, say, or your family). In either case it represents an affirmation or endorsement of (some or all of) the conditions or circumstances of your life, a judgement that, on balance and taking everything into account, your life is going well for you. . . The affective side of happiness consists in what we commonly call a sense of well-being: finding your life enriching or regarding, or feeling satisfied or fulfilled by it. (pp. 145-6)

Here, Sumner presents two dimensions of happiness that correspond to the intellectual and affective dimensions that comprise ‘being good’. In order to cultivate one’s moral disposition, there must be a mindful and intellectual engagement with one’s moral life. Striving for cross-level coherency, one’s moral disposition and the behavior that it generates allows for a more “positive evaluation” of one’s life. That is, one’s behavior measures up favorably against the recognized standards at each level. Concurrently, there must be an affective and emotional engagement with one’s moral life in order to synchronize one’s behavior with one’s feelings and judgments. This allows for the expression of one’s moral disposition more sincerely and spontaneously. Phenomenologically, I would insist that this occurs as an enjoyable global flow experience. The more engagement and coherency, the more flow. This now exposes an important difference between Sumner’s view and my own.

Sumner is articulating a theory that measures ‘authentic happiness’ (what he sees as comprising one’s well-being or welfare) in terms of ‘life-satisfaction’. This means that one’s happiness is informed by the positive evaluation of one’s life and the occurrent sense of “feeling satisfied” with it. The proposed view of happiness that I’ve articulated in this paper

involves these intellectual and affective dimensions but also a degree of *engagement* in these dimensions that Sumner does not acknowledge. Using the skill analogy, I believe that I've shown that including flow experience in a discussion of moral expertise is justified.

Additionally, I believe that emphasizing felt engagement or absorption in one's moral life goes a long way towards discouraging a charge of a kind of intellectualism that comes with Sumner's 'life-satisfaction' view of happiness. When taken out of flow (that is, when taken out of the actual activity which one finds inherently enjoyable), it's likely that the agent would provide a positive evaluation of one's experience. But this evaluation would be *retrospective* and external to the experience which is being evaluated. The actual instance of happiness is *immanent* — in the experience itself. Thus, it's more helpful to talk about happiness as comprising of a global flow experience and a sense of meaning, both of which is the result of achieving (through intellectual and affective engagement) the vertical coherency described in this paper.

The resulting view shows 'authentic happiness' as a global kind of 'vital engagement'. As Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi (2002) say, "the optimal outcome of human development is a life characterized by the conjunction of enjoyment and meaning in one's endeavors" (p. 94). Global 'vital engagement' entails both enjoyment and meaning which emerges from the sustained 'vertical coherency' found in the practical disposition of a morally developed agent.

Angela is authentically happy because of the vital engagement she finds in diplomacy. Unscrupulous is deprived of authentic happiness despite experiencing legitimate moments of 'feeling happy'. To clarify why this doesn't matter much to the kind of happiness that we care about, I will briefly present what 'being happy' is *not*.

5.2. What 'being happy' is not

'Being happy' is not '*being happy with*' or '*about something*'. The way that this phrase is commonly used, 'being happy with' amounts to merely being satisfied with something — having a positive attitude towards it or expressing a positive evaluation of it. Sumner rightly notes that "no affect or occurrent feeling on your part is implied" when we say we are happy with something (p. 143). This kind of happiness is potentially absent of any enjoyment or felt meaning. It is not the kind of happiness that we pursue for ourselves and our loved ones.

'Being happy' is not *'feeling happy'*. This kind of happiness involves the affective dimension that 'being happy with' was lacking. It is certainly desirable (this is the kind of happiness that hedonism pursues) but — as Sumner notes — “feelings of happiness . . . are frames of mind subject to fluctuation from day to day, rather than settled judgements about the quality of our lives” (p. 145). By itself, it lacks the intellectual dimension which is meant to guide our pursuits appropriately towards things that give us more stable and meaningful experiences of enjoyment. 'Feeling happy' is certainly good but it is not what we should aim for. Authentic happiness should allow for richer and more consistent experiences of 'feeling happy' but it provides much more than episodic pleasure.

'Being happy' is not *'having a happy disposition'*. This is “a settled tendency” toward occurrent episodes of feeling happy (p. 145). This is getting closer to the kind of authentic happiness that we care about for ourselves and our loved ones. But it still seems unrealistic without it being guided by an intellectual engagement with one's life as a whole. In other words, although I agree that this kind of happiness would be close to the kind of happiness we care about, I don't think it's realistic to aim towards having a happy disposition without engaging with one's life as a whole and how it 'hangs together' in the way that I've been discussing in this paper. 'Being happy' should not be thought of as just increasing the amount one 'feels happy' — this is ancillary or even incidental to authentic happiness. 'Being happy' is about ensuring that your life is not only enjoyable and engaging, but also and meaningful.

5.3. Conclusion to Part 5

In conclusion, 'being happy' is the conjunction of enjoyment and meaning that results from developing moral goodness as a skill and achieving the vertical coherency characterized in Part 4 of this paper. 'Being good' is a practical disposition that entails intellectual and affective engagement with one's world, resolving inconsistencies and aligning the values that one holds at a personal and socio-cultural level. To the degree that this coherency is achieved, one becomes more 'good' in a real and sincere way. Likewise, to the degree that this coherency is achieved, the more one enjoys a global flow experience and the more meaning is granted to one's life. These two elements characterize the kind of 'vital engagement' that we can appropriately deem 'authentic happiness'. This is the happiness that we hope for ourselves and those we care about. If one pursues this kind of happiness

without also seeking to be good — without seeking vertical coherency — whatever happiness that is procured will be unstable and easily spoiled. ‘Authentic happiness’ is stable happiness. It is an achievement that a sincerely good person enjoys after a thoughtful and careful engagement with her world, her community, and herself.

Part 6: Concluding Thoughts — Happiness as achievement

‘Being good’ is a kind of global skill directed towards shaping and fashioning one’s practical dispositions. The goal is to better express this disposition. The only way to do this is by deliberately and gradually bringing all the activities of one’s life into alignment. Exercising this global skill is inherently enjoyable and meaningful. I think it’s fair at this point to characterize the happiness that one finds in this process as — more than anything — an *achievement*. Doing so will drive-home the point that my proposal conforms to common sense notions of happiness.

Julia Annas in her article “Happiness as Achievement” (2004) conveys the sentiment nicely — making the distinction between ‘feeling happy’ as a result of “doing any old thing” (p. 45) and actually ‘being happy’ and living a happy life:

Getting a smiley-face feeling from good deeds or bad deeds lasts only as long as the deeds do. And this kind of happiness does not matter to us all that much once we start to think in a serious way about our lives. As we bring up our children, what we aim for is not that they have episodes of smiley-face feelings, but that their lives go well as wholes: we come to think of happiness as the way a life as a whole goes well, and see that episodes of happiness are not what we build our lives around (p. 45) . . . Even if episodes first come to mind, we do think, centrally, of living happy lives. And this is because we think of our lives as wholes when we are thinking of how to live, what kind of people we are to aspire to be. (p. 46)

We have the thought that happiness comes from living in some ways and not others, that it is not something that others can’t give you, either by giving you stuff or by getting you into a particular state. (p. 50)

I have argued that the kind of happiness that we truly want for ourselves and those we care about comes from not just doing good things but being good people. This can be perceived as difficult at first (and rightly so) but as we gradually train ourselves and keep striving towards being better, such moral cultivation will not only become easier, it will become more enjoyable and undergird an enriching and sustainable happiness. Now we can see this project as a worthy endeavor not just for morality’s sake but for our own happiness. This

makes us willing participants in this challenge, allows us to take pride in our success at being good people, and allows us to take satisfaction from our well-earned achievement that is true happiness.²⁸

²⁸ The line of Sanskrit in my acknowledgments page (p. v) is an Indian proverb presented as entry 26 in Bhate, S. (Ed.). (1987). *Subhāṣita-śatakam [One Hundred Good Sayings]* (Vol. 2). Pune: University of Poona. My own translation is as follows: "As the thought, so the word; as the word, so the deed. Among good men, there is a uniformity in thought, word, and deed." This rang true to me when I first read it and served as an impetus for writing this paper. The sincerely good person would have no tension between her thoughts and actions (including her speech acts). Once we've appropriately cultivated ourselves morally, the beneficial consequences surely include a free and enjoyable relationship with our surroundings and with each other.

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