

Wagging Tails and Riding Elephants: Why Study Non-Western Philosophy?

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The development of consciousness in human beings is inseparably connected with the use of metaphor. Metaphors are not merely peripheral decoration or even useful models, they are fundamental forms of our awareness of our condition...it seems to me impossible to discuss certain kinds of concepts without resort to metaphor, since the concepts are themselves deeply metaphorical and cannot be analyzed into non-metaphorical components without a loss of substance. (Murdoch 1991, 77)

1. Introduction¹

I want to advance two arguments connected, though in different ways, with the value of studying non-Western philosophy. If the arguments are sound they show not only that it can be helpful to study non-Western philosophy but, at least for ethical and political theory, it would be irresponsible not to do so. I believe both these claims to be true.

My first argument is that those who advocate a *wide* “reflective equilibrium”² approach to ethics and political theory, who seek to begin philosophical reflection by sympathetically understanding and critically evaluating the best views currently in play, are not being true to their own principles or are assuming, without evidence or argument, that there are no wise views outside the western canon. I take it to be evident that the latter assumption is both irresponsible and absurd. Now, some will respond that this is not the way to approach ethical or political theory, and we can debate the merits pro and con of such an approach, but it is simply a fact that many well-known philosophers and political thinkers today defend and practice this kind of approach—philosophy and political science departments rely on classes that consist of surveys of works from the Western canon, which strongly implies that this is how one begins the study of these disciplines—and so the criticism applies at least to a very large group of and arguably

¹ Thanks to Karen L. Carr, Erin M. Cline, Brad Cokelet, Owen Flanagan, Eirik L. Harris, Eric L. Hutton, Bryan W. Van Norden, Hagop Sarkissian, Eric Schwitzgebel, Michael R. Slater, and Justin Tiwald for very helpful comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this essay.

² While I use Rawls’ term here, “reflective equilibrium,” I intend its sense to be much wider than his. Rawls limits the scope of reflective equilibrium to what makes sense to a particular culture or nation, perhaps worrying that this is necessary in order to avoid incoherence. This view is most clearly on display in *The Law of Peoples* (1999). Nevertheless, he presents no evidence or argument for so limiting the scope of reflective equilibrium. I see no reason to stop inquiry at the boundary of culture or tradition. To do so seems to invite not only pluralism, which I believe is both true and manageable, but strong relativism, which is neither. Thanks to Hagop Sarkissian and Owen Flanagan for helpful discussion and suggestions on this topic. The kind of approach I advocate is well described in Kraut 2006 and on display with some comparative dimension in Nussbaum 2001.

almost all contemporary philosophers and political theorists.³ The argument can and should be extended to include contemporary thinkers who argue that ethical and political theory should be based upon or at least attentive to work in the social sciences. In this case, the thought is that such approaches take among their primary objects of study the values and norms that people actually have and practice and this leads one to at least begin with the best views currently in play. Among philosophers who employ a version of wide reflective equilibrium, which comprehensively embraces not only philosophy but the social sciences, empirical and evolutionary psychology, as well as cognitive neuroscience, are people like Owen Flanagan and, as I shall show, he and his work are particularly revealing for exploring the connection to non-Western philosophy.

My second argument concerns two metaphors Jonathan Haidt offers to represent the relationship between reason and emotion in ethical justification and what these imply, conceal, and preclude. (This is where the quote from Iris Murdoch that serves as the epigraph of this essay comes in.) Haidt has become well-known and in some quarters notorious for arguing (Haidt 2001, 2006) that moral judgment and justification are primarily and almost wholly matters of “fast” emotionally based responses and have very little to do with “slow” rational deliberation or decision. The latter purportedly are almost always *post facto* and function as a kind of rear guard action, to defend decisions that our fast-acting emotional system already has made. This of course would pose significant problems for just about every moral and political theory currently defended by contemporary thinkers, which unsurprisingly has drawn criticism from some quarters.⁴ Among such critics are Owen Flanagan, who (Flanagan 2014) argues for a more robust and important role for reason. What I have to say about Haidt’s views supports Flanagan’s position, which I share, but this is not my primary concern. My core interest is to note that Haidt and those who take part in the widening debate his views have generated in one way or another maintain and remain stuck in the venerable dichotomy between reason and emotion. I will show how Haidt’s choice of metaphors both reflect and in certain respects preclude or obscure this important point, which leads him as well as his defenders and critics to fail to see how reasoning almost always enters into and informs, through practice and tradition, our emotional and ethical lives. I then will show how serious engagement with East Asian philosophical traditions offers a way out of this debilitating dichotomy and toward more plausible philosophical and psychological views.⁵

³ In the concluding section of this essay I present some reasons for thinking that the perspective of wide reflective equilibrium is an inescapable horizon for all those philosophizing about ethics and political theory using natural languages. Here, though, I am only defending the weaker claim that this in fact is the perspective from which philosophizing in these fields is practiced.

⁴ Haidt’s results would not create problems for philosophical theory if philosophers, when they build their philosophical theories, manage to avoid the cognitive patterns he sees in non-philosophers. Work by Eric Schwitzgebel and Fiery Cushman (Schwitzgebel & Cushman 2012, 2015) and Josh Rust (Schwitzgebel & Rust 2014) suggest that they do not manage to avoid such problems, but the issue is not yet clearly decided. The nature and extent of the problems Haidt’s view would pose differs among moral theories, but if he is correct his view would undermine the use of any theory as a reliable method for personal deliberation and choice.

⁵ Engagement with East Asian traditions also lends support to certain contemporary strands of the Western philosophical tradition that have been critical of the distinction between reason and emotion or rejected it entirely. For example, Nietzsche, as well as most pragmatists beginning with James and Dewey, rejects the distinction. Thanks to Michael Slater for making this point in comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

2. Moral Modularity⁶

Flanagan's interest in moral modularity is long-standing and clearly stated in his classic work *Varieties of Moral Personality: Ethics and Psychological Realism* (Flanagan 1991).⁷ Initially inspired by the work of Chomsky (Chomsky 1957) and Fodor (Fodor 1983), Flanagan took up and developed the idea that human beings are endowed with domain-specific, modular moral processors. These processors are primarily brain-based systems that are to a significant extent functionally autonomous, i.e. dedicated to certain phenomena which they track and respond to largely without the aid of other parts of the self and at least initially fairly well encapsulated, that is to say, not readily susceptible to control or direction from other modules or some overall executive agency. While softening the strong isolated silo description of modularity characteristic of Chomsky and Fodor's work, which is attributable at least in part to the particular human capacities that were the focus of their investigations, and allowing for greater permeability and coordination among moral modules, Flanagan saw clearly and showed precisely how revolutionary such a picture might be for traditional approaches to ethics by asking,

The obvious question, however, is whether moral competence is appropriately construed as a coherent domain in its own right or whether it is, in reality, just a convenient term which depicts a multifarious set of competencies, each possibly with its own learning story. (Flanagan 1991, 269)

The "unitary-competence" view being challenged here is characteristic of the Stoics and most Enlightenment ethicists as well as the theories of psychologists such as Piaget and Kohlberg, whose research was widely regarded as providing empirical support for such views. The ethical theories of neo-Aristotelians as well as Pragmatists like Dewey are consistent with versions of the alternative "multiple-competence" view. Flanagan offers a variety of reasons for thinking that some version of the "multiple-competence" view is more plausible: e.g. it is difficult to identify any essential feature of moral problems, character, or beliefs—morality and character "are more what psychologists call cluster concepts than they are classical natural kind terms" (Flanagan 1991, 270); moral traits are acquired and function in very different ways; there is considerable "gappiness" in actual moral character—some people regularly show great compassion but appear unmusical or even deaf when it comes to justice or courage. This last

⁶ The following section is taken with modification from my essay "Owen Flanagan on Moral Modularity and Comparative Philosophy," which will appear in Nelson and Seok 2016.

⁷ Over time, Flanagan has made clear that he regards theories like Kohlberg's moral psychology or the moral modularity hypothesis as idealizations or models and not real descriptions of physical modules in the brain. One of his objections to these or even dual processing models such as Kahneman (2011) proposes is their tendency to engender realist beliefs about analytic distinctions. This despite the fact that Kahneman at least explicitly states that system one and system two are *not real*. Thanks to Owen Flanagan for comments and suggestions on this topic.

point, along with others, shows that the “multiple-competence” view does not provide strong support for many traditional forms of virtue ethics either. For in addition to tending to rely on a single strict and inflexible teleology, such views also tend to see much greater consistency and range to individual virtues and much greater unity and relationship among the virtues than the empirical evidence warrants.⁸ A “multiple-competence” modularity theory that allows for good as well as bad natural tendencies, though, can offer a plausible psychological basis for both virtues and vices. In later work, Flanagan also brings into play ideas and evidence articulated by contemporary psychologists such as Jonathan Haidt, whose work we will discuss in more detail below, about the existence of specific sets of innate moral modules that can be tuned up or down within different moral traditions, which also militate against most traditional forms of virtue ethics (Flanagan 2014).⁹

There are fascinating and deeply challenging questions and puzzles surrounding the general claims of the Moral Modularity Hypothesis. Some of these, such as the degree of binding that exists among different innate modules, apply equally and fundamentally to non-moral abilities such as vision, while others such as whether and in what sense a given module needs to be engaged or employed in order to produce a viable ethical system or the ways in which culture and history contribute to or shape such decisions seem to apply at least more directly and dramatically to moral as opposed to non-moral modules.¹⁰ Evolutionary theory has a great deal to contribute to our understanding of modularity in all its forms, but as is often the case evolution contributes but is by no means decisive. For, as Flanagan and others have pointed out, while evolution surely has bequeathed to us the capacities with which we begin life, it does not control either the circumstances within which these operate or the ways in which we develop and deploy our capacities.¹¹ Innate modules for vision or for detecting and responding to suffering developed over extensive periods of time and enabled our ancestors to survive and develop but we exercise these inherited capacities in profoundly different circumstances. Our innate tendencies to gorge on sugar and animal fat worked very well when these substances were extremely difficult to find, but such tendencies strongly incline us to consume unhealthy amounts of these in today’s environment. Moreover, we develop and deploy our innate modules very differently and with new and previously unforeseen goals in mind. Color vision served important functions in the distant past helping us to identify ripe fruit or rancid meat, but today we use it to know when to brake or continue on through an intersection. We also cultivate and deploy it in the production

⁸ Both these features show how much Western forms of virtue ethics—even contemporary ones—still owe to Aristotle. Thanks too Erin M. Cline for raising this point.

⁹ Flanagan distinguishes the most general form of moral modularity, which he calls the Moral Modularity Hypothesis (MMH) from views like Haidt’s, which call themselves “social intuitionism” or “Moral Foundations Theory” (MFT) and further argues that it is best to consider the former as a general hypothesis, apart from Haidt’s or anyone else’s specific statement of the view. Flanagan also explores with great insight and clarity the particular expression of MMH put forth by the early Confucian thinker Mengzi (391-08 BCE), which Flanagan calls Mencian Moral Modularity (MMM). See Flanagan 2014.

¹⁰ Issues in childhood development are important to consider here. Some capacities, for example for language and empathy, need to be engaged and developed at certain points in a child’s life. There are also interesting questions in regard to developmental delays and disorders in young children where there are normal or even exceptional capacities in some areas but serious delays or developmental problems in other areas. Thanks to Erin M. Cline for raising this set of issues.

¹¹ This point is extremely important for those seeking to develop the MMH, for it makes clear that any adequate version of the theory requires a broad and expansive version of naturalism—one that includes the influence of non-biological, social phenomena such as culture, history, and tradition—that might give some scientific naturalists pause. Thanks to Michael Slater for raising this issue.

and appreciation of a remarkably broad variety of visual arts that motivate and satisfy us in a range of profound ways that have nothing at all to do with the original value of color vision. Such differences between our ancestral past and current life show that the evolutionary goals of survival and reproduction offer only the most basic, open-ended, and often defeasible standards for deciding how modern human beings can or should live. The older, more basic conception of fitness no longer describes what we choose to do; evolution has bequeathed to us capacities that equip and compel us to look beyond survival, to seek, discover, and invent more robust and open-ended forms of the good life in environments we have profoundly altered, shaped, and manufactured.

The MMH, as described by Flanagan, leaves us with many questions but it offers a number of important insights and answers to ponder, appreciate, and apply. According to this view, morality is much more a matter of drawing upon and developing a set of innate human tendencies, something very much like what P. F. Strawson (Strawson 1962) called “reactive attitudes,” and through an ongoing process of reflective experience identifying how to adjust these up or down in strength, express them in various forms, and bring them together in different permutations and combinations to address the kinds of challenges creatures like us tend to face in ways that yield viable, satisfying, and enjoyable forms of life. Now admittedly there are quite a number of parameters in play here that can be satisfied in mutually incompatible ways, but that does not entail any strong form of relativity, only a natural, healthy pluralism (Wong 2006; Ivanhoe 2009). There is no single, fixed course of development that leads inexorably from the nascent “sprouts” of our innate moral repertoire to an ideal form of human life. It is not altogether clear that every moral module needs to be developed and deployed;¹² it is perfectly consistent with the hypothesis that informed and reflective human beings will come to judge that some sprouts no longer contribute in the ways or to the extent that they did successfully in the past. Some moral sprouts might even come to be viewed as moral weeds.¹³ This and other features of Flanagan’s conception of MMH lead us to explore the connection between his moral theory and comparative philosophy.

As noted above, the MMH leaves us without any algorithm for deciding which moral inclinations we should develop, to what extent we should develop them, or how to relate them to one another. As many have noted, we lack a clear natural teleology in regard to morality; in this sense we cannot move from how things are to how we should be, from is to ought without, as Hume noted, offering some explanation of how to make this passage. Nevertheless, like the theory of natural selection itself, the MMH does not do away with the notion of teleology altogether, which is one reason it does not support strong relativism. As a number of people have pointed out (Wright 1976; Lennox 2013), Darwin still saw himself as pursuing a teleological

¹² In remarks on this section, Eric Hutton has suggested there may be a rough parallel here with Aristotle’s view about how the virtues contribute to happiness. Charitably read, Aristotle might allow that not all virtues need to be exercised in order to have a happy life; in the same way, not all moral modules need to be developed and deployed.

¹³ Flanagan discusses some of the ways in which modules such as disgust need to be reined in and refocused in light of what we know today (Flanagan 2014, 62-5). Paul Bloom sees no viable moral role for disgust and argues that it often offers support for profoundly immoral behavior (Bloom 2014, 131-57). On the other hand, the role of disgust in moral judgment recently has been called into question. See May 2014 and Landy and Goodwin 2015. Thanks to Hagop Sarkissian for pointing me toward this work.

account of the evolution of living organisms. Within a relatively stable environment, traits that enable an organism to survive and reproduce more successfully are selected for the functions they provide. Moreover, since we talk about this process in terms of the relative *advantage* of such traits, values are clearly in play. The problem with applying such an analysis to the case of morality lies in the fact, noted earlier and clearly discussed by Flanagan in terms of the difference between “fitness” and “flourishing” (Flanagan 2014, 38-9), is that human beings are not satisfied, happy, or content with lives that aim only at survival and reproduction.¹⁴ It’s not that we don’t value such things; that is not the point. Rather, the point is these are not the only or trumping values that human beings hold dear and pursue. This is not just or even primarily a hortatory claim; it is an empirical claim. This, in fact—and it is a contingent fact—is what distinguishes us from every other creature on earth; we are “evaluative animals” (Van Norden 2000, 114). In light of the range, variety, and intensity of the things we value, support, advocate, sing praises to, and pursue, it is not an exaggeration to say we are promiscuously valuing creatures.

Given that human beings, by nature, tend to value morality in its various guises, we are justified in claiming that the search for and pursuit of moral ends describe a clear though general and still evolving natural teleology (Flanagan 2014). This requires further explanation. First, we must keep in mind that “moral ends” here refers not to a single rule or principle or set of rules and principles derived prior to human experience (like the rules and principles of traditional deontology or consequentialism), but a collection or cluster of goods that are widely seen as constitutive of individual and collective well-being. Second, we must keep in mind that how we tune, arrange, and instantiate our innate moral tendencies depends in large measure on the accumulated and ongoing reflective experiences of people in particular historical cultures and traditions. In light of these factors, the proper work of ethics and political theory is not primarily much less exclusively abstract theoretical speculation, though that has its place, but systematic reflection, analysis, critique, and development of a fundamentally empirically based inquiry drawing upon biology, neuroscience, psychology, religion, anthropology, literature etc. aimed at discovering the bases and forms of moral values. As a general approach, this should sound familiar, for it basically describes the method of *saving the phenomena* first described and employed by Aristotle, which is the progenitor of the wide reflective equilibrium I advocate. We are not to passively register and accept what we find in either our first or second nature; both are open to and invite critical evaluation and creative reformulation and extension. Nevertheless, these are the starting points for ethical and political reflection. This is a good way to describe how Flanagan proceeds in all his work and it shows how his sustained and productive interest in non-western philosophy, originally focused mostly on Buddhism (Flanagan 2011) but now also including Chinese Mohist (Flanagan 2008) and Legalist (Flanagan and Hu 2011) philosophy as well as Chinese and Korean Confucianism (Flanagan and Williams 2010; Flanagan 2014), follows naturally from such an approach.

The relationship between saving the phenomena and comparative philosophy is obvious and something we shall return to at the conclusion of this essay. Here I want simply to note that it is nothing short of astounding that so few seem to recognize that the careful and sympathetic

¹⁴ It is common to hear people say that the theory of evolution establishes survival or the propagation of their genes as the only real value or goal of humanity, but the theory itself does no such thing. Evolutionary theory explains why some species survive and some go extinct, but it does not say that survival is good or extinction bad. Thanks to Eric Hutton for raising this issue.

consideration of other traditions is an obvious imperative for anyone who advocates this more naturalized method in ethics and political theory. This kind of imperative to explore other cultures and traditions, both historical and contemporary, is well understood and widely practiced in fields such as psychology (Nisbett 2003). My point here is that there is a clear reason why this is the case. In order to successfully identify and describe general psychological features of human beings, psychologists need broad and varied samples of human behavior under a range of conditions. In recent years, most psychologists have come to appreciate just how narrow, parochial, and idiosyncratic their samples often are (Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan 2010). It is time philosophers too recognize how narrow, parochial, and idiosyncratic their “intuitions” are about core issues in ethics and political theory.¹⁵ Human beings have been working independently on many of the same problems in ethics and politics at different times, places, and circumstances throughout history. “Wise observers of the human condition” (Flanagan 2014, 76) saw clearly truths about us that still apply and are valuable to us today, and different cultures and traditions within them have invented, refined, and carried on individual practices and more general styles of human living that offer distinctive opportunities for human satisfaction, edification, and joy.¹⁶ Participating in the creation, improvement, and continuation of various traditions is itself a *new* and profound source for human flourishing and we must look for and will find examples of such values throughout the world. There are many, very different, highly successful societies around the world whose members are well-acquainted with Western values and civilizations but prefer their own distinctive norms, values, and practices. Why would any open-minded person committed to exploring ethical and political values *in principle* constrain their exploration and consideration of sources only to their home tradition? Theological geniuses like Augustine, Aquinas, and Leibniz¹⁷ placed no such constraints on their thought, so why do so many contemporary, purportedly more objective, scientific, and open-minded philosophers do so? It makes one wonder to what degree the provincialism of much of contemporary ethical and political theory is more a manifestation of the lack of education, experience, empathy, and imagination than just a failing of theoretical insight (though it surely is both).¹⁸

One might respond to the challenge I have raised above by declaring that one simply is not committed to an in principle exploration of other sources of value and instead is only interested in saving the phenomenon in the case of Western ethical and political values.¹⁹ If one accepts the idea that there is indeed a “healthy relativism” in regard to such values, then it is not immediately clear there is a need to study other cultures. As long as one is able to save the phenomenon and justify one’s home ethical and political system, one might think that there is no

¹⁵ Take the top twenty philosophy departments in the English speaking world and plot the racial, gender, and ethnic diversity to be found among their senior members. Does the picture this information paints offer *prima facie* evidence of parochialism and perhaps a kind of guild or club of like-minded fellows or evidence of a community of objective, open-minded, clear-thinking inquirers, selected in a fair and inclusive manner?

¹⁶ Eric Hutton adds the important point that in some cases ancient observers saw things *more* clearly than many people nowadays do. We can and perhaps tend to be so absorbed in technology and the problems it creates that we overlook the ways in which the ancients, because of the simpler lives they led, had greater insight into widespread and fundamental human problems.

¹⁷ For an insightful study of Leibniz’s views about the importance of China for philosophy, see Perkins 2004.

¹⁸ For a thorough study that reveals the shallow and despicable reasons that motivated the historical neglect of non-Western philosophy, see Park 2013.

¹⁹ I am indebted to Eirik L. Harris for raising the issues explored in the following paragraph.

real work left to be done. Of course, there are costs to holding such a view and among them is that one must abandon any pretension to universal prescription and any expectation that those outside one's particular tradition should find one's views appealing or even acceptable.²⁰ I do not, though, see how those making such an appeal could have adequate grounds for believing that they have a good grasp of what the available options in fact are, i.e. that they have properly identified what basic moral modules are available much less how they might be deployed or tuned. Without such knowledge, one could not be confident that one's particular version of saving the phenomenon is as good as other available options and thus defensible in its own right. For example, imagine a society in which compassion reigns supreme (highly tuning up something like a suffering/care module) and no attention whatsoever is paid to our capacity and tendency to seek justice (based upon our fairness/reciprocity module).²¹ Could a person in such a society plausibly claim to understand what kinds of good lives are available? In order to be confident that one's particular version of saving the phenomenon is at least as good as others it seems one must in fact engage in comparative philosophy. The more insular position I have described above is only something one might appeal to at the end of a process of comparative study, though, there are good reasons to think that the process of such study itself will preclude at least certain forms of such an appeal (Ivanhoe 2009).

Turning to the particular case of Flanagan and his work, it is important for people on both sides of the East-West divide to understand and appreciate the nature and seriousness of his various forays into non-Western philosophy. These are not mere fancies or diversions, but an integral component of the naturalizing turn and the methodology of saving the phenomena. Those on the Eastern side need to see that his interests in non-western philosophy do not manifest a desire to debunk (though on certain issues he does not and cannot shy away from raising strong objections) but a desire to learn from and not just about other conceptions, approaches, and traditions of human value. One clear piece of evidence in support of this understanding of his work is that he applies the same rigorous analysis to his own home traditions. If something like MMH is the best way to think about the nature and practice of morality and how to engage in systematic critical moral reflection and theory building, we must "go empirical" in the different senses described above, not as absolute prerequisites to reflection and discussion but as working hypotheses to see how far this can get us. As I have argued above, we must also heed the imperative to "go comparative" in order to have good grounds for identifying even the basic moral modules, much less their various forms of expression, combinations, and permutations.²² These points should lead those interested in ethics and political theory beyond the comfort of their home traditions and motivate them to open their

²⁰ Richard Rorty explicitly defended something like this view in works such as Rorty 1989.

²¹ Flanagan considers a possible actual example of this kind of culture in Flanagan 2014.

²² It is an open question what we might learn from the comparative program. Minimally we will learn different ways and styles of expressing and combining whatever moral modules we might possess, but we might also learn things about the nature, type, and range of the basic models themselves. An example of how comparative study can directly contribute to our understanding of even basic human capacities is the relatively recent addition of umami ("savory taste") as one of the five basic tastes (along with sweetness, sourness, bitterness, and saltiness). Umami is the Romanization for the Japanese term うま味, which means "pleasant savory taste." It was coined by Professor Kikunae Ikeda who first proposed the existence of umami in 1908. The fact that leading scholars such as Haidt continue to add to and adjust their accounts of the moral modules shows that it would be premature to cut off the potential value of comparative study. Thanks to Eric L. Hutton and Justin Tiwald for discussions and suggestions on this issue.

doors and minds to respectful criticism from without. It should also lead them to deeply and sympathetically study and critically engage other traditions and points of views and to work on developing the knowledge, skills, and virtues needed for productive engagement with alternative points of view.

3. Dogs and Elephants

In section two we mentioned Jonathan Haidt's "social intuitionism" or "Moral Foundations Theory" (MFT), its relationship to Flanagan's Moral Modularity Hypothesis (MMH), and the relative strength of the latter. In this section I want to highlight and analyze the two metaphors Haidt uses to represent the relationship between reason and emotion within his theory, show how these tend to constrain a proper analysis of the issues they seek to explain, and argue that East Asian traditions offer productive ways to extend, improve, and strengthen our understanding of the complex relationship between reason and emotion. The first of Haidt's metaphors is "(the emotional) dog and its (rational) tail" (Haidt 2001); the second and more recent is "(the emotional elephant) and its (rational) rider" (Haidt 2006).²³ The first thing to note is that there is an important ontological shift between the "dog and tail" metaphor and the "elephant and rider" metaphor. The former describes parts of single living organism; the latter consists of two unrelated organisms and presents reason as a *foreign* part of the rider-elephant combination,²⁴ a part that for the most part is just along for the ride. Among other things, the former metaphor primarily conveys the relative strength between emotion and reason and seems to imply that reason is just a way to express what emotion commands; the latter metaphor strongly implies a fundamental dichotomy between emotion and reason and suggests a less integral but slightly more important role for reason, which is most unfortunate, for, as Flanagan and others have argued, Haidt does not fully appreciate the role of reason in moral life.²⁵ While a number of people have objected to Haidt's demotion of reason in ethical judgment, as noted earlier, both defenders and critics of Haidt's view tend to accept and perpetuate the fundamental dichotomy between reason and emotion.²⁶ But this is a debilitating assumption and not at all true

²³ Haidt notes the earlier precedent of Plato's metaphor in the *Phaedrus* of the self or soul as a chariot with reason as a chariot driver holding the reins and trying to control and coordinate two horses (spirit and appetite) that do the pulling; he has very interesting and insightful things to say about this and other models of the self (Haidt 2006, 2-5 etc.). Haidt also makes clear that he chose the elephant and rider to highlight how little control reason has when emotion or desire is in play (see page 4).

²⁴ Eric Hutton has reminded me that for Plato, there is a strong sense in which reason really is a distinct and *foreign* part of the human composite, for he thinks of reason as something that is *divine* and superior to the rest of our being.

²⁵ Another way of thinking about the difference between the metaphors is to say that in the case of the dog and its tail, practical reasoning is just an indicator or expression of the emotions, while in the case of the elephant and rider, practical reasoning sets the goals and determines the means for achieving them while the elephant provides the motivation to get there. The latter is closer to but distinct from Hume's notion that practical reason is a slave to the passions but can determine the means for achieving goals and identify possible goals to pursue. Thanks to Bryan W. Van Norden for suggesting this way of unpacking Haidt's metaphors. Haidt's model does allow for one's reasoning to affect *other people's* emotions and intuitions—young and impressionable people who observe or listen to one—and so at least in this respect he does allow for contributions by reason. Eric Schwitzgebel noted that Haidt raised this point in a personal conversation.

²⁶ This is true of just about every contemporary treatment of this theme, even such rich and revealing works as de Waal 1996; 2006.

to either psychological studies or the experiences of moral life.²⁷ As East Asian traditions as well as some parts of the Western tradition have argued, reason in the form of a guide, organizer, contributor, and molder of emotions—rather than some abstract, disembodied executive directing human behavior—is always and in various ways deeply involved with orienting, augmenting, extending, and shaping our emotions. This is most clearly seen in the sustained and sophisticated concern that East Asian traditions such as Confucianism have consistently shown toward ideas and practices connected with the moral cultivation of the self (Ivanhoe 2006). It is also manifest in the way that East Asian philosophers tend to talk about moral perception, judgment, and action. For example, Mengzi regularly invokes metaphors of taste to describe both the nature and path for developing moral understanding. Chapter six of the Confucian classic the *Great Learning* describes moral insight as “like disliking a bad odor or liking a something beautiful.” In these examples, not only is cognition fused with emotional response but there is no clear moment of judging, deciding, intending, or acting. When we smell a bad odor, we immediately dislike, turn away, and distance ourselves from it.²⁸

The idea that reason plays integral and critical roles as mentor, organizer, and shaper of emotions is altogether absent and not even a possibility in Haidt’s first metaphor of dog and tail—a tail simply cannot play such roles in the life of a dog—and it is deeply obscured and hidden in his second metaphor of an elephant and its rider. The truth, however, is that the rider of Haidt’s elephant enjoys the benefits of years of rational tutelage and practice, for in order for the metaphor to gain plausibility or force it must presume that she rides a well-trained elephant; no one would ever think of much less succeed in riding a *wild elephant*.²⁹ This domesticated elephant has successfully undergone a long and complex process of training, which traditionally was done by a single person, a Mahout, who typically begins working with the elephant as a young boy and almost always shares a life-long relationship with his charge. For the most part, the Mahout in turn is not relying primarily on his own reason-backed decisions; he does not devise a training program on his own; he follows a time-tested tradition of training and here we see another way in which reason and practice are deeply embedded in the remarkable phenomenon of riding an elephant.³⁰ When highlighted, these points may seem obvious and

²⁷ In more recent work (Haidt 2012) Haidt has begun referring to the “intuitive” elephant rather than the “emotional” elephant. This is an important change which seems to reflect his stepping away from the emotion/reason dichotomy and toward something more like the fast/slow dichotomy first described by Kahneman. This suggests Haidt might already be moving partly in the direction advocated in this essay. Thanks to Eric Schwitzgebel for this insight.

²⁸ This kind of merging of cognition, feeling, judging, deciding, intending, and acting into a single seamless process was actively discussed throughout the tradition. One of the most dramatic positions on this set of issues was taken by Wang Yangming (1472-1529) who advocated “the unity of knowing and acting.” For a description and analysis of his view, see Ivanhoe 2011.

²⁹ The kind of view I advocate is at odds with the picture of emotions as part of a “fast” or “automatic” system if this is understood as largely free-standing, isolated, and fixed. Our affective system is more flexible, broad, and can develop over time. For a defense of such a view and its implications, see Railton 2014. See also footnote #7 above.

³⁰ Of course, the Mahout does rely on practical reason in applying traditional methods of training and may engage in theoretical reflection on how to improve what he has inherited, but the point remains. We might consider whether our contemporary psychological model should include a “Mahout module”—roughly a reflective self-guidance module. Such a module would not initially have a specified content but describes a capacity or set of capacities that are the result of evolutionary forces. This module may itself turn out to have various aspects and may be understood differently in different traditions, but all empirically informed philosophers should grant that this Mahout, when fully matured or developed, is something that is the result of habituation, learning, reflection, and discipline. Thanks to Brad Cokelet for this suggestion.

become salient but they are not at all evident in the metaphor as Haidt presents it, and here is where East Asian traditions bring something quite new and important to the table.³¹

For example, the kind of view I am advocating as an extension and enhancement of the kind of model Haidt proposes would highlight that participation in and identification with a tradition can lead us to care about being vigilant in protecting and transmitting the valuable practices and ideas that have been developed, and to feel inspired to build on and further improve these in order to prove worthy of our inheritance.³² The care needed to protect, transmit, and further enhance what we inherit involves emotion but ideas such as “building upon” and “proving worthy of” highlight that it also involves intellectual and critical reflection. Thinking about ourselves, how we fit into our traditions, and how we can prove worthy of those in our traditions who inspire us are all aspects of the Mahout module. This is a reflective, slow module—not a fast and hot one—and it is both rational and emotional.³³

The extent to which reason and emotion are mutually implicated with one another runs deeper and their relationship is even more complex than what has been suggested above. For example, the plausible claim that language, an ability necessary for sophisticated rational reflection, evolved as part of an ongoing effort to foster and improve cooperation and probably began with story-telling (Gibbard 1990) illustrates that moral emotions such as empathy and emotions more generally played important roles from the start in developing our most basic rational capacities. Emotions of all sorts motivate, propel, and enliven such stories and emotion, as well as metaphor, are integral features of all natural languages (Lawrence 1993). The work of people like Damasio (Damasio 2005) has shown that reason alone cannot account for moral deliberation or judgment and so even if we hold as we should that reason is necessary for a genuine moral life we must recognize not only the evolutionary connection between our more robust moral abilities and earlier more purely emotional tendencies but the ongoing roles that emotion plays in our contemporary moral deliberations. What I specifically want to emphasize here is that some profoundly important roles that reason plays are embedded in humanly developed traditions and practices and these are obscured and often overlooked in most contemporary discussions that are cast predominantly or exclusively in terms of the *relative strength* and *contribution* of reason versus emotion.³⁴

³¹ Kwongloi Shun (Shun 2009) notes that there is asymmetry between the rate with which ideas derived from East Asian philosophy are applied to the study of Western philosophy and the rate at which ideas derived from Western philosophy are applied to the study of East Asian philosophy. I agree with this important general point though note that there are exceptions, for example, work applying East Asian conceptions of moral cultivation of the self (Ivanhoe 2006; Cline 2015), spontaneity (Ivanhoe 2010), connoisseurship (Hutton 2002), ritual (Sarkissian 2010; Tiwald and Kline 2014), and political theory (Cline 2013; Kim 2014 and 2016). For a general discussion of the nature, challenges, and potential rewards of comparative philosophy, see Van Norden 2007; Cline 2013; Wong 2014.

³² I advance such an argument and offer several examples of cases where such concerns are in play in Ivanhoe 2013, 1-16.

³³ Thanks to Brad Cokelet for suggestion this line of thought and especially for pointing out the relationship between this and my earlier writings on tradition.

³⁴ The position I am advocating is deeply opposed to the commonly encountered view that traditions are largely *impediments* to reason, at least in its “proper” critical employment. Rather, the idea is that traditions can actually exhibit rationality or generally function as reliable guides to good reasoning. They can perform the role of cognitively “off-loading” a good deal of work. My view is related to but distinct from Alasdair MacIntyre’s idea (MacIntyre 1988) that different traditions embody distinct forms of rationality. Thanks to Michael Slater for helping me to see and express these ideas.

The kind of obscurity that I have argued occurs with Haidt's metaphor of an elephant and its rider also occurs in the study of East Asian moral theory, and here again a more accurate and powerful account often becomes hidden in the way certain central metaphors are deployed and understood.³⁵ For example, anyone familiar with East Asian Confucianism knows about Mengzi (Mencius) and his theory of human nature, which holds, among other things that human beings are endowed with "four moral sprouts" (*siduan* 四端) of virtue.³⁶ But it is critically important to keep in mind that Mengzi employs *agricultural* and not merely *vegetative* or botanical metaphors (Ivanhoe 2013) to describe the proper process of self-cultivation and that we must recognize that agriculture is based upon a long and complex process of human discovery, ingenuity, and invention, which means it incorporates the accumulated insights of reason.³⁷ While agriculture was developed over a long period of time and depended on contingent environmental resources in order to take on the importance it eventually came to have, it is arguably the most important and influential invention in human history.³⁸ It made possible, the settled, literate, large-scale community life that is most characteristic of modern human beings and posed novel and powerful demands on human behavior. When properly understood, Mengzi's metaphors, no less than Haidt's, imply that reason plays a complex and largely hidden role in our moral lives. It is hidden because the long tradition of discovery, reflection, and experimentation that constitutes the practice of agriculture is inherited by almost all human beings and now lost in familiarity or distance from agricultural life. In regard to ethical and political theory, the norms and practices—social, political, religious, etc.—that constitute the surrounding environment in which we exist incorporate and internalize a great deal of human reasoning and give it emotional shape, direction, and power. Language itself is not just a tool for reasoning, which is how it is most often portrayed in contemporary philosophical debates, natural human languages come preloaded with the kinds of norms, practices, and metaphors described above. These provide our starting points for moral and political reflection and theorizing; this means we all in fact begin philosophical reflection by thinking through the best views currently in play. We all start off trying to save the phenomena and should be committed to extending this exploration to the norms and practices of other successful societies and cultures. We are or at least should be committed to comparative philosophy.

³⁵ Unpacking and carefully analyzing these and other metaphors at the heart of different philosophical or psychological views is an important task for, as David B. Wong (2015: 191) notes, "metaphors do not confirm themselves." Several of my works on East Asian and comparative philosophy (Ivanhoe 2002; 2006) involve the careful unpacking and analysis of what I take to be some of the guiding metaphors in the Confucian tradition. Others have produced similar works, though, with different assumptions about the nature of metaphors. For example, some seem to believe that the use of metaphors is distinctive and perhaps even unique to Chinese philosophy (Allan 1997); others, employ views such as Conceptual Metaphor Theory and argue that certain core metaphors are shared by all human beings (Slingerland 2011). My approach lies between these alternatives; I believe metaphors often play critical roles in philosophical theories and are part of every human language, but I hold no theory about deep, shared, universal metaphors informing human cognition. For an example of the kind of approach I employ, see Munro 1988.

³⁶ There are important and related points involving the proper translation of this term, which I have explored in other work (Ivanhoe 2006:18-20), but here I want to focus on how this metaphor is deployed and understood.

³⁷ Flanagan (2014, 59-62) recently has suggested a number of interesting ways to extend and enrich Mengzi's agricultural metaphors.

³⁸ For a most insightful study of the importance of agriculture and its course of development, see Diamond 1997.

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