SEMESTER: COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY #721
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TITLE: "BUDDHIST ETHICS AND MORAL MODULARITY"
SPEAKER: OWEN FLANAGAN (DUKE UNIVERSITY)
RESPONDENT: WAYNE PROUDFOOT (COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY)
CHAIR: JONATHAN GOLD (PRINCETON UNIVERSITY)
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ABSTRACT:

Owen Flanagan suggests that the modularity of morals is a topic worth serious consideration. Since the publication of that book in 1991, Jonathan Haidt has posited the following five universal domains that socio-moral life typically engages: 1) suffering/compassion, 2) fairness/reciprocity, 3) purity/sanctity, and 4) hierarchy/respect. (A fifth one that is sometimes included is in-group/loyalty). In the following lecture, Owen Flanagan explores the possibility that moral moduality might be supported in certain non-western intellectual traditions (e.g. Buddhism). Flanagan poses the following questions: Does Buddhist ethics support moral modularity? How psychologically realistic is Buddhist ethics? And what might Buddhist ethics look like from the point of view of contemporary moral psychology?
Welcome to the Columbia Society for Comparative Philosophy. I'm Jonathan Gold. I teach at – in the department of Religion at Princeton University, and I have recently had the honor of inheriting the position as chair from Mark Siderits when he moved this summer to accept a position in the department of Philosophy at Seoul National University.

Where?

At Seoul National University in Korea.

Oh, really? No kidding.

So he's not around. He's not entirely out of the picture. He is going to be back giving a talk in January, as you can see. Actually, I do want to draw your attention to this list, if you all have the announcement for our upcoming speakers for the fall and for the spring. We have Tao Jiang, who is here today, and he's going to be speaking on November 7th as our next talk. And the title of his talk is here, as you can see. And also, I believe that the abstract is going to be up on the web site very soon, so you might be interested in that.
If you're interested in today's talk, there are a couple of very interesting things. Also, you might be interested to come and see – to follow up, one of them being Hagop Sarkissian's talk December 5th. Actually, I have a title there that didn't make it onto the list. He's going to be speaking on "Confucius and Contemporary Moral Psychology, or What to Do in an Interconnected Moral World." That's his title. And then, in addition, there is another meeting coming up in April that I didn't – that also didn't make it up onto the list. But April 6th, which is a Monday, we're going to have a joint meeting with the Ethics, Moral Education, and Society seminar, and during that we'll be discussing the work of Michael Schulman, who is one of the chairs of that seminar, the co-chair with Kathleen Wallace, who is at the table as well. And so we're going to be talking about his chapter that he has written on moral motivation. He is a psychologist who works on moral motivation theory. And so I think that is also going to be a very interesting reflection of this conversation here today.

If for any reason you are interested in any of the talks here listed, but you are unable to attend, have a look at our web site because very often we manage to post an audio version of the talk, very often also with the questions, so you can sit and enjoy that in the comfort of your own home. And also, possibly we'll be having – posting transcripts. You should know that the minutes from this meeting will be eventually put into the archives of the university and made available to anyone who wants to – has access to the Columbia University library. They're not publicly available, but they will be available if you have access to the library.
I believe that is all the announcements that I have, so I think it is time to introduce our speaker and respondent for today. We're especially lucky to have two, I think, wonderful speakers today. Let me just begin by thanking Wayne Proudfoot for agreeing to respond to Owen Flanagan's talk today. As I'm sure you all know, Professor Proudfoot is tremendously influential on the study of religion and in particular the study of religious experience. He is a philosopher of religion who has taught us all in many ways how to think about religious language and the talk of experience, talking about experience in religious texts. And so I think it's a very appropriate thing to have him here responding to Owen Flanagan's talk.

Professor Flanagan is coming from Duke University. Of course, probably all of you know he's a very prolific writer and one of our most helpful and learned expositors of the science of the mind in philosophy today. And his work has helped to bridge a gap and make it possible for us to think about the nature of the mind through all kinds of avenues that otherwise wouldn't be available, I think. His work – his recent book I recommend, *The Really Hard Problem: Meaning in a Material World*, in which he has a very useful explanation of why – of what Buddhist happiness is not, of what happiness is in some descriptions and how that is different from what is traditionally found in Buddhist texts.

So I guess without further ado, let's welcome Owen Flanagan on the topic of Buddhist ethics and moral modularity.
Thank you very much, Jonathan, Chris, Wayne, and everybody who is here today. This is my favorite seminar in the world, that is, not the one I'm giving, this particular – this group of people. And what I'll do today is – and I want to thank, actually, Wayne especially for his forbearance. About an hour ago, I sent Wayne these slides, so that is about as much preparation as he has. And that's kind of when I finished things. But he agreed about two weeks ago that that would be the case, and he was very generous. And that actually fits what I'm going to do today. This today is – again, it's a kind of talk that I can only give in a place like this. It's real fusion, which is Mark Siderits' nice – it's Mark's phrase, right, fusion philosophy? Yeah. So you might think of the talk today as what do you get when you combine Mencius, the great Chinese philosopher, Buddhism, and contemporary cognitive science inspired by Darwin. What do you get? Like what – so this is – now I don't know what you get. We're going to know at the end of two hours what you get. But – so what I'm going to do today is talk to you about some ideas that are current about the nature of moral – human moral psychology in contemporary psychology, in particular a hypothesis that I call "moral modularity."

Just to give you a feel for what moral modularity is, it has been shown to be a profitable idea in the study of the human mind outside of areas like ethics to think about the mind–brain as having evolved certain special purpose modules. Now what is a module? A module – this is kind of circular. A module is roughly a dedicated system in the mind–
brain that processes a certain type of information. For example, the visual system processes light. It doesn't process sounds. The olfactory system processes smells, doesn't do light, doesn't do sounds.

So Jerry Fodor, a great philosopher and cognitive scientist at Rutgers – Fodor wrote an important book around 1981 called *The Modularity of Mind*, in which he argued that the human mind – and a useful way to think about the human mind is that the human mind consists of the five senses, which he argued were modules, and they have certain properties as modules. They're evolutionarily old. They're very rapid processing. And they are dedicated, as I said, to certain kinds of information. They're informationally encapsulated; the visual system keeps its own visual information, the olfactory system keeps its olfactory information. They process it quickly. And he suggested that they were cognitively impenetrable, the idea being that if my eyes are open I'm going to see who is there. If I close my – I mean, I can't will, or it's hard to will, a way seeing – the system just wants me to see what is there, okay? I can will to close my eyes, and that will stop me from receiving information. But the systems are quick, fast-functioning, and presumably they have a good Darwinian explanation, that they are highly adaptive. And the information gets passed upstairs.

Now, the idea would be that, on Fodor's view, upstairs the thinking, cognitive self is not modular at all. It's very general-purpose. It brings – it takes all that information, and it thinks about it. And Fodor argued, actually, that cognitive science was possible for the
sensory modules. God knows, he actually thought that cognitive science – an explanation of the thinking mind is probably beyond our ken.

So that's where – so then the question that we'll talk about today is, is there any possibility for an idea about the modularity of the moral? In other words, could it be the case that what we call human morality is actually built upon a bunch of special purpose competencies, and isn't one sort of unified thing? Now, this idea – I talked last year about some connections between Aristotle and Buddhism. It has been suggested, possibly only by me, but I remember it, that ancient – you can track something like this. Ancient virtue theory, for example in Aristotle – Aristotle has a theory of virtues, and the virtues – there is an idea about the unity of virtues. So once you become truthful and you become – you list off the virtues. Courageous – there is courage, okay? That's one thing. A person wants – in addition to courage, you want honesty, truthfulness, okay? In addition to those two, you want fairness. In addition to those three, you want benevolence.

Now you might think, well, gee, are these all possibly part of a unified moral competence – and one idea that we get from the Greeks is the doctrine of the unity of virtues, that once you get all of the different virtues you're supposed to possess, whatever number that is – it could be five, it could be ten, it could be 15, but once you get them up and running, then they're supposed to interact in a suitable way to make you a proficient moral agent. That's one picture. Call that Aristotelian with a small A.
A different view would be that being moral involves a unified general purpose competence. So, for example, a proper moral agent is one who applies the utilitarian rule. Every time she is faced with a moral question, she computes will such and such action promote the greatest amount of happiness or well-being for the greatest number of people in the long run. She treats situations of courage the same way she treats situations of benevolence.

So this is the topic area, okay? And what is going on right now in cognitive science is that there is a suggestion out there that it’s empirically extremely plausible to think that our moral competence is built on fast-acting, quick-reacting, underlying Darwinianally basic – whatever you want to sort of say about them – intuitive systems that are highly emotionally oomphed. You get the idea.

Okay. That’s sort of the vicinity. Now this is an audience participation seminar today. I'm not going to answer the questions that I raise here; you are going to, because people in this room know much more about Buddhism than I do. But I probably know a little bit about the philosophy of mind, so I'm going to talk about this research today. I'm going to give you kind of – I'm not going to defend the moral modularity hypothesis so much as try to make it plausible to you why people would think this might be true, and then I'll explain to you how I think it relates to interesting questions about Buddhist ethics.
So here are three questions. One is, how psychologically realistic is Buddhist ethics? Now this psychological realism is – means many different things, but first pass, I mean something like this. In my 1991 book, Varieties of Moral Personality: Ethics and Psychological Realism, I did suggest that it was a good idea if possible that an ethical theory be psychologically realizable by humans, all else equal. All else equal, it's a good idea, if you could do it. Now, so the idea – and the analogies I used there were things like this, that if – I used to run track. I can’t run, I can barely walk, but no. So when I was a boy, they would say to you, well, Roger Bannister – I was long after Roger Bannister, but the point is when I was in high school, they'd say, you could – Owen, you could probably run a four-and-a-half minute mile. And I'd think, really, I could do that? And they'd say, yeah, you could do that, because back – and they'd tell me this inspiring story, that at one time, there were many men all at once who looked like they were going to break the four-minute barrier. No one knew who among 20 would do it. It was five, six years. People kept getting close, and then all of a sudden Roger Bannister did it, and then, bam, hundreds of people started to do it after that.

So that's – so the analogy would be there. A coach could tell you, here is something far from you now, but you can do it, I bet, okay? Or a parent could tell us this, or a culture could tell us. So that's demanding, but it's psychologically realistic. If you take the world record for the 100-yard dash – let's suppose it's nine seconds – and you multiply that by whatever to get, you know – you might say, well, if you can run that fast, if you're a fast sprinter, then just run that fast for 1500 meters, and you'll run a two-minute mile. That's
physically unrealistic, you shouldn't tell people that. We have all kinds of reasons, okay. So – and one reason would be motivational, and I think that we'd say something like telling a person to sprint for a mile isn't quite something that anyone – it wouldn't be motivational. You wouldn't even get them close to the goal if you do that.

Okay. A related question is how demanding is Buddhist ethics. Some ethical theories – I think you can plot ethical theories along the dimensions of demandingness in the following sort of way. One thing possibly – and one reason that people like Aristotelian ethics is it actually isn't very demanding in the following ways. I mean, Aristotle's idea was that if you're just raised in a good society, and you're habituated in the right ways, the kind of way we all know how to ride a bicycle, you'll know how to be a decent moral agent. Now, it's not something for – I mean, you need to be raised well, but it's not that hard.

On the other side, many people will say to be a utilitarian is extremely demanding and possibly so demanding that it is psychologically impossible. So, for example, on a standard conception of act utilitarianism, it says act always so that for each and every action opportunity, you act so that you maximize the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people. Then add "in the long run." So how long is the long run? How many action opportunities do I have right now? And what is the best way to optimize, okay? This looks to me incredibly problematic, okay? I mean, I'm not
suggesting you can't be a utilitarian, I'm just saying that type looks to be unbelievably demanding and possibly psychologically unrealistic.

So – and sometimes, on some readings of Buddhism, just to anticipate what you guys are going to answer, because I'm not, you might say, well, if I'm supposed to be compassionate for all, to all sentient beings, that seems to me prima facie fairly demanding. If I'm supposed to bring loving kindness to the beings who are suffering, not only try to alleviate their suffering, that seems even additionally demanding. If I'm supposed to do a lot of things that Shantideva says, that's hard for me.

Okay. So then – all right. So these are the two – these are the vicinity of the topics. And how does Buddhist ethics look from the point of view of contemporary moral psychology? This is what I call Darwin plus neuroscience. And a lot of my recent work has been on something I call neuro-existentialism. That's my name for what you get when you combine Darwin with neuroscience. People have the heebie-jeebies right now about Meaning in a Material World. They don't see how it is possible. And Raziel had the answer a long time ago, and I'm just repeating his views. But this is another area of intellectual discourse right now where I think looking at the way mind science is being done right now, which is people now – people whose mothers in Brooklyn think they were psychologists in the eighties started to call themselves cognitive scientists, and now they all call themselves cognitive neuroscientists. Trust me, I know them all, okay? There isn't like a psychologist left. And what do they know about the brain? They just know where it
is housed. But they are all on board with this sort of – if there is such a thing as a
paradigm, this is kind of a paradigm thing, at least naming, the naming practice. And T.S.
Eliot taught us that naming is very important.

Okay. Three levels of ethical inquiry – this will be important. Chris and I were talking
about this in advance, and I just want this out there. So what I'm talking about today will
go among these, so I just want to mark them. First there is what I'll call descriptive ethics.
Descriptive ethics is just like – you want to know what the hoi polloi thinks about stem
cell research or abortion or euthanasia. You'd have a sociologist ask them. And those are
just the facts. Now, Kant called that, famously, the disgusting chit-chat of ordinary
morality. That's of absolutely no interest to us highbrow, good, decent people. That's
just what they think out there, okay? These are moments in Kant where he says ethics as
philosophers do it has nothing to do with that, okay?

Now this is, I think, an intuition that many of us do, of course, have, that just because
most people think such and such is okay – like just our parents used to say, right, I don't
care if everybody else is doing it, I don't care – the moral philosopher will say, I don't care
what everybody believes. That's irrelevant to – so there is something to the disgusting
chit-chat, although he probably shouldn't have said it.

But normative ethics – by normative ethics, it is just what you ought – you're supposed to
do, first order normative ethical theory, how you're supposed to behave, the dos and
don'ts of morality that we're all familiar with. Then there is meta-ethics, and meta-ethics – some of it comes above ethics, and some of it comes under it. So one question – I know you can't ask it, but I've always been interested in – is what is human nature like beneath the clothes of culture? I mean, you can't answer it. We don't know how to answer that because we have culture's clothes on. But there are some ways, I think, philosophical thought experiments like Plato's in Book II of *The Republic*, the Lydian shepherd. Remember the guy who gets the magic ring? Okay, he's a sweet little shepherd boy, he gets the magic ring, and when he goes to pay taxes, he immediately – Plato's brother Glaucon says – manages things so that he seduces the queen, with her help kills the king, and takes the kingdom. And Plato's brother Glaucon says, And any person, be he just or unjust, would do the same thing. Powerful thought experiment. You might – when I tell my students – I did a formulation of that recently with my students, and I changed some of the old-fashioned way of speaking. I said, "Who do you think said that?" And they said, "Freud." That's smart. That's perceptive, you know? Sort of what are these motives that are coming out?

So – you know, and we all know all the great – many of the great thinkers, Hobbes, Rousseau, et cetera – have had different answers to this question. It would be interesting if we get traction on it, so I think of that as a meta-ethical question. What is ethics about? What is ethics for? Some people say it is for human flourishings, for happiness. It is for pleasure, for social coordinations, for conflict resolution. It's for satisfying your duty. It's
for getting into heaven. We all know that these are different answers to the question about what is morality about, what is it for.

Then there is what do ethical terms mean? One view is that they – it goes back to Euthythro kind of, that saying somebody is good means – it refers to some kind of objective, transcendental truth, something in God's mind, or something that God lays down. And in a twentieth century emotivist view, talk about good and bad is just hooraying and booing, okay? This is emotivism. So these are – and then there are theories of moral justification, which are related to the other.

So the reason I put these out there is to – not because I won't be confusing. I will now proceed to be confusing among these areas. I just want you to know that they all run together, okay? And I'll be playing all three today. Okay. So I said at the beginning, what do you get when you get Mencius and Buddha and modern cognitive science. So Hagop Sarkissian, who will speak to you soon, is a student of mine, and I've learned a lot from him. Most of what I know about Chinese philosophy I know from Hagop. And actually, I just started – I published my first article in Chinese philosophy, which is based on work that I did with him last month. Anyway, I didn't do the work last month. The paper was published last month. It's on Confucius and Mozi.

Anyway, here is an important quote. So Mencius is about – I think he is about 500 or 600 BCE, okay? He plays the role I always think of to Confucius that Aristotle plays to Plato,
okay? So I want to read this. This is Mencius on human nature. "Humans all have hearts that are not unfeeling toward others. Suppose someone suddenly saw a child about to fall into a well. Everyone in such a situation would have a feeling of alarm and compassion — " everyone will have it, even Hitler, right, will have the feeling of alarm and compassion "— not because one sought to get in good with the child's parents, not because one wanted fame among their neighbors and friends, and not because one would dislike the sounds of the child's cries. From this we can see that if one is without the heart of compassion, one is not human."

Okay. Now, I am going to claim today that Mencius is the first person in history, east or west, to propose the moral modularity hypothesis. And you'll see why I think that now, okay? So – but notice, this is a thought experiment, and we're supposed to be able to consult our own phenomenology, right? We're supposed to, like, look inside. And we all realize, you know, no matter how much I hate the family who that guy – the baby comes from, I want to save that – I want to go for that child. This is in 286 in Mencius.

Now, Mencius has this famous "four sprout" view, and that is why I think of this as a modularist view. So these are the four Mencian seeds. Do we have more chairs back there that people can – any more? No, I'm sorry.

Well – so what I'm going to suggest now, just to get – I didn't want to start with a contemporary modularity view because if actually the modularist view is plausible, people
should have been noticing it for a long time. That's one of my theses, but I'm not going to – I'll say something about that in the discussion period. You don't have to know anything about genetics or anything like that to have seen, figured out what traits are universal. And that's part of what is going on here. There is something about universal traits.

Okay. So the four – the so-called Mencian sprouts are – go like this, okay? We just saw – there is compassion, which is the sprout, the seed for benevolence. So the same features of you that make you want to save the child falling into the wall are the ones that then in society are grown to make you in the Chinese tradition ren, a benevolent person, a nice person, as we say, okay? So that's going to be the seed that is there. It is already in your nature, and you need to grow it.

Then there is the heart – some of these I just – the italics, as we say, are not in Mengzi. I put them in to call your attention – the heart of disdain is the sprout of righteousness. This is an important one, okay? Because the idea is that disdain, shame, or disgust – some of the contemporary people who work in moral modularity, like Jon Haidt, who I'll mention today, H-a-i-d-t – his research, doctoral research, was on disgust reactions. He is a student of Paul Rosen's at Penn, a psychologist who works on disgust. And they both think that feelings of disgust and disdain are at the basis of a lot of moral responsiveness, okay? And they don't actually have much to do with the compassion seed.
Okay. So the idea here on the Mencian view, just to get a picture – we're not going to talk about Mencius at great length – is simply this. Mencius’ idea is that in human nature there are four seeds. The four seeds are such that – and the second quote you see – people having these four sprouts is like they're having four limbs, okay? And then – this is a famous statement of what a Chinese philosopher they call Wu Wei – like effortless action, moving in social moral space effortlessly. So if you just let – in this case, we'd now say you just let the genome, the genotype, do the building, and barring really weird things in the environment, you're going to get two arms and two legs, right? I mean, there could be a deficiency – I mean, we know where these can – the point is, we know where these things can go wrong, okay? Radiation in the environment – you can start to have peculiar numbers of arms, or too few, right, too many or too few. And we know about environmental degradation. But the idea is in a normal environment these things will grow. Now, and then without realizing it, one's feet will begin to step in time to them, and one's hands dance according to the rhythm. So that's the idea.

Okay. Now, you might wonder – and Chris and I were talking about this before – if it is so easy to grow a good, virtuous person, you know, why do all the Chinese philosophers, as well as all the rest of other philosophers, lament how unvirtuous and disordered everything is, right? Because then you might think, oh, maybe in China, where there is disorder and disarray, it's like radiation poisoning. There are too few or too many limbs coming out. Okay. So – but nonetheless, this is the Mencian view.
Now, by the way, in my experience, cognitive scientists love Mencius. They quote him all the time. But they like him because it's so positive and upbeat, and I think that – they can't love him on all the empirical evidence. I'll say more about that shortly, okay? But it's a sweetened ear view. It's probably too Pollyannish.

Okay. But this is the picture. So my idea here – this is a slightly different take on this – would be something like this. Imagine that the seeds aren't just the seeds for your arms and limbs. I think the Mencian picture – and he goes on to say lots of things to this effect, that – imagine that if I give you – you can go to the store that sells seeds, and you can get a fully nutritional diet. Suppose there are seeds for peppers, seeds for tomatoes, seeds for eggplant – no, I think eggplant is not nutritious. But you get the idea, okay? So four vegetables – and make believe that someone says, these four vegetables, if you grow them in your garden, that's a healthy – you know, that's good for you. Notice the tomatoes can't – won't become watermelons, you know. They just have to grow – they grow into their own thing, okay? And you need each of them to get the system. So that's where I say Mencius is modular.

Now here we go, okay, up to the modern – we're going to move towards the modern view. So notice, back to what I said earlier about different levels – talk about two different theses, moral modularity descriptive, okay, which just says humans have these four seeds from four different moral competences. Now you can say they have five seeds or 12 seeds or eight seeds, you know. There is no limit to how many you have. Mencius just
thought there were four, okay? And then there is this normative thesis, though, that Mencius definitely has, which is you ought to grow those seeds, okay? Moral maturity or moral excellence, become a ren ginsa [ph.] in the Chinese tradition – you should grow these seeds and – otherwise, it would be like not growing a limb, okay? So these would play an important role. Or these will play an important role in your assignment at the end, okay?

Okay. Now, here is what I claim would be an argument that you'll see if you do what I do, if you hang out with psychologists and people who are influenced by Darwin. This is a little argument. If you get Mencius plus you throw in a little Darwin – it goes something like this. This is just the argument for why the leg going from "is" to "ought" in the case of legs is good, okay? You say something like this. Number one, evolution settled on four–leg, four–limb design because it was an adaptation. It was initially just a good way to get around. It's excellent, right? Historically, when it evolved – now it didn't evolve in humans – or maybe it did, actually, some people will say. But, you know, whenever it evolved in ancestors of humans or in humans, it was just a good idea. It worked better than some other – like being down on all fours or whatever. And it's still adaptive. Now two is key. And I think this is where – I am going to give you hints about how you're going to solve your problem in the discussion period. It says it is still adaptive.

There are two different senses of adaptation, by the way, that people who work in philosophy of biology or philosophy of psychology use. One is an historical one. So just
here is an example. Eucalyptus trees in Australia have - well, they are elsewhere, but, you know, they are food for koala bears, so there is a wonderful linkage between their health and other things. So eucalyptus trees have glossy leaves, okay? Those are an adaptation for retaining water in an arid climate. So they were historical adaptations, historical, okay? Now as long as the environment stays that way, they are still an adaptation. If the environment, which it has so far - but if most of the arid places in Australia became damp, then they would retain too much water, and it would no longer be an adaptation. Get the idea?

So, for example, some people say - this is not rocket science I'm talking about - that humans - Darwin in 1872, in his book, *The Expression of Emotions in the Human Face* - Darwin suggests that we are all great face readers. There are six or seven - thanks to Paul Eckman, now we think - facial expressions which are culturally universal, which show up. Everybody can read them, although there are cultural display rules. And they are evolutionarily really significant. They'll stop us, for example, from fighting sometimes if I see that you're saying "uncle" with your face. But if I can't see your face, then my aggression doesn't have a way to turn itself off. That's why drone planes are especially problematic, okay?

So fighting with sticks and stones, watching faces might be a good way to solve the reproductive problems that we have. But fighting at distances, that may not - we may not be suited to do that. That's the distinction between ancient history and current.
Okay. So the limbs are adaptive, and they emerge naturally in a universal species-specific way across ecologies. That's my point about if the environment isn't too bizarre, you'll get two arms and two legs, more or less. And so humans ought to continue to grow their arms and legs the way nature designed them to grow. Now here is the moral analogy. Evolution settled on four moral seeds because they were adaptations. If there are these Mencian seeds, then the reason you have them – the best explanation – this is, by the way, a usual sort of evolutionary – again, I'm not defending all this. This is just a usual – I will, though. But, I mean, it's a standard background theory of evolutionarily inspired mind science. I'm not talking about evolutionary psychology, by the way. I'm not defending that at all today. That goes way too far, in my book.

It's just that if you believe that humans are animals, à la standard orthodox Darwinian theory, then – and if you find a universal phenotypic trait, then the best inference is that it probably came about as an adaptation. It's not universally true. Like dreams, in my view, are not an adaptation, even though they're universal. But – okay. So seeds evolve because they're adaptations. They're still adaptive. The seeds emerge and grow and are tuned roughly the same way across all natural and social ecologies. Therefore, we ought to grow the moral seeds the way Mother Nature designed them to grow. Now there the analogy seems to me to break down, and the reason is that premise number three – that the seeds don't emerge and grow and get tuned roughly the same way across all worlds, across all socio–moral worlds. And I'll have more to say about that in terms of Mencius.
So, for example, some – just think about it this way. If we want to stick with the four-limb analogy, one of them is supposed to be the limb of compassion – I mean, I'm sorry, the leg, your left leg, okay? It seems to me that we know some traditions that try to grow your left leg a lot. Buddhism might be an example, if that's the leg of compassion, okay? You grow that a lot, and then there might be another leg, the leg of – I'm trying to think of Mencius' rule. Well, take something like deference to authority. That's one that in liberal American culture we shorten, but in Chinese culture, you keep long. Okay? You get my idea here? I mean, I'm not – it's just there is a tuning of these things. So up to a point, the analogy – you get the idea.

So one thing I like about this Mencian idea is it seems – it's a kind of naturalism that kind of seems like cool. If you're in a certain mood, you say, oh, all we have to do to make ourselves good is to just grow our natures, let it go. You can sort of see that go-with-the-flow kind of thing, you know? It's kind of the Taoist, hippie – I don't know. Just be suspicious, watch it.

Okay, okay. But number three seems to be a problem, at least I'll say it. Okay. Now, you're going to get to go to your handout shortly. So this is the twenty-first century modularity that – there has been a series of articles – and actually, they're not only getting attention among psychologists, but they're getting a lot of attention in the political sphere
right now. And I'll say something about that. So here is – so what is going on here is something like this.

Some of you may have read a book years ago by Howard Gardner called *The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. Howard Gardner suggested in the 1980s – he said, look, there is something problematic about what we call intelligence in America. We – intelligence is what IQ tests test. But there are all kinds of methodological problems. You may know this, for example. Everybody in this room, your grandparents actually – their IQ has gone down a lot, not because they're getting old. It just goes down. It's a phenomenon called the Flynn effect. To normalize IQ each generation, you make the previous two generations retarded, seriously. It's not just they're lower. It's like grandma and grandpa around 60 – this is a great secret, okay? But what Gardner suggested is like – let's pay attention to what anthropologists throughout the world will find if they ask people about what constitutes intelligences. And he argued that there are seven different kinds of intelligences.

Now, in the case – so there are interpersonal, intrapersonal, tactile–kinesthetic, linguistic, okay, mathematical–logical. He claims that these are all – these are clearly – if you look at the broad spectrum – now different cultures value different kinds of intelligences. Now the claim carries over.
Same technique. Haidt and his colleagues look at what anthropologists, among other people, and what cultural psychologists say are the moral rules in particular cultures. Now, there are problems of translation here that are complicated, but the main point is something like this. Now, you get these five modules – and Haidt is open to there being more. He is the example I give, but he is the leader of this group. So – and now if you go to your sheet here – I wasn't able to get this on to – so he claims that if you look across cultures, you'll see that – I'll read through one or two of these just so you get the feel of this. So there is a harm–care module. He actually likes talk of modularity, so that's why I'm comfortable using it, okay? So he is the leader of this school, and he likes to talk about modularity. So there is a harm–care principle. This is the Mencian sprout that makes you feel like you want to save the child on the well, okay? This is the one that is operating there.

So the adaptive challenge – so this top thing called "adaptive challenge" on the left side is what evolutionary problem the module was designed to solve way back when, okay? What one is there? Well, it is to – so that you're, as it were, constructed as an animal who wants to protect and care for your young, for the vulnerable, and for injured kin. That's the adaptive challenge there.

Now, the proper domains – this is what it was designed to get triggered by, in his view, okay? It's designed to be triggered by suffering, or in the child–falling–in–the–well case, distress, or a threat to one's kin, okay? That will activate it really quickly. The actual
domain – this is now what psychologists nowadays find – is that baby seals and cartoon actors also activate it. Can anybody think of why this is the case? There is a good explanation for this, but I'm just – this is a little pre–quiz before you get to do your real lesson.

**FEMALE SPEAKER**

Cuteness.

**OWEN FLANAGAN**

Cuteness. It's the cuteness factor. This is why people, like, go crazy over puppies and kittens and stuff, and then older ones, they don’t – older dogs. Just like with human babies, the head is large compared to the body, so too on these kind of animals. The head is exposed and usually big. Cartoon figures have that property. This is well known, been studied by lots of psychologists.

Okay. But notice now, the characteristic emotion, the next one, is compassion. Now, is the harm–care principle only controlled by an emotion? I'm not going to go into that myself. But the idea is that this is the way to explain these syndromes, okay? And the relevant virtues, notice, are caring and kindness. The relevant vice is cruelty. Okay. So that – I'm not going to go through all of these in the same way. But now, the suggestion is you can tune that up really high. Some theories do that. Does Buddhism do that? Maybe. Does it tune it up so high or suggest tuning it up so high that it becomes
psychologically unrealistic? That's a question I leave for you. I mean, we'll talk about that.

Fairness-reciprocity – this is a totally different thing. And I think, by the way, what is interesting here – fairness-reciprocity would be something like intuitions about fairness. So Franz Duvall has done some interesting experiments. He's the number one primatologist in the world. He does studies with non-human primates. I forget what monkeys he used for these. But you take a little monkey and give it – I give both Marie a cucumber and Raziel a cucumber, and they look at each other between the screen, and they're okay as long as I'm giving them cucumbers. And the minute I switch, though, and give Raziel a kiwi and Marie a cucumber, guess what happens? She gets very upset. She starts throwing dirt and rocks at me, okay? And he's kind of looking over like – right away, you get this, okay? There is no prior training effect, okay? Just as soon as the monkey – sorry – sees the discrepancy, it gets powerfully motivated to react to the fact that it's not being treated fairly. At least this is the best explanation that people can give.

So go on, you know, so proper domain. It is supposed to get activated – evolutionarily this is the explanation – by cheating in order to cooperate and so on. And the actual domain that it gets activated now is people even think that they got screwed by vending machines, or your computer hates you, things like that. This is just facts about how these – the point is that these things do generalize, and it's just not surprising. Mother Nature ought to want these things to be quick to generalize if they're positive. It's like, you
know, there is a thing called the Garcia effect in psychology, which is one taste food aversion, okay? Most things you have to learn trial and error. If you get sick as a kid, if you get the flu after eating something, okay, you'll never want that food again. It's a wonderful design to over-generalize, even if the food didn't make you sick, okay? Because sometimes – often enough, the food will make you sick. But if it's not the food that made you sick – it's not a bad idea to give up scallops because you got the flu after scallops. It's not a big deal, at least in the modern world it's not.

Okay. The other two – the other areas are – by the way, fairness and reciprocity is not on Mencius' list. I'm not going to argue for this. I just call your attention to that. It's just not on it, okay? Now, that's interesting because you might say – I have a hypothesis about this. Mencius tunes up because of his Chinese thing – tunes up, you know, li and shao and deference and filial piety and stuff like that. And justice–fairness is a lower value virtue, so it doesn't even appear on his list of four. That's possible on this view because you might not notice them. If you're looking at local ecology, you should sort of pick up what is there and think that that's what you're trying to grow.

Okay. In-group, out-group – great experimentation on this over many years. If I give Wayne a red marble and I say, Wayne, I'm going to report to you every day. You're on the red marble team, and you're playing against the blue marble team. And then I go in – this is Tajfel and Turner's famous studies, at least as good as Stannard and Milgram's studies, by the way – and I report each morning to Wayne, and I say, guess what, your team is
ahead. He goes, great, great. I say the next day, your team is ahead by a lot. Great. I start to do tests about how he feels towards the other team. He doesn't like them. He kind of hates them. He wants to smash them. Not Wayne in particular, but over populations of people, they get incredible in-group loyalty and out-group animosity, even if they haven't met any other people who are members of their team or the other team, okay? This is very interesting and important research.

Okay. And then there is authority and respect, things like this. We know that – from Konrad Lorenz's important work – if I hatch a duckling, and Phil is there, the ducklings will follow Phil around, okay? He is the mother duckling – he is a mother duck to the ducklings, okay? These are just part of the way creatures are taught – there is – in fact, if you look this up – I was telling my students about this the other day. I'm especially fond of this story. There is a hippopotamus named Owen who was – during the tsunami, he lost his mother, and they took him to a zoo in Malaysia, and he adopted a 100-year old turtle as his mother. And the turtle is fine with it, yeah. And they are just together, okay?

But these kind of relationships that are just automatic – I mean, well, you have to pick the right turtle and the right hippo, but anyway. It's interesting because, you know, hippopotamuses kill more humans than any other animal. They're extremely territorial, and they're not that friendly. They're cute and – they look cute because they're like baby seals. They have that kind of face that makes you go, ooh, cutie, but watch out. But anyway, they – it gets along. It's interesting. Okay.
Okay. And then finally, purity and sanctity, okay? Now John Haidt has told me, actually, that when he looks – when he and his colleagues look for cultural universals, that they find – the only thing that they have found that he thinks is reliable at this point – it's not the Oedipal Complex. It's cooties. Cooties – you know, cooties, like germs, like you touch – get cooties. Every language has words for cooties, for making me impure, okay?

**MALE SPEAKER**

What about hair?

**OWEN FLANAGAN**

Lice would be one kind of cooties. But the idea is just don’t touch me, okay? I remember in sixth grade, like girls that had cooties, or maybe they thought guys had. But it's that kind of a universal thing about this, you know – and some of the research that some of this stuff was based on, the psychological research, just goes like this: all of us in the room are swallowing our saliva all the time. It doesn't bother us. If you ask people to spit into a cup and then re-swallow their saliva, most people find that disgusting. And there is an evolutionary explanation I won't give you about the question why exactly would that be, why is it so gross. Okay, why is it so gross? And it is considered gross.

Okay. Now, so the idea here is that if you look at a lot of ethical traditions – you can see how this is going – you'll see in a lot of ancient texts taboos about such things as sex
during menstrual cycles and things like that, okay, really quite ritualistic, clear ritualistic stuff. And Haidt thinks that this is all turned on – this is all part – it is considered in lots of cultures to be a central part of morality. So again, we know that Brahmanism had lots of purity taboos. Many people say Buddhism sort of tuned those down. We'll say that. I'm not – this is your task, okay?

Now, by the way, the reason some people are interested in this as a political thing right now is that Haidt and his colleagues are trying to explain some of the conflicts between liberals and conservatives and red states and blue states in the following way.

Conservatives have all five modules turned up to about the same degree, and liberals have turned down, way down, which ones? Two of them, three of them, the last three.

(off-mic)

MALE SPEAKER

The last two.

OWEN FLANAGAN

Well, he thinks the last three. They turn – so the idea – now notice, on the Mencian idea – see, now we're making progress here because Mencius' idea is that whatever number, there are these things. Now make believe they're, like – like, you do a piano key thing, right? You can say – the piano works best if they're all tuned the right way, okay? Or the limb system works if they all grow to the right length, the two legs and the two arms, okay?
Now, here we start to see – this goes back to that premise number three that I said is just false – different cultures seem to do these things in different ways. If these things are the universals, then different cultures, but then different subcultures – so – a great book – I mean, a great book in the sense that it's a powerful book – Lord Patrick Devlin – a book I used to teach called *The Enforcement of Morals*. In 1957, he was asked to decide whether or not male homosexuality should be decriminalized in Britain. It was based on a report called the Wolfenden Report that was inspired by John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*.

**MALE SPEAKER**

Is that Lord Devlin, Patrick?

**OWEN FLANAGAN**

Lord Patrick Devlin, yeah. And so Mill – the Wolfenden Report said by all means you should get rid of male homosexuality – laws against it. It means something that – self-regarding behavior, just whatever. And Lord Patrick Devlin – everybody thought he would approve this, but he suggested that a society is held together not by what the rational person thinks, but what a reasonable thinks. A reasonable person is a person from the [unintelligible] omnibus, off the street, and most people in Britain in 1957, he claims, would have, and I quote, "powerful feelings of intolerance, indignation, and disgust" about just hearing about male homosexual behavior. It is highly implausible that he's right about this, but the point is he depended on disgust responses to push – and I think if you look
at the sphere of sexual behavior that liberals don't get fussy about, conservatives get very fussy about. Okay, you get the idea.

So Haidt's thing is that – now the question is, well, what do you do? Sometimes Haidt speaks, in person anyway – it's, like, we should all – you might say, well, what I've just said should make us all be more tolerant. That would be maybe one thing. So I'm supposed to understand why you get repulsed by something like that. I don't know. It would be odd. It's not clear what normative consequences that has. You get what I'm pointing to.

Okay. There is an empirical prediction. Now we're getting close to the end, which relates to Buddhism. If the moral modularity hypothesis is true, either version, a Mencian version or the 21\textsuperscript{st} century version is true, then one should see every moral tradition giving moral attention, plus or minus, positive or negative, to the seeds that are trying to grow inside us. I know this is a very sort of – it's actually an Aristotelian way of talking. There is this \textit{ergon}, right? There is this thing, like the acorn really wants to become an oak tree. Most of them don't make it, okay? Or the seeds on the Mencian shelf all want to become – the compassion thing wants to grow. And that's a wonderful thing about these botanical metaphors, I think, is that cross – you see them again and again. They're ubiquitous across all traditions, as far as I can tell. And it is true. It's a wonderful, amazing thing, right, that seeds, like an acorn, can become a grand oak tree. Or a little seed, a mustard seed, can become a mustard plant. These are amazing things.
So that's the idea here. So you should see this. This is an empirical prediction. So one of the things I'm interested in now is if you look at Buddhist ethics, does it bear out the prediction that Buddhism is responding to whatever the seeds there are, whatever the seeds there are. And then I put here – and this is an important caveat, just to show you that I'm not – I've thought about it. You could think that moral modularity – that you could keep going on the idea that the seeds must be in us, so we're not moral *tabula rasas*. That would be an idea, right? One idea could be we're moral blank slates. So we're definitely not moral blank slates. We've got these seeds oomphing to get out.

Another idea, though, that Peter Winch – I didn't go back and read this book again, but I remembered today when I was writing this up. Peter Winch has the idea – a book called *The Idea of a Social Science*. And in that book, as I recall, he says there are problems that every environment gives you and me. There is like birth, death, sex, food. And around these huge things, there will be built whatever we need. So you could be a *tabula rasa*, as long – maybe – as long as the environment keeps coming at you the exact same way all the time. That's the idea.

So the question is this. Does Buddhism do so? Does Buddhism reveal that it is trying to give attention to these seeds? Now, the idea here – again, if we go botanical – is which seeds does it think it should grow, and which ones doesn't it want to grow? Mencius, I
told you, only has four good seeds. What is the difference between a plant seed and a weed seed? This is Zen, for you. It's kind of Zen.

**FEMALE SPEAKER**

A weed is just a plant in the wrong place, or —

**OWEN FLANAGAN**

A weed is a plant in the wrong place, or a weed is a plant we don't like. There are plants we like we call "plants," and plants we don't like we call "weeds." I'm from the land of kudzu, so I know what I'm talking about.

So does Buddhism do this? Does it give attention to these seeds – and if it doesn't, suppose we said that, well, gee, Buddhism never – Buddhist texts like Shantideva – I mean, I can't – I know we can't talk about all Buddhist texts, so I decided to – for my thought, thinking about this, I was just sticking with Shantideva. If they act like, gee, I never heard of any justice seed in people – suppose we find that, that there is not a lot of discussion of justice or fairness in Buddhism, then the question is, well, does that – is that good for – is that bad for the moral modularity hypothesis, or is it bad for Buddhism? I have my views, but I'm not going to tell you, okay? And you get to answer that.

Okay. Here is another – now here are some other things to think about now. These are consequences of the moral modularity hypothesis, it seems to me. This has helped me
think again about something I thought about 20 years ago. I'll say this much. It seems to me that this would be true. A moral conception will be demanding or will be perceived to be demanding to the degree that it requires or involves overcoming the seeds or overcoming what the modules want to do. That is, if – I think this is a way to read Aristotle. Aristotle could be a Mencian, sort of, because you might just say Aristotle's – I've suggested that none of Aristotle's virtue seeds are all that demanding. You just have to be – have nice parents and grow up in a nice city–state, and then they come out. Where things get tricky, I think, is if we start to say there is some very powerful seeds in you that really want to get out. So Confucius famously says three times in the Analects – it's the only thing he repeats three times. He says this, "I have never met a man who prefers virtue to sex." Yeah, he said – I mean, I'm just reporting.

MALE SPEAKER

Who said that?

OWEN FLANAGAN

Confucius. You solved all the problems, and you didn't notice that part of his text? Yeah. It's cute that – I mean, that's interesting. The master says – what does he say more than anything else in the whole Analects? He says that three times.

Now, that's what I mean by – a demanding view would be one that recognizes that there is conflict among certain desires, right? So – and so that's one idea, demandingness, okay?
And furthermore, going back to my Roger Bannister thing, a moral theory would be perceived as psychologically unrealistic, or what is different – I'm putting these together, but not because I know – I know they don't go together – or perfectionistic to the degree it is very demanding, that is, it asks us to overcome our natures.

Now, how is this relevant to your thing? Okay. So Buddhism, it seems to me, is better off than Mencius' view because the Buddhists have the three poisons. And a way to think about the poisons, it just seems to me, those are three seeds which you'd better get under control because those are weeds. They're not all the same because of delusion. Oh, and I put down here – one way I found useful recently thinking about delusion is in terms of what – we were talking about economists, you know. People call the hedonic treadmill – you know, everybody in America thinks they'll be happy if they earn 20 percent more than they need – they make now. But you make 20 percent more, and you're not happy. You need 20 percent, and so on and so forth. It's the hamster-gerbil problem, right, the hedonic treadmill problem.

So that's taken in Buddhism, right, to be the common mistake, that we think that the next thing will make us happy, and it won't. And then there are these other big things, okay, greed and avarice, wanting to possess. The Lydian Shepherd – he's not a Buddhist, but he wants the queen, the king dead, and the kingdom, right? Greed, avarice, resentment.
Okay. So notice, this is sort of a side point here. But I do think the Buddhist view is – I think the Buddhist view does do something like this. It suggests that the Mencian seeds are – it's compatible with believing that the Mencian seeds are all there. I think there is plenty in whatever Buddhist text you go to to see that there is reason to believe that those parts of us can be grown, right? But Buddhism also, I think, is more psychologically realistic because it throws in these bad seeds. Now – and, of course, then we have – this is – I cut out some stuff, and I'm about to stop in a minute. So we have the bodhisattva's virtues. But again, we know that when you take the bodhisattva's vows, that you're supposed to not just try to be compassionate – this is a way in which Buddhism might – I will say this much – is demanding.

So in both rule utilitarianism and, I think, Kantian ethics in the West, most moral actions are – not act utilitarianism, but these others – doing a lot of good is supererogatory, okay? It's good if I'm nice to you and compassionate and loving towards you, but I don't have to be. That's optional, okay? It's above and beyond the call of duty. I'm not sure that Buddhism isn't very demanding in the way it requires me to try to work for compassionately to alleviate the suffering of all sentient beings. And not only that, to bring, by loving kindness, happiness in its place. This seems to me prima facie to be very demanding, growing some seeds.
Now, by the way, a question that we haven't talked about is when you grow some seeds, okay, do they – are some other seeds that are related to them not growable at the same time.

Okay. Your mission, should you decide to accept it, as they used to say, is this. Buddhists do talk – and I didn't talk about it at all today, but Chris and I were talking about it today. Buddhists often do talk about pure or real or original or Buddha nature, right? You're supposed to be getting back to your real something, and realizing this nature, say, as a bodhisattva. And so I ask you this. How does talk – number one, how does talk about this pure nature map on to talk about real human nature, as discussed by, say, Mencius or by Darwin? See, it's clearly – I mean, there is something going on that I don't know what to say about it. But getting at your Buddha nature or your pure nature or your – you get the idea, okay? It doesn't seem like getting in touch with your Mencian nature or your Darwin nature. It's something better, purer, deeper. Of course, you might be skeptical that it exists at all. And then which of the Mencian or twenty-first century seeds, modules, are grown and which are suppressed in Buddhist ethics? That's one question. I've given you a hint about what I think. And why are they suppressed, repressed, or grown? And these are your rewards. Answering these two questions makes an interesting contribution to fusion philosophy in its own right, and puzzling about these questions keeps our eye on the really difficult question of why be moral, the question that the world never seems to stop asking. That puzzles me every day I'm alive, why be moral. And on Fridays, I'm often a Nietzschian, so I'm really puzzled by it today.
Okay. Thank you.

(Applause)

OWEN FLANAGAN

Can you tell me a story right now? I think we have a commentator.

MALE SPEAKER

We have a Respondent.

MALE SPEAKER

Oh, sorry.

WAYNE PROUDFOOT

Okay. I mean, I found this very interesting. As Owen said, he just sent me these slides this afternoon, although he did send me a paper by Jonathan Haidt and a colleague so that – so I looked at those today, too. He sent me some material because – and I'm not really knowledgeable about a lot of this.

But it seems very interesting. So I just – the paper by Haidt and his colleague, in setting out this notion of the five – of the five different modules that we have on the paper – they said, look, all we're really insisting on is that there is some kind of structure to the mind in relationship to these things before experience, right? So modules that – some kind of
pre-experiential structure that disposes it to these things. So I just wanted to raise – and I have no more expertise than the rest of us here – but sort of what is the evidence for that. And the kind of evidence that Owen mentioned and a number of his slides did well – if you can see some similar kinds of things in primate behavior or pre-human behavior or animal behavior of various sorts, then maybe it seems to be something that some – prior to human experience in that way.

I suspect that this list of five that you put up there – you know, if we looked at it 100 years from now or 20 years from now, we see it reflects very much certain kinds of issues, you know, in our particular time, and that – and in fact, they in that paper recognize something like this. They said, well, there does seem to be evidence outside of human experience, that is in animal behavior, for the harm-care issue, for in-group loyalty, although they said they only came to that very recently, right? That's a kind of add-on in the recent papers. So that is something that wasn't so obvious, but they think that also is present in animal behavior – and then authority–respect. Fairness–reciprocity they said is debatable, that is, some people, they seem to think it is present with the kind of examples you gave, that it is present in animal behavior. And purity–sanctity they say only comes at the human level.

The reason I raise these questions – partly for evidence, but then it's partly to think if these are adaptations, then they might be different at different – then something that comes only at the human level is – we're already talking about cultural kinds of things,
too. So the adaptation and the way it is preserved are important. But as I say, we can't really do an historicist analyst of these five now, but I suspect that they're not arbitrary, but just as we looked back on certain kinds of moral categories and so forth – you know, even 30 years ago or so, they looked quite differently as now. So the claim – so it's a fairly strong claim that they're independent of culture in that kind of way.

The – and really, they say – as I say, they say just that there is a kind of partial predisposition toward them in some partial structure of the mind, and they're not really quite sure that – what that is.

If you take the example of the purity idea – this is a somewhat different question, but to focus on one issue – they say, well, they really only came to that very – I didn't know that Haidt wrote his thesis on it. But they came to that relatively recently, and it's not in the kinds of lists that others have, and it's particularly by noticing that – I think in their paper they say Jews, Muslims, and Hindus – that kind of notion of purity and so forth is really central there. But they think that somehow they can see this also as even though the evidence isn't available from animals or others, but this is a kind of predetermined module, and that – and the implication is that seeing these as modules, even though they're – it's not just that we allow seeds to grow, but they are really revised and adapted in different kind of cultural forms, and so forth. But still, if we thought these were basic modules that would give some kind of explanation, initial explanation, about them – and
just to set alongside that kind of explanation sort of for purity laws – you know, Mary Douglas’ *Purity and Danger*, for instance.

So if we look at something like the kosher laws in the Bible – I mean, Douglas had a lot of these kinds of – and in fact, Haidt says, look – I think it’s Haidt’s paper – said, look, these are – have a kind of evolutionary basis; they're adaptive. We don't know what it is, but maybe we can speculate that humans, unlike animals – I'm not sure why they said "unlike animals" – but are aware that certain foods are poisonous or dangerous in some kind of way, and therefore they begin to divide things into things that are dangerous and things that are not, and so forth.

Well, Mary Douglas and others had that – I mean, that's what Maimonides said about the laws, you know, in other words, they really – the reason, you know, for the not eating pork is because of trichinosis, not that they had that word or knew that, but they must have known somehow that it was dangerous, and various kinds of things. But she said, well, first of all, looking at the Bible, there are all kinds of things in there that is "chew the cud" and "not-cloven hoof" and so forth, things that don't seem to fit in that way, and argued that if you look carefully not only in the Hebrew Bible case – but also she later went on to look at Hinduism, and she herself was a Catholic, and so it came out of Roman Catholic kinds of purity and sanctity and so forth. You'll see that that kind of explanation is relatively simplistic and is projecting back our notion – or not just ours, but Maimonides. We know that, look, pork can sometimes – if not refrigerated, you know, is a problem.
And if – but if you look carefully at that, the cognitive structure of the way in which the – you know, kosher and treif or pure and impure and so forth are divided up, then you'll see really rather elaborate cognitive structures that reflect the social structure and questions of things that really vary in some ways from culture to culture about the way in which outsiders are to be treated and so forth.

So again, this debate about Mary Douglas' analysis – but it's a very different kind of analysis, saying that cultural kinds of divisions which are rooted in social experience may – in this case, may actually explain all of the detail of the Deuteronomy – of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, these particular kinds of laws, as well as certain of the laws in Hinduism and so forth, as opposed to just saying that they come out of some kind of purity or impurity, which is – develops from [unintelligible].

And then one other comment, and I'll stop for now, but we can talk about it. To take another example, in the first column you have here, harm-care and character —

**OWEN FLANAGAN**

This is Haidt's, by the way.

**WAYNE PROUDFOOT**

Yeah, yeah, Haidt's, I know, yeah, yeah. I'm not saying it to you, I'm just trying to get out on the table. So [unintelligible] becomes compassion. And as we said a few times, well,
Buddhism seems to sort of up the compassion thing, and maybe not talk as much about some of the other issues. But I wondered how much that is just a kind of pun. I mean, not really a pun, but it is a little bit like the way I feel sometimes when I read some of this neuroscience discussions of sort of Tibetan states of compassion and so forth, you know, that had either MRI studies or EEG studies and so forth, and they say, well, we can see that – I'm now referring to what Richard Davidson, I guess, at Wisconsin who has done a lot of this, and who actually – you know, in one particular study, he had Tibetan monks who had been engaged in ascetic practice and study for up to 40 years, and then he had people who had been taught for just a week to sort of control attention, and he found the Tibetan monks surprisingly were able to control, as measured by EEGs and the MRI stuff, kind of positive emotions more than the others.

But so he says here we've studied compassion, or Buddhist compassion. But it seems to me compassion – the kinds of things that those monks had come from, you know, 25 or 40 years of immersing themselves in scholastic texts and disputation and argument, which means that their understanding of, you know, what particular preachers mean and the words mean and the world is and compassion and so on is completely different from the other side. Now granted, that's all you can measure with an EEG or an fMRI, is blood flowing into a particular part of the brain, and so forth. So it's not that that isn't valuable, but to think you're getting at Buddhist compassion there it seems to me leaves out the whole notion that these are social practices embedded in linguistic and social and cultural ways of understanding the world, which is really far richer – by that, I don't necessarily
mean better now, just more complex and more dense and more elaborate. So that this may be better because you're not just looking at, you know, the numbers on an EEG scale or an fMRI, but still, the compassion as that language is found in various Buddhist texts may be so different that using the same word here, even though we know there is a connection in some way, doesn't really – we may be tricked into thinking it illumines more than it actually does.

That's enough now, just to throw out.

OWEN FLANAGAN

Great. Thank you very much. I don't want to keep the audience long because they have an assignment to do. I – starting at the last point – I mean, I am on record, so I totally agree that there is really a problem with inter-translatability. This is a huge problem across – fusion philosophy has that problem, which is why, like, when I teach my students, I say, I can't believe you come here, you don't know Latin, you don't know Greek, you don't know ancient Chinese, you don't know Pali and Sanskrit. It's appalling. You know, and I even say things like ex nihilo nihil fit, and they look like, excuse me, what are you talking about, you know? So o tempora o mores. I mean, there really is that huge problem about inter-translatability, yeah. And the sort of positivistic identification of brain states with complex social states.
I think for purposes of today, really, what I – all I'll say is this, that – about – I believe that morality is a social construction, and I think there would be – the world would be a better place if people saw that. But I do think it has – I do like the idea that it has – it is seeded in a certain way. I think what is clear is that the seeds are quite indeterminate in terms of what they can become. But I think – and I think what one sees is that – talking about Mary Douglas and – well, any tradition. I think what one sees – and that this can be useful in thinking about it – is that every tradition that there is, as far as I can tell, does accentuate certain virtues, certain ways of thinking about moral life, and usually has a background theory about human nature and what the function of morality is, and then hooks onto a thesis of moral realism. I didn't say this in my – but then that is the most important thing, that we really got it right. And I think that is the big danger, and I think the more we naturalize ethics, whether it be by looking at the historical overlays of what, you know, I've done – it's sort of like topiaries, you know, Japanese gardens, right, where you just say, oh, I – this – yeah, this wants to grow this way, but look what I can do to it, you know? I mean, I think that's the way morality is. It's a socially constructed thing, possibly on top of some common and ubiquitous human problems. That's the Winchian view. Or on top of that plus a little bit of being fired up in the first place.

And by the way, I didn't reread Haidt's paper, but if he says that about purity, it's kind of – he's wrong about that, if it's not found – that he says – I notice that locution in his paper. He'll say, "humans but not animals," but he could say "other animals." So, for example, at Franz Duvall's place, where I visited in Emory, where he has the biggest chimpanzee
colony, his chimps sleep in their own excrement. No wild chimp would ever do that. I mean, so there are taboos and there are degenerations of things, that bad things happen in certain environments.

So – but as regards the – what would be the evidence for moral modularity, I think you're right. It is sort of a – it's a complicated effect of equilibrium, how good are the data at this point. One point I think that Haidt does have right, though, is this, because I started out in my early career looking at some research on moral psychology. So back in the day, Lawrence Kohlberg – his model was a big model. And he points out at the beginning that Kohlberg viewed the essence of morality to be justice is fairness. He really did. I mean, and in his work, he is always talking about Rawls. When I asked Rawls, "What do you think about Kohlberg," he said, "I never met the man, and I never read anything by him." But Kohlberg was always emphasizing that. And Haidt actually says at the beginning of his paper, he said – and this is a sort of social construction of science, right? He says psychology, moral psychology, as done by liberal social scientists, got really hooked on morality as the development of this one tendency that gets Marie to throw dirt at me if I don't give her the kiwi. You see, that's where – that's what we see as, like, the most important – we really tune that one up.

I think that's just important to embed ourselves that way, so, yeah. I don't have any questions – problems with anything you said. And I think we can say, you know, what goes on in – what about – you know, when I teach my students – when I read Confucius'
Analects, and I say, "filial piety," and they go, "What?" You know, or they read where he says you can say to your parent, "Mommy, can I stay out to midnight tonight?" and she says, "No, you'll be in at 11:30," and you can ask a second time, and then you say, "Thank you very much for your wisdom," when she says no the third time. That is completely – that is not something that is part of our tradition, right?

So this is again the tuning. And then there are big background theories as to why you should do that, why you should respect your parents' wisdom, ancestors, and so on and so forth. So these things radically – as we would say, they radically underdetermine morality if they are there at all. So okay. Let's open it up to your assignment. You guys have to go. Okay, good. I'll see you tomorrow. Tell your story.