

## McMAHAN ON SPECIESISM AND DEPRIVATION

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ABSTRACT: Jeff McMahan has long shown himself to be a vigorous and incisive critic of speciesism, and in his essay “Our Fellow Creatures” he has been particularly critical of speciesist arguments that draw inspiration from Wittgenstein. In this essay I consider his arguments against speciesism generally and the species-norm account of deprivation in particular. I argue that McMahan’s ethical framework (as outlined in *The Ethics of Killing*) is more nuanced and more open to the incorporation of speciesist intuitions regarding deprivation than he himself suggests. Specifically, I argue that, given his willingness to include a comparative dimension in his “Intrinsic Potential Account” he ought to recognize species as a legitimate comparison class. I also argue that a sensible speciesism can be pluralist and flexible enough to accommodate many of McMahan’s arguments in defense of “moral individualist” intuitions. In this way, I hope to make the case for at least a partial reconciliation between McMahan and the “Wittgensteinian speciesists”, e.g. Cora Diamond, Stephen Mulhall, and Raimond Gaita.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Jeff McMahan has been quite critical of defenses of speciesism, and he’s been *particularly* critical of defenses coming from Wittgensteinian quarters (e.g.

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authors such as Stephen Mulhall, Cora Diamond, and Raimond Gaita).<sup>1</sup> It might, therefore, seem that any attempt at reconciliation between his own “moral individualist” position and their less revisionary approach to ethics is a fool’s errand. Nevertheless, that’s what I’ll be attempting here. I will argue that McMahan’s ethical framework (as outlined in *The Ethics of Killing*) is more nuanced and more open to the incorporation of speciesist intuitions than McMahan has been willing to admit. Specifically, I’ll argue that, given his willingness to include a comparative dimension in his “Intrinsic Potential Account”, he ought to recognize species membership as a legitimate comparison class within his own account of deprivation. I’ll also maintain that a sensible speciesism can be pluralist and flexible enough to accommodate many of McMahan’s arguments in defense of moral individualist intuitions. In this way, I hope to make the case for at least a partial reconciliation between McMahan and the “Wittgensteinian speciesists”.

## 2. SPECIAL RELATIONS, THE FOLK CONCEPT OF SPECIES, AND THE MORAL IMPORTANCE OF KINDS

In *The Ethics of Killing* McMahan distinguishes between those relations that have intrinsic moral significance and those that are only instrumentally significant, and he acknowledges that the relationship between parent and child is a “relatively uncontroversial” example of an intrinsically morally significant relation. Accordingly, he admits that it may similarly follow that some partiality to fellow humans could be justifiable because of special relations, but he thinks the relevance of such a bond is minimal:

If the relation of parent to child, stripped down to its purely biological component, is morally significant, perhaps the relation of membership in the same species is as well. This possibility cannot, I think, be wholly excluded. But if membership in the same species is an intrinsically significant special relation, it is surely one with only minimal moral significance. It can hardly have more significance, for example, than membership in the same race, which is a similar kind of biological relation. (226)

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<sup>1</sup> See his “Our Fellow Creatures”, *The Journal of Ethics*, v.9, no.3/4, pp.353-380. Key works on these topics by the “Wittgensteinians” include: Cora Diamond, “Eating Meat and Eating People” in *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind*, MIT Press, 1991; Cora Diamond, “The Importance of Being Human”, *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, 29, 1991, pp.35-62; Alice Crary, “Minding What Already Matters”, *Philosophical Topics*, v.38, n.1., pp.17-49; Stephen Mulhall, *The Wounded Animal: J.M. Coetzee and the Difficulty of Reality in Literature and Philosophy*, Princeton Univ. Press, 2009; Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity: thinking about love and truth and justice*, Routledge, 2000.

Regarding the possible instrumental value of species membership, he also denies that the shared bond of a common humanity could amount to much:

Membership in a nation, for example, is for many people an important source of psychological stability: it provides them with a sense of security and belonging, and by merging their individual identities into the larger national identity, enables them to expand the boundaries of the self, thereby enhancing their self-esteem. There is, however, no parallel to this in the case of membership in the human species. Unlike membership in a nation, membership in the human species is not a focus of collective identity. Being human does not significantly differentiate us from anything else; it therefore fails to engage our pride or enhance our sense of identity. (221)<sup>2</sup>

These passages initially sound sensible enough, but notice that in both McMahan is limiting his discussion to a very narrow biological notion of species. Such a notion, however, is clearly not the concept that the Wittgensteinian speciesists (and other sophisticated speciesists) have been presupposing.<sup>3</sup> Instead, they tend to recognize the relevant concept of human being (or of “humanity”) as a thick “folk” concept that contains biological elements but is not exhausted by such elements.<sup>4</sup> Further, to say the concept of humanity (understood in *this* light), “fails to engage our pride or enhance our sense of identity”, is to ignore what we actually say when we invoke the term: as Bernard Williams has pointed out, we talk of *human* rights, “humanisms” of various sorts, the Princeton center for *human* values, etc.<sup>5</sup> Consider, as just one example, a typical case in which people are arguing over the reasonableness of *nationalistic* pride or identity. What is the anti-nationalist likely to claim? Probably not: “But remember, we are all creatures with the relevant capacities necessary and sufficient for

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<sup>2</sup> In “Our Fellow Creatures” McMahan’s strategy is somewhat different: there he claims that the “net effect” of partiality with the human species is not benign, and compares the harm done to animals with the possible benefits to radically impaired human beings.(361) Since I’m among the speciesists who don’t think that our position justifies most of the harms to animals McMahan is considering, I’m inclined to think he’s misjudged the plausible net effect of humanism/speciesism.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Alice Crary on Diamond’s writings: “Again and again, Diamond attempts to get us register ways in which ethical thought is shaped by concepts of human beings of sorts foreign to the work of moral individualists, concepts that are “ethical” or “imaginative,” as opposed to merely biological, insofar as they treat humans as creatures that as such merit specific forms of respect and attention.” From “A Brilliant Perspective: Diamondian Ethics”, *Philosophical Investigations*, 43:4 October 2011.

<sup>4</sup> If one wants to insist that any talk of species must refer to a strictly biological concept, feel free to substitute “humanism” and “human” throughout this paper. I refrain from simply using the term “humanism” because it comes to us loaded with a variety of senses that are not relevant for the current discussion. Cf. Bernard Williams, “The Human Prejudice”, *Making Sense of Humanity*, Cambridge, 1995.

<sup>5</sup> Bernard Williams, “The Human Prejudice”

personhood.” No, what is much more likely to be uttered is the quite powerful plea: “But we are all *human beings!*”<sup>6</sup>

Why this basic disconnect between McMahan’s arguments and the motivations of many of his speciesist opponents? I don’t think McMahan has simply overlooked the possibility that the concept at hand is something richer than the stripped down biological notion he dismisses as morally irrelevant. Rather, I suspect he only seriously considers that biological concept in *The Ethics of Killing* because he’s already committed to a moral individualism which he believes to be in fundamental tension with the idea that kinds (like the folk notion of “species” or “humanity”) are the sort of things that can matter morally. However, in his more recent essay “Our Fellow Creatures”, McMahan tackles assorted Wittgensteinian thinkers (and some others) who have criticized his moral individualism, and there he offers an explicit response to those speciesists invoking a “thick” concept. His response involves pointing out that the “marginal” cases (e.g., infants and adults with very low cognitive capacities) that are taken to pose a challenge to moral individualists *lack* whatever qualities of humanity (language, culture, etc.) there are that supposedly thicken the concept “human being”. (Perhaps the *only* thing such “marginal” humans have in common with us is the biological link.) So, the argument goes, the thick concept can’t be doing work for *those* cases:

Where along this spectrum does co-membership in the human species lie? It is not, like the parent–child relation, a close or personal relation. Nor is it, like cultural membership, a relation that is constituted by shared values; *for radically cognitively impaired human beings do not and cannot share our values any more than animals do.* Mere co-membership in the human species is instead like co-membership in a racial group in being a purely biological relation. (361, emphasis mine)

Later in that same essay McMahan comes back to a similar point when discussing the views of Stephen Mulhall and Eva Kittay, but again he can’t help but find their remarks puzzling as he filters their claims through the lens of his own deep commitment to moral individualism. This results in his coming to suggest that the speciesists’ position is committed to the admittedly implausible requirement that cognitively impaired human beings can nonetheless *somehow* share in certain distinctly human capacities which would ground their moral status:

But these passages from Mulhall and Kittay both invite the obvious reply that the forms of common life they describe do not include the radically cognitively

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<sup>6</sup> McMahan’s remarks (quoted earlier) about the limited *intrinsic* value of the concept human being merit a similar response: since the relevant concept at play isn’t purely biological, the Wittgensteinian speciesist will resist his purported analogy with race. (Note that in saying this I don’t mean here to imply (as McMahan does) that the concept of race itself is purely biological.)

impaired. Those human beings do not, and cannot, share our language, culture, ways of knowing, and so on, any more than animals can. [...] Perhaps the requirements for participation in the common life are less stringent than those suggested in the passages I have quoted (where language, culture, shared interests, and so on are highlighted), so that even the radically cognitively impaired are capable of certain minimal forms of participation. But if that is so, then it is also true that some among the more highly developed types of animal often participate more extensively than is possible for human beings with lower psychological capacities. (363-4)

But perhaps this “obvious reply” is indeed too obvious to be on target, for I take the deeper point of philosophers like Mulhall to involve the legitimacy of being able to hold on to the thought that such humans are rightly regarded as belonging to a kind that typically does share “language, culture, ways of knowing, and so on” and that belonging to this kind can matter morally *even if* the individual in question lacks many typical human characteristics or abilities.<sup>7</sup>

As I’ve suggested, I think McMahan’s aversion to placing significant moral weight on kinds leads him to reject any such talk, but it is important to keep in mind that his rejection of the reasonableness of caring about human beings *as* human beings brings with it no small cost: it requires far-from-trivial revisions to our moral thought. Notably, it requires that we substantially alter our thinking about what can count as a *deprivation*. More specifically, McMahan’s rejection of the moral relevance of the kind “human being” bars him from being able to recognize a congenitally severely intellectually disabled human as being deprived.<sup>8</sup>

### 3. SPECIES-NORM ACCOUNTS OF DEPRIVATION AND MORAL INDIVIDUALISM

Many people inclined to defend a “speciesist” or humanist position do so in part because they find that appeal to the notion of species is essential for a

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<sup>7</sup> In saying that they want to be able to speak of the moral importance of kinds in certain contexts (such as deprivation, which I’ll go on to discuss) I don’t mean to suggest that such thinkers must in turn be committed to a general “nature of a kind” view regarding moral status of the sort McMahan attributes to Scanlon or Finnis. First, though a speciesist regarding judgments of deprivation may well also hold species membership to be relevant for judgments of overall moral status, these are logically distinct concerns (which could come apart), and my focus here is on the former issue. Second, at least as McMahan describes the views of Scanlon and Finnis, they seem to involve a fundamental “criterialist” line of reasoning justifying moral concern, a line that is then (somewhat mysteriously) extended to cover members of a kind lacking the relevant criteria. I take the approach of the Wittgensteinians I have referenced to be radically different in rejecting the criterialist impulse from the start. For more on this, see Timothy Chappell, “On the Very Idea of Criteria for Personhood”, *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, v.49, Issue 1, March 2011.

<sup>8</sup> That such a claim is strikingly counterintuitive is emphasized by Frances Kamm at the beginning of her review of *The Ethics of Killing* in *Philosophical Review* (vol. 116, no.2, 2007)

plausible account of what it is to say a life has gone well or poorly. A typical statement of such a position can be found in Martha Nussbaum's essay "Beyond 'Compassion and Humanity'":

Such a [mentally disabled] child's life is tragic in a way that the life of a chimpanzee is not tragic. . . In short, the species norm (duly evaluated) tells us what the appropriate benchmark is for judging whether a given creature has decent opportunities for flourishing. (309-310)<sup>9</sup>

In "Our Fellow Creatures", McMahan instead argues that such a conclusion is "not obvious" and he encourages us to consider revising our views:

Why should we think that their having limited cognitive capacities is a grave misfortune when it is not a misfortune for an animal to have capacities of roughly the same level? Many people believe that the answer appeals to the distinction between individual and kind. When we evaluate how well off an individual is, should we assess its level of well-being relative to the levels that are possible for normal members of its kind (that is, species) or relative to the levels that are possible given the individual's own intrinsic nature? Most people seem to think the former is the appropriate comparison. [. . .] But the natural view for moral individualists is that an individual's own intrinsic nature, and thus the range of well-being that is possible for it given that nature, sets the scale on which its actual level of well-being is to be evaluated. There is no space to defend this view here, though I have done so at length elsewhere. ("Our Fellow Creatures", p. 366)<sup>10</sup>

The earlier discussion that he cites is from *The Ethics of Killing*. There he considers this issue in section 5.1 (The Standard for Assessing Fortune), where

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<sup>9</sup> Martha Nussbaum, "Beyond 'Compassion and Humanity': Justice for Nonhuman Animals" in *Animal Rights: Current Debates and New Directions*, edited by Cass R. Sunstein, Martha C. Nussbaum, Oxford University Press, 2004. See also Raimond Gaita: "There are those who say that [if a mother's disabled child] will not develop beyond the psychological and intellectual capacities of certain animals, then it is morally on the same level as those animals. The animals, however, are not as they are through *misfortune*. To speak of the child as a victim of misfortune is to keep him amongst us. . ." in *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception* (second edition) Routledge, 2004 126). And Cora Diamond: "I do not mean by 'having a human life to lead'; having a life in which distinctively human capacities are exercised. Someone may be deprived, for part or all of his life, of distinctively human capacities like reason. A human life without the exercise of these capacities is his human life. The one human life he is given has that terrible deprivation; that, in his case, is what his having a human life to lead has been. We may perfectly well think of that as a particularly terrible human fate.", "The Importance of Being Human", p. 59.

<sup>10</sup> McMahan cites an article by Peter Vallentyne ("Of Mice and Men: Equality and Animals", *Journal of Ethics*, 9, 2005, pp.403-433) as well as his prior writings in *The Ethics of Killing*. However, the article by Vallentyne assumes without argument that speciesism is untenable and adopts a "species-neutrality" condition which rejects (again, without argument) the notion of species-relative conceptions of fortune and well being. It explores a problem that results for the moral individualist given her rejection of species norms, it does not offer further or original objections to the species-norm account of deprivation.

he acknowledges that the view which many speciesists wish to hold on to is indeed a part of common sense:

Suppose that this human being, having cognitive capacities comparable to those of a dog and having also a shortened life span, has a life with an overall total of well-being that would be sufficient for a good life for a dog. Is this a fortunate or an unfortunate life? The common sense view is of course that this human being has a terribly unfortunate life [...] While the dog has a good life *for a dog*, the severely retarded human being's life is a bad life *for a human being*. (146)

McMahan goes on to conclude, however, that this common sense view (which he dubs “the *Species Norm Account*”) is undermined by counterexamples. His first counterexample involves anencephalic infants, but acknowledging that such cases are problematic and controversial he offers another (now famous) counterexample involving a radically enhanced chimpanzee (*The Superchimp*). McMahan argues that if such a chimp were to be enhanced (to the level of a ten-year-old human) but then lose those capacities (but live a contented life among the chimpanzees) the *Species Norm Account* is committed to the conclusion that the loss of capacities “was not a misfortune that left the Superchimp in a deprived or unfortunate state.” He counters:

This, however, is the wrong way to think about this case. [...] When a comparable decline occurs in the case of a ten-year-old human being, we regard it as a tragic misfortune that leaves the victim in a pitifully unfortunate condition (one of moderately severe mental retardation). But the Species Norm Account implies that, when this same decline occurs in the case of the Superchimp, the victim is not unfortunate at all, though he has suffered a misfortune. It seems arbitrary, however, to suppose that the mere differences in species should make the human being's state an unfortunate one while the same state in the Superchimp is not. If the human being and the Superchimp have both fallen from the same height to the same lower state, it seems that either both are unfortunate or neither is. (147-148)

My own reaction to the Superchimp case is different. It doesn't seem *arbitrary* at all to me to conclude that the chimp is, in an important sense, not deprived in the way the child is. As McMahan earlier acknowledges, it is common sense to think of judgments of deprivation as at least in part relative to the species norm, so it is unclear why we should take this case to function as a counterexample rather than a plausible consequence of common sense moral thought.<sup>11</sup>

One factor that may be leading McMahan to conclude that this case has force against the *Species Norm Account* is his apparent initial assumption that

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<sup>11</sup> Eva Feder Kittay makes a similar point about such cases in “At the Margins of Moral Personhood”, *Ethics* 116 (October 2005): 112.

holders of such an account are thereby barred from recognizing any *other* sense of deprivation or misfortune for an individual, but there is no reason for the speciesist to accept this restriction. As McMahan later acknowledges, we can sensibly take the *Species Norm Account* “to state a sufficient condition of an individual’s being unfortunate rather than a necessary and sufficient condition.” (148) Indeed, a speciesist ought to be pluralistic enough to agree to most of what McMahan goes on say about his own account. There’s no reason a sensible speciesist cannot *also* recognize and embrace the sense of an “intrinsic” deprivation that McMahan describes as falling under that approach. In other words, we have good grounds for accepting a hybrid account that acknowledges that at least two sorts of comparison can be relevant for judgments of deprivation, with one type involving reference to species norms and another type involving the individual’s actual state compared to what is possible for that individual. Thus we can reasonably conclude that the Superchimp’s retardation does involve a *sort* of deprivation (relative to that chimp’s inherent capacities and potential) but at the same time recognize that it doesn’t involve the sort of deprivation we lament when a creature falls short of a species norm.<sup>12</sup>

McMahan claims that there is a different counterexample which renders even this type of sophisticated speciesist view unacceptable: Imagine that *enough* Superchimps are around “to shift the median for the range of well being possible for chimpanzees.” Then: “The hitherto normal chimpanzees will have become abnormal, or retarded, and their levels of well-being will have dropped below the median level for the species. According to the *Species Norm Account*, therefore, they will have become unfortunate. But this seems absurd.” (148)

But is this conclusion really so odd? If we imagine human beings reaching a point of much greater intelligence than we currently possess (say through genetic manipulation), and we then imagine a human born with what for us would be normal intelligence but for them would be radically impaired intelligence, why would it be at all absurd to consider that particular human as, in that context, suffering from a tragic deprivation? That some of our judgments concerning deprivation hinge on context in this way is not bizarre. In fact, it would only *come* to seem absurd to call that human deprived if we came to view these super smart humans as a relevantly different “kind” (e.g. Superhumans) and so were implicitly or explicitly thinking of this particular human as an “old fashioned” or “classic” human rather than a Superhuman.

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<sup>12</sup> It is an interesting further question whether these forms of deprivation are *additive*. My own intuitions lean towards the view that they are. In other words, I’m inclined to conclude that an individual who is deprived in both senses is worse off (other things being equal) than an individual only deprived in one sense. (Thanks to Jeff McMahan for pressing this issue.)



(Note that the Superhuman “kind” classification need not involve a commitment to claiming that Superhumans are different biological species.)<sup>13</sup> Thus, despite McMahan’s insistence, it doesn’t seem to follow from this thought experiments that “we must abandon the idea that whether a being is fortunate or unfortunate depends on a comparison between its life and the lives of other members of its species.” (149)<sup>14</sup>

In addition, it turns out that McMahan’s revisionary alternative (*The Intrinsic Potential Account*) ultimately *shares* many of the supposed challenges facing the *Species Norm Account*. This is because, as McMahan eventually acknowledges, there are good reasons for wanting to include a “comparative” dimension in his account that references kinds:

I suspect it is best to see the Intrinsic Potential Account as encompassing two distinct accounts—one involving comparative evaluation, the other involving non-comparative evaluation—whose judgments need not coincide. Indeed, the comparative dimension to our evaluation of overall lifelong fortune may itself be pluralistic, involving comparisons not only with all other persons but also with certain subgroups among persons. [...] I think we should recognize the legitimacy and importance of several different types of comparison. (158-159)<sup>15</sup>

McMahan goes on to mention nation, social class, and peer group as possible legitimate subgroups. Given McMahan’s consistent endorsement of moral individualism, this concession is surprising. Remember the remarks from “Our Fellow Creatures” that I quoted earlier in which McMahan *contrasts* his moral individualism with the view of “many people” who “believe that the answer [to why the damaged infant is seen as deprived] appeals to the distinction between individual and kind.” (p.366) McMahan there suggests the preferable account is the one that looks at *just* intrinsic nature, but in reality the position offered in *The Ethics of Killing* is one in which a hybrid account is accepted, and an important part of that account is the comparative dimension which allows

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<sup>13</sup> So McMahan’s claim that classifying Superchimps as a new kind would be illicit because it is “contrary to the canons of biological taxonomy” is beside the point (149). For a rich treatment of these issues that is somewhat more sympathetic to McMahan’s claims regarding multiple Superchimps, see Gerald Lang’s “Discrimination, Partial Concern, and Arbitrariness” in Luck, Value, & Commitment: Themes from the Ethics of Bernard Williams, eds. Ulrike Heuer & Gerald Lang, Oxford University Press, 2012, 293–332.

<sup>14</sup> He reiterates this rejection of Species Norm Account based on the Superchimp case on p.327.

<sup>15</sup> Note that McMahan here refers to the position in which one’s actual state is compared with what is possible for that individual as a “non-comparative” account of deprivation, but he has pointed out in correspondence this phrasing is misleading. It is more accurate to characterize both senses of deprivation as comparative: one involves a comparison with species norm, the other a comparison with what is possible for that individual.

for judgments of deprivation to be based on a comparison of the individual relative to larger classes and kinds.

With McMahan's eventual willingness to accept judgments involving groups, the question arises anew: why not "species" as a relevant group? He admits that abandoning such judgments leaves us with the highly counterintuitive result that "a congenitally severely retarded human being may not be unfortunate at all" (164), and he writes as if he was pushed to accept this problematic conclusion by his commitment to moral individualism, but if the best version of moral individualism is compatible with recognizing judgments that reference kinds, McMahan's eagerness to give up the natural and deep-seated tendency to include species as one relevant kind in our moral judgments comes to seem, in the end, unnecessarily revisionary and without argumentative support. For remember that McMahan claimed that the *Species Norm Account* was defeated by Superchimp style counterexamples, but at this point it should be clear that similar counterexamples apply to that portion of the *Intrinsic Potential Account* which recognizes comparative evaluations. When considering a synthesized version of the Intrinsic Potential Account (that he goes on to reject) on p.157, McMahan acknowledges that taking "person" as a relevant moral kind allows for counterexamples comparable to Superchimp to arise for such an account (i.e. if the norm for what counts as a typical life for a person shifted, judgments of misfortune would shift as well). As he says on pp.157-8, "If the range of psychological capacities within the class of persons were as wide as it is among chimpanzees in the case of Superchimp, the Intrinsic Potential Account, understood in this way, would have implications as implausible as those of the Species Norm Account." McMahan's argumentative strategy here is complex. At the point of this quotation he is considering a version of IPA in which comparative elements (referencing kinds) are allowed to dominate. He goes on to reject this view for one in which we understand the IPA as involving two distinct components (comparison to kind vs. comparison to the individual's capacities) which may diverge. Surprisingly, however, he does not consider the relevance of the fact that the kind-comparative component of his preferred formulation of IPA still seems to fall prey to the objection quoted. In the end, his final position seems committed to the conclusion that should persons radically improve in intelligence (as with the Superchimps) a person who was previously deemed normal would come to be seen as (at least in one relevant sense) deprived. As I mentioned, I don't find this result particularly problematic or counter-intuitive (whether we are talking about chimps, persons, human beings, or other comparison classes), but McMahan *ought* to find it *as* problematic as his refined Superchimp thought experiment. If, on the other hand, he ultimately finds such contextual judgments of deprivation acceptable in the case of the kind "person", I encourage him to reconsider the moral acceptability of also placing

some degree of importance on species norms when making judgments about deprivation.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Ironically, McMahan ends his defense of the dual-natured version of the Intrinsic Potential Account with a criticism of those who would focus on too *small* a comparative class for their judgments regarding fortune:

A person who aspires to the highest sort of life and identifies himself with those who have attained such a life may feel unfortunate if he never quite succeeds in attaining it himself; but if he thinks of himself as simply unfortunate—unfortunate in some absolute way—and thinks that comparisons between his life and the lives of the mass of humankind are simply irrelevant to understanding how fortunate or unfortunate he is, then he is suffering from a failure of imagination. (159)

McMahan has to say “mass of humankind” here because his account as it stands doesn’t permit a comparison with *all* of humankind – it excludes many congenitally intellectually disabled human beings. While I fully agree with McMahan’s point in this passage, it seems to me that his exclusion of some humans involves a similar failure of imagination, one that results in a moral philosophy that is more revisionary (and morally problematic) than it needs to be. This is unfortunate because, if I’m right, his own work has provided us with the resources for a position that manages to accommodate a key insight from “speciesist” moral philosophers regarding deprivation with McMahan’s thorough and convincing defense of the importance of the intuitions that lay at the source of moral individualism. This is far from a total reconciliation between McMahan and the Wittgensteinians, but perhaps it is a start.

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