ETRTHICS IN THE WAKE OF WITTGENSTEIN

Edited by
Benjamin De Mesel and Oskari Kuusela
This book brings together essays from leading scholars who, rather than taking a strictly exegetical approach, attempt to show how discussions in moral philosophy can benefit from Wittgenstein’s later philosophical work. The essays in this volume make the argument that Wittgenstein’s relevance for moral philosophy depends not only on his views about ethics, but also on the methods he introduces, on his views on the nature of philosophy and philosophical problems and on the insights into language developed in his philosophy. They also focus on the “Wittgensteinian tradition” in moral philosophy and its relation to more mainstream analytic moral philosophy, addressing how several prominent philosophers use these ideas and methods in their work. Ethics in the Wake of Wittgenstein seeks to answer the following question: can we apply Wittgenstein’s ways of dealing with problems in logic, philosophy of language, epistemology, philosophy of mind and philosophy of mathematics to moral philosophy as well? It will be of interest to Wittgenstein scholars and those working on current debates in moral philosophy, meta-ethics and normative ethics.

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Ethics in the Wake of Wittgenstein

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In this chapter, I wish to outline and defend a particular use, or development of, certain ideas in Wittgenstein—most prominently from his *Philosophical Investigations*—by, amongst others, Stanley Cavell, Cora Diamond, Raimond Gaita and Stephen Mulhall; specifically, one that bears on our moral relations with, on the one hand, our fellow human beings, and on the other, other animals. As far as our moral relations with other human beings is concerned, the general view here can been described as the “common humanity” view. Focusing just on that aspect of the view that relates to our moral relations with other human beings is, in a way I will indicate, apt to mislead right from the start. Nevertheless, the view has been expressed by one of its critics, Jeff McMahan, as follows:

> According to this view, which has been advanced by various philosophers writing in the tradition of Wittgenstein, our common humanity is more than just a special relation in the traditional sense. The necessity of recognising the moral claims imposed on us by other human beings is inherent in our grasp of certain fundamental moral concepts. The failure to understand the moral significance of our common humanity is thus more than a failure of imagination; it is a failure to understand the concept of a human being.

(McMahan 2005, 362)

Thus stated, the common humanity view is seen by many moral philosophers, and certainly by McMahan, as problematic. But the view is also, I will contend, widely misunderstood by many of those same philosophers. In order to see the nature of the misunderstanding here, I will consider the objections to it by McMahan since they have the merit of being both quite typical and very clearly stated.1

The perspective from which McMahan criticizes the way in which certain Wittgensteinians understand our fellowship with other human beings and our (different) fellowship with animals has been called by him, following James Rachels, “moral individualism”. The core of this idea is that in our treatment of individuals—and, by individuals,
McMahan and Rachels certainly do not mean just human beings—what matters morally, what justifies our treatment or renders it morally wrong, is simply the particular characteristics possessed by that individual. For example, characteristics such as whether it can suffer, has certain interests or is rational. So stated, the thesis has implications for our treatment of some animals. As Rachels puts the point and as McMahan concurs in citing him, “If we think it is wrong to treat a human being in a certain way, because the human being has certain characteristics, and a particular non-human animal also has those characteristics, then consistency requires that we also object to treating the non-human in that way”. Many would just see this as a humane and enlightened view about our treatment of animals. However, the thesis, again for the sake of consistency, has further implications that McMahan goes on to spell out; specifically,

that if we think it is permissible to treat an animal in a certain way because it lacks certain properties, it should be permissible, if other things are equal, to treat a human being in the same way if that human being also lacks those properties.

(McMahan 2005, 354–355)

Thus, for many, an unacceptable aspect of the view is that “other things being equal”, it should be permissible to treat severely mentally disabled human beings in the same way, including with the same level of respect, as we treat some (say equally cognitively advanced) animals. The caveat “other things being equal” is important here because McMahan envisages a particular kind of case where they may not be. So, for example, McMahan is prepared to accept that some special relations can generate agent-relative reasons for some people. An example of such relation is that of being a parent. So a parent may have an agent-relative reason to treat his or her disabled child in ways that are not required by agent-neutral moral reason. But even if there is no agent-neutral reason for us to care for this person’s disabled child, there may be such a reason to respect their reasons for doing so. But, of course, as McMahan also says, a person might have a special relation with a pet, in which case here, too, we have a similar reason to respect this relation. So, basically, I have the same kind of reason to respect a person’s disabled child as I have to respect another person’s pet.

So that is the view; it could also be called the “property view” in that if we are justified in treating a certain being in some way, then that justification must be grounded in certain characteristics or properties possessed by that being and not merely because it is say a human being rather than a dog. And it is here that McMahan takes issue with the above-mentioned Wittgensteinians, since they argue that our moral consideration including respect for other human beings is for them not
grounded in any properties possessed by the relevant individuals. Thus, as McMahan goes on to ask, how is it that such philosophers ground our moral regard here? And his answer is that such philosophers must be appealing to a different sort of property, a relational one. As he says, think specifically of Mulhall and Kittay:

Both Mulhall and Kittay are concerned to explain why radically cognitively impaired human beings matter more than animals with comparable psychological capacities. The considerations to which they appeal are essentially relational. Because the radically cognitively impaired share in our common life and are therefore our fellow creatures, they make a claim on us.

(McMahan 2005, 363)

In short, McMahan is saying that if the justification for the different treatment isn’t based on the properties of the particular human beings and animals respectively, then it must be justified by relational properties; relations that in the case of cognitively impaired human beings render them our fellows in ways that animals are not. And McMahan’s reply then is that “the forms of life [such philosophers] describe do not include the radically cognitively impaired. Those human beings do not, and cannot, share our language, culture, ways of knowing, and so on, any more than animals can” (McMahan 2005, 363).

But McMahan’s whole argument outlined previously simply misunderstands the view being presented by the Wittgensteinians that are his target; which is that our different treatment of animals and human beings here is not really justified in terms of any properties, either possessed by the human being/animal or relational. Indeed, this way of looking at things, from the perspective of the Wittgensteinian view at issue, gets matters the wrong way around: it is not as if we first recognize some property (relational or otherwise) and take that as a reason for treating all humans differently to all animals. Rather, it is that the way in which we respond prior to any such justification, on the one hand, to human beings, and on the other, to animals, helps determine in the first place our conception of what it is to be a human being and what it is to be an animal.

So what in detail is the view here, and how does it relate to and draw on Wittgenstein’s philosophy? One discussion in the Philosophical Investigations that is particularly relevant here is Part I §§243–315, where Wittgenstein advances what has been called the Private Language Argument. What Wittgenstein says there, paradoxically, is that while pain “is not a something [it is] not a nothing either”. But, further, that this paradox disappears [. . .] if we make a radical break with the idea that language always functions in one way, always serves the same purpose:
to convey thoughts—which may be about houses, pains, good and evil, or anything you please.

(PI § 304)

Wittgenstein’s point in these sections of Part I of *Investigations* is to show how we mistake the grammar of mental concepts such as pain. That mistaken grammar depends upon thinking of mental phenomena in terms of certain pictures; pictures that are useful enough in certain ways or contexts in which we might talk about pain but misleading and paradoxical if extended beyond this to cover all ways, all contexts.\(^4\)

Time and again Wittgenstein’s interlocutor in these passages returns to the idea that if there is nothing behind the expression of pain, then he is really a behaviourist in disguise: surely, if you do not believe there is something else, something behind the expression of pain, then you must be a behaviourist. And it is at this point the remark I have quoted from §304 is further amplified, at §310 where Wittgenstein turns to another mental content, that of belief:

I tell someone I am in pain. His attitude to me will then be one of belief; disbelief, suspicion; and so on.

Let us assume he says: “It is not so bad.”—Doesn’t that prove that he believes in something behind the outward expression of pain?—His attitude is a proof of his attitude. Imagine not merely the words “I am in pain” but also the answer “It’s not so bad” replaced by instinctive noises and gestures.

Wittgenstein’s point, I take it here, is to show us another way that language functions, one that enables a distinction between pain and pain behaviour but one in which language does not convey a thought about a thing, a thing we will call the pain. On this account, belief itself is an attitude, a kind of response, to a person; a belief in another’s pain is an expressive response to their expression of pain. Importantly, as Wittgenstein also says, our responses to another in such cases can be immediate, unthinking, pre-reflective; we are not here conveying or expressing some thought about some inner thing, something behind their expression of pain. As Wittgenstein says in a similar vein in *Zettel*:

It is a help to remember that it is a primitive reaction to tend, to treat, the part that hurts when someone else is in pain; and not merely when oneself is—and so to pay attention to other people’s pain-behaviour

[. . .]

But what is the word “primitive” meant to say here? Presumably that this sort of behaviour is *pre-linguistic*: that a language-game is
based on it, that it is a prototype of a way of thinking and not the result of thought.

[. . .]

My relation to the appearances here is part of my concept.

(Z §540–43)

The point of the last sentence of §310 and the above quote from Zettel is then to remind us of how the meaning of our verbal expression of pain and our belief, disbelief and so on in another’s pain is connected to, and dependent upon, certain instinctive noises and gestures, noises and gestures which can in certain cases replace those verbal expressions. As Peter Winch—another Wittgensteinian—puts it:

His [Wittgenstein’s] point, I take it, is that if we want to be clear what the belief (for instance) that someone is in pain comes to, we should not allow ourselves to be hypnotized by its verbal expression (“He is in pain”), but should look at the whole range of behaviour, demeanour, facial expression, etc. in which such verbal expressions are embedded, and with which they are continuous, which give the words their particular sense and by some of which indeed the words can be replaced. The purpose of such an enquiry is not to show that what we are dealing with here is not “really” a case of belief at all, but something else. That would quite misleadingly imply that we have a secure paradigm of what it is to believe something, which does not draw its sustenance from the expressive behaviour in which it is embedded.

(Winch 1987, 142)

So this is Wittgenstein’s solution to the paradox noted earlier and to the claim that he is really a behaviourist, and it is terms of such an account of our relations both with other human beings and animals that we need to understand the Wittgensteinian arguments that are McMahan’s target. When McMahan says that cognitively impaired human beings do not share a specific form of common life with us, he simply appeals again to considerations that specifically relate to the cognitive capacities of ordinary human beings; “language, culture and ways of knowing”. But the Wittgensteinian point is that it does not follow that because severely cognitively impaired human beings do not share this with us that they do not share in what Raimond Gaita has called our “common humanity”. They share this in virtue of the whole range of behaviour—much of which is, like the instinctive noises and gestures Wittgenstein alludes to, pre-reflective—that goes to constitute our relations with other human beings as distinct from that with other animals. To give some examples of this fellowship: we clothe them but not our pets, seat them at the dinner table next to us and not place a bowl on the floor for them, they
live in the house with us, not in a kind of kennel in the yard. McMahan would have to say such things were a kind of gesture, a kind of play-acting in which our ordinary shared human activities with cognitively impaired human beings require scare quotes; we do not dine together with these human beings, we only “dine together” with them, we do not talk to them, we only “talk” to them, we are not sorry for they terrible plight but only “sorry” for it—more on this later. Our fellowship with some of the most unfortunate human beings, and I take it contra McMahan that they are unfortunate, may consist in nothing more than these specific ways that we respond to them as opposed to animals, ways that are not in McMahan’s terms justified, but not for all that without sense or meaning.

But just as McMahan mistakes the intended sense of our common life with (all) human beings, he mistakes, and in the same way, the different kind of common life we share with other animals. For here, too, in order to understand the kind of fellowship that is at issue, we need to consider the whole range of our behaviour in response to animals. Here is one example. There was an injured bird outside the window next to my desk where I am now typing. How to describe my fellowship with this creature? What I want, indeed think I need, to describe is how I was riveted for a moment on the struggle of the bird to get up on a wall. The bird caught my eye, captured my attention and for a moment I was with that bird and its struggle, willing it to succeed. But what really is going on in describing this experience so? Well, nothing in what I say here about my response to this bird assumes that it was justified by some view, some thought of mine, about the cognitive capacities of birds; rather, my words, like my response, express my engagement with other creaturely life, an aspect of my fellowship with creatures. But in what I say, there is the hope, even expectation, that you can both comprehend this engagement and be engaged in the same way; recognize, that is, your own fellowship with such creatures. But if you do share this sense of fellowship, that is not because some thought about the cognitive capacities of such creatures provides you with a reason to accept such fellowship. The meaning of this fellowship is as before, when I suggested I can give you no reason to do with the capacities of human beings for the different fellowship expressed in my relations with them, when I treat even a cognitively impaired human being differently from a loved and intelligent family dog. Our responses, on the one hand, to other human beings and, on the other, our differing responses to animals, I am suggesting, ground respectively our sense of what human fellowship consists in and what it is to share a creaturely life with other animals. But that these different senses of fellowship are not based (in the sense indicated earlier) on reasons does not, I contend, make them unreasonable.

But, of course, for McMahan and probably most other contemporary moral philosophers, they are clearly unreasonable. So consider
McMahan’s response to Cora Diamond’s discussion of our concept of human life and our differing and varied concepts of other animal life. I say varied concepts of other animal life to mark the difference between, say, farm animals and pets, a difference that Diamond highlights. Diamond has been discussing the fact that we do not eat our own dead, and adds that we do not eat our pets either. But,

it is not morally wrong to eat our pets; people who ate their pets would not have pets in the same sense of that term. . . . A pet is not something to eat, it is given a name, is let into our houses and may be spoken to in ways in which we do not normally speak to cows or squirrels. . . . Treating pets in these ways is not at all a matter of recognizing some interest which pets have in being so treated. . . . Similarly, it is not out of respect for the interests of beings of the class to which we belong that we give names to each other, or that we treat human sexuality or birth or death as we do, marking them. . . . These are all things that go to determine what sort of concept “human being” is. Similarly, with having duties to human beings. This is not a consequence of what human beings are, it is not justified by what human beings are: it is itself one of the things which go to build our notion of human beings. And so too. . . . the idea of the difference between human beings and animals. We learn what a human being is in. . . . sitting at a table where we eat them.

(Diamond 1995, 324)

McMahan’s objection is then to say that it must follow from what Diamond says that our different concepts of human and animal life “are not something we can argue about”, that there can be no room for disagreement here. To which he adds that the fact

we can coherently discuss the possibility of socially approved forms of anthropophagy, seems to demonstrate that Diamond’s moral commitments are not in fact embedded in our concepts. But even if they were, [. . .] that alone could not bind us to an acceptance of those views. We could form new concepts that would allow us to articulate different and more reasonable views.

(McMahan 2005, 376)

The first thing to say here is that it does not follow from what Diamond says, or the Wittgensteinian view I am outlining, that there can be no revision of our concepts. It is part of our understanding of what it is to be a pet that we do not eat them. But we could in time form a different concept, or we could do away with the concept, with pets, altogether. Sometimes such conceptual revision is a good thing; it is surely something to celebrate that if someone said today that a particular person had “risen above his
station” they would be met (by young people at least) with a blank stare. What Diamond and other Wittgensteinians would urge though is that we must consider the way our understanding of particular concepts informs and is informed by many others of our concepts, the way their meanings are interdependent. So consider an example taken from McMahan, where he puzzles why the congenitally radically cognitively impaired human beings should be thought of as having suffered a great misfortune: “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?” Of course, the idea that such a plight is a grave misfortune for a human being but not for, say, a dog, is internally connected to the fact that we would naturally pity a human being in such a state—that it goes without saying that such a human being is an object of pity, that they have suffered a harm—whereas if someone pitied a dog with the same mental capacity that by itself would make no sense for us. All right then, one might now say, perhaps we should do away with the pity in this case, perhaps that is what McMahan would call an unreasonable view. But, to go on, so many other and related of our reactions will seem unreasonable in just this kind of way, including all the other natural reactions to such individuals that I noted earlier and that are distinct from our treatment of animals with the same mental capacity. The question then is what kind of moral world-view are we left with after such a revision and whether that is something one might (must?) reasonably endorse.

It is a large question, and one beyond the scope of this chapter, to get clear about what “a more reasonable view” ultimately amounts to in ethics. One very common view, and one I think that McMahan would be happy to think his moral individualism is an expression of, is that it follows from reason alone that ethics must indicate moral judgements that are universalizable and impartial. While I have in various places argued against this supposed truism, I can’t repeat those arguments here. What I would say, however, is that what, from the point of view of the Wittgensteinian position I am articulating, counts as reasonable as an ethical view is not to be determined by assessing any particular moral idea or claim in isolation, but to be determined by considering the place that idea or claim has in the wider interlacing network of moral claims and concepts that go to make a particular and overall moral world-view, and then by assessing the merit or attractiveness of that overall world-view. So, to return to the example from McMahan, that would involve considering, indeed seriously assessing, the kind of moral world we would have were we to do away with pity in the kinds of contexts that are for McMahan and many other moral philosophers so problematic, the kind of world where one might quite reasonably say to the parent of a radically cognitively impaired child—as it were without blushing—“I will of course show your child the respect owed to ordinary human beings, but as a courtesy to you”.

I am sure that many moral philosophers may find my last remark and perhaps my earlier remarks (e.g., kennels for the severely mentally disabled) somehow, to use a legal analogy, out of order. My reply is that my point here is not just to focus on or draw attention to what a particular moral world-view might commit one to, but, just as importantly, what it *entitles* one to. Such offence, to explain that last remark, seems of a kind to that which many consequentialist philosophers have to Elizabeth Anscombe’s remark that consequentialism is a shallow philosophy (Anscombe 1981 [1958]). That remark, they too must mean, is out of order. But how so, according to what standard? It seems to me they should be more circumspect. Anscombe’s point was that in morality, there will always be borderline cases, but that here the consequentialist “has no footing on which to say ‘This would be permissible, this not’; because by his own hypothesis, it is the consequences that are to decide” (Anscombe 1981, 36). But even worse, they don’t for the same reason have any “law or standard according to which this is a borderline case. [So] Where then does he get the standard from? In practice the answer invariably is: from the standards current in his society or his circle” (Anscombe 1981, 36). As if to say: around here, we do not claim that another philosopher’s moral theory is shallow. But if one wants to say Anscombe is being unreasonable, she is owed the standard that will make that so, and then what the ultimate grounds of that standard are supposed to be. Similarly then, if our natural pre-reflective reactions really are to be subject to the kind of radical revision that McMahan and others would require, then it is an important question whether they in their turn have the footing on which to say my remarks are out of order. Where does that standard come from?

The Wittgensteinian point, if I may call it that, is to notice how so much of our relations, including communications with, other human beings and animals goes on without our thinking about it; is a matter of what Wittgenstein regards as our shared form of life—including the ways we immediately bristle with offence at others. But just because so much of this pre-reflective responsiveness goes unnoticed, so, too, do we fail to consider the ways in which all this informs our conceptions of human and other animal life, and how very different these conceptions would be in the absence of such responsiveness. In order to think about the significance of such primitive reactions to our conception of human and animal life, it is a help to imagine that such responsiveness, such expressive behaviour as being entirely absent. So consider the following passage, again from *Zettel*:

Imagine that the people of a tribe were brought up from early youth to give no expression of feeling of any kind. They find it childish, something to be got rid of. . . . “Pain” is not spoken of. . . . If anyone complains he is ridiculed or punished.

[. . .]
... here life would run on differently.—What interests us would not interest them.

[...]

“These men would have nothing human about them.” Why?—we could not possibly make ourselves understood to them. ... We could not find our feet with them.

I really want to say that scruples in thinking begin with (have their roots in) instinct. Or again: a language-game does not have its origin in consideration. Consideration is part of a language-game.

(Z §§383–391)

I cannot speak for all the Wittgensteinians that are McMahan’s targets, but the penultimate sentence “that scruples in thinking begin with (have their roots in) instinct”, for me, at least, lies at the heart of the Wittgensteinian view I am attempting to outline. On such a view, the search for some objective in the sense of independent (of such primitive responsiveness) ground for ethics must be misguided. As Wittgenstein puts it in his Lecture on Ethics, “No state of affairs has in itself... the coercive power of an absolute judge” (LE, 112). What is, as far as our ethical ideas or claims are concerned, more reasonable from within one conceptual framework will seem less so in another. Diamond and the other Wittgensteinians whom McMahan discusses are, I think, simply trying to trace the complex web of connections between the vast range of our moral and morally inflected concepts. That provides a justification of sorts of our moral ideas or concepts, but not from some perspective outside of our understanding of human life, what in it gives meaning, what, including what ways of acting, constitute for us a good human life.

The moral individualism that McMahan defends, and from the perspective of which the views of Diamond and others seem unreasonable, is itself a product of a particular way of thinking about the nature of morality and of what has moral significance. It makes its own assumptions, as I have briefly alluded to, about the nature of moral thought and they are not beyond scrutiny; I cannot see that such a view has any claim to have reason on its side. But further, if we really are to subject our natural and pre-reflective ways of acting towards human beings and (differently) towards animals to the kind of revision envisaged by McMahan, then my concern is that the moral world-view this would ultimately leave us with is in danger of being so unrecognizable, so alien and alienating, that, echoing Wittgenstein, I could not make myself, including my objections, understood to anyone who held it. But to be clear, I am not saying, again, that the concepts we have are impervious to revision for the better. But rather to say that what we are assessing here is not individual concepts in isolation but as they contribute to particular ways of thinking about the moral, that is, particular moral visions, and then the relative merit of alternative moral visions; there is,
I am suggesting, no neutral ground from which to assess those concepts independent of the particular moral visions they help to constitute.

That last idea stated above is so far removed from what McMahan (I think, along with many other philosophers) is able to think about or entertain that he does not notice it even as it is implicit in the work of someone he himself quotes. So in a footnote, McMahan refers to J. M. Coetzee’s novel *Disgrace*. McMahan sees this novel as suggesting we can dishonour an animal corpse as well as a human one because of the animal’s intrinsic nature. But McMahan fails to see Coetzee’s point. In the story, Coetzee’s protagonist David Lurie works for an animal refuge. Unfortunately, many of the dogs they receive need to be put down. So every Monday, the dead dogs are taken in plastic bags to a furnace at the local hospital, with David loading the dogs on to the furnace trolley one by one. Why does David find it necessary to do this job himself? The answer is given when he describes what happens when leading into the furnace, crew do this job instead. As Lurie tells us, stiffened with rigour mortis, the dog’s legs sometimes get caught in the bars of the trolley so that the blackened corpse returns still lodged in the bars. Lurie disposes of the dogs himself then because “[a]fter a while the workmen began to beat the bags with the backs of their shovels before loading them, to break the rigid limbs” (Coetzee 2000,144–145). What is puzzling, of course, is the idea of a moral demand here at all, a demand that the corpses of dead dogs not be treated like this. It is a point that occurs to Lurie himself:

> Why had he taken on this job? To lighten the burden on Bev Shaw? For that it would be enough to drop of the bags at the dump and drive away. For the sake of the dogs? But the dogs are dead; and what do dogs know of honour and dishonour anyway?

> For himself, then. For his idea of the world, a world in which men do not use shovels to beat corpses into more convenient shape for processing.

*(Coetzee 2000, 145–146)*

That last sentence is crucial. Coetzee knows both that what is at stake here is a particular idea of vision of the world, and that others might resist this, that it has no ultimate ground. Now, of course, McMahan might argue that respect for animal corpses can, in fact (perhaps as a sort of symbolic act), be grounded in the intrinsic properties they had when alive. However, the properties of dogs do not, I think, play that role in constituting the moral vision that Coetzee is alluding to. It is not as if Lurie is thinking of the properties of dogs, their level of sentience or whatever, and then suggesting that that provides a reason for his actions. Rather, the (Wittgensteinian) point is that our sense of the moral significance of animal life (including sentience) is itself founded on a certain kind of responsiveness to animals, even dead ones. Through Lurie’s actions at the
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furnace, then, Coetzee is inviting us to see a certain kind of responsiveness to animals (here, their corpses) as appropriate both to them and for us, a responsiveness that helps constitute a way of understanding the moral relations between them and us. What he presents, again thinking of my example of the wounded bird, is not so much an argument as an invitation to share, through such responsiveness, a particular moral world-view. One then has a choice: whether to accept this moral vision of the world or reject it, a choice that will depend upon what such a vision has, as it were internally, to recommend it. In deciding whether to treat severely mentally disabled children like animals with similar cognitive ability, we face a similar kind of choice, a choice between worlds. There is, admittedly, nothing in the objective sense that McMahan seems to require, to vouchsafe one’s choice against treating such human beings perhaps like two-legged pets. But that is not to say there is nothing at all, nothing of meaning or sense, which we might say here.8

Notes

1. Similar objections have been raised by, amongst others, the utilitarian Peter Singer (2010).
3. McMahan links Eva Kittay together with the other Wittgensteinians I have noted. However, while Kittay is largely in sympathy with Wittgensteinians such as Diamond with respect to their argument for the moral status of the severely cognitively impaired, in fact, she quotes Diamond approvingly, Kittay herself and her argument here are not particularly Wittgensteinian. See Kittay (2005). I thank Ylva Gustafson for bringing this point to my attention.
4. So, for example, at PI §293, we have Wittgenstein’s famous example of the beetle in the box, which is to show that “if we construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of ‘object and designation’ the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant”. But, of course, we can understand why one would want to say that one is in a unique position to report on one’s pain, the supposed beetle in one’s private box; the picture captures something of our talk about pain; for example, it is not as if this is like reporting on a place that another might visit themselves, it captures that distinction. But then the supposed grammar, the picture, misleads, as the box might be empty. Which leads Wittgenstein’s interlocutor to saying that “there must be something. . . . accompanying my cry of pain” and on account of which they cry out. Which suggests the different picture at §297 of water boiling in a pot and steam coming out of it. But, as Wittgenstein goes on to say here, “what if someone insisted in saying that there must be something boiling in the picture of the pot?” That is to say, what is a person’s insistence supposed to add to this picture, which seems complete of itself? It is complete in this sense: on this picture, the relation between the inner thing, the pain, and my crying out is pictured as a causal one, the pain causing my cry. But then, there is no place for my report of my plain as when I insist, when I try to communicate to you, that there is something accompanying my cry. What on this picture is my instance that there is something accompanying my cry of pain supposed to add to my cry? Here, what the interlocutor wants to tell you, where the picture now is one of cause and effect, again idles. So we have two pictures for our construal
of the grammar of the concept of sensation, each one captures something of
our talk about sensations but the pictures themselves conflict; what pain is
represented as being on one picture cannot be squared with what it is repre-
sented as being on the other. There is in neither case a place as Wittgenstein
notes at §300 for a picture of the pain.
5. There is perhaps a certain tension for the argument I present here in my talk-
ing in terms of ordinary human beings, us, and severely cognitively impaired
human beings, them, as this maybe suggests there are different categories of
the human here which may then invite the idea of different moral status across
those categories. That is, as this chapter makes clear, a conclusion I would
reject. In responding to McMahan, however, and I think it is important that I
do respond to him as I have, it is inevitable that to some extent I am forced to
talk in his terms, or his language. I thank Salla Salskov for reminding me of the
tension, and danger, here.
7. For an extended interrogation of the assumptions that lie behind the kind of
moral individualism that McMahan defends, and that bears some similarity
to my discussion here, see Alice Crary’s Inside Ethics: The Demands of Moral
Thought (2016).
8. I would like to thank the staff and students of the Department of Philosophy
at Åbo Akademi for comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

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