

In my thesis, I accept the premise that animals possess inherent value and as a result, are deserving of certain protections. I argue that a rights-based approach is required to sufficiently ensure such protections, since the beneficence of the human spirit has consistently fallen short in the modern era. To this end, I explore the dominant ethical theories of contemporary philosophy, to see if they are conceptually capable of accommodating a rights based system of protections to ensure animal welfare in our society. The theories I explore are Contractarianism, Utilitarianism, Kantian Ethics, and Martha Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach. I conclude that in order for an ethical theory to successfully house a robust system of animal rights, the theory must be open to accommodating various forms of consciousness that do not necessarily conform to the human standards of cognition. Ultimately, I argue that Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach is the only theory that meets the criterion required to successfully accommodate animal rights.