

Animal-Ethics Deep-Dive

Purpose. Layer 11 of the main paper names the ethical schools but cannot spell them out. This text does so: it presents the five-to-six major theory families each in turn — core idea, key work, what it grounds, where its internal limits lie — treats the main *counter*-positions fairly, and finally shows why the convergence of such differently grounded theories is the real argument. The presentation of positions is descriptive: it gives the best case proponents make, together with the strongest objections.

Preliminary — why ethics comes *after* the empirics. No norms follow from facts (the naturalistic fallacy). The scientific layers (biochemistry, ecology, digestion) do not say what one *ought* to do — but they frame the question: humans are omnivores with a choice (0090-B4 §F), plant-based eating is nutritionally viable (0090-B2 §5), industrial animal production is ecologically and medically burdensome (0090-B2, B3). *Only where alternatives are genuinely available* does the ethical question become sharp. That condition is the hinge — and at the same time the source of the firm subsistence caveat (§9).

1. Utilitarianism — Peter Singer

Core idea. What matters morally is whoever can suffer and experience wellbeing (sentience). Equal interests deserve equal consideration — regardless of species. Preferring one's own kind without a relevant reason is "speciesism", structurally analogous to racism and sexism. Industrial husbandry produces enormous suffering for trivial benefits (palate pleasure); the suffering balance is clear.

Key work. Singer, *Animal Liberation* (1975; updated as *Animal Liberation Now*, 2023).

What it grounds. A strong, scalable duty to avoid suffering; a direct argument against factory farming.

Limits (honestly). Utilitarianism grounds no *inviolable* rights: if the balance came out right, "painless" use would in principle be justifiable (the notorious "replaceability argument" for sentient but non-self-aware beings). Aggregation can sacrifice individuals to the total. Singer himself draws fine, contested lines here (the concept of personhood).

2. Deontological rights — Tom Regan

Core idea. Animals that are a "subject-of-a-life" (perception, memory, preferences, a good of their own) have *inherent value* and are not mere means to others' ends. From this value follow rights that cannot be traded off against utility.

Key work. Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (1983).

What it grounds. A principled barrier: use as a mere resource is forbidden, not just "to be minimised". This strikes industrial animal production at the core, not only in its excess.

Limits. The line-drawing — which animals are "subjects-of-a-life"? — is fuzzy (vertebrates yes, insects?). Conflict cases ("lifeboat") force trade-offs the absolute rights claim was meant to exclude.

3. Kantian grounding — Christine Korsgaard

Core idea. Korsgaard reconstructs Kant *against* Kant: beings that have a good of their own (for whom things can be good or bad *for them*) are ends in themselves. Since animals have such a

good, we owe it to them not to treat them as mere means — even though they are not moral agents.

Key work. Korsgaard, *Fellow Creatures: Our Obligations to the Other Animals* (Oxford University Press 2018, ISBN 9780198753858).

What it grounds. The most fully developed Kantian theory of duties to animals to date — important because it breaks open the classical Kantian exclusion of animals (for lack of reason) from within.

Limits. How far does “having a good of one’s own” reach? The theory needs a sentience threshold it does not itself supply.

4. Capabilities approach — Martha Nussbaum

Core idea. Justice means enabling each living being to develop the capabilities characteristic of its form of life (movement, social behaviour, play, freedom from pain, species-typical flourishing). Animals are wronged when their flourishing is systematically blocked — as in intensive confinement.

Key works. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice* (2006); *Justice for Animals: Our Collective Responsibility* (Simon & Schuster 2023, ISBN 9781982102517).

What it grounds. A positive standard of flourishing (not just suffering-avoidance) and a language of justice rather than mere compassion.

Limits. “Species-typical flourishing” as a norm is delicate (suspicion of naturalism); and the **predation problem** — should humans reduce suffering in nature? — embarrasses the approach.

5. Political-relational approach — Donaldson & Kymlicka

Core idea. The dispute over “moral status” is shifted to *political relationships*. Domesticated animals are, through their history, part of our community — owed a kind of **citizenship** (inclusion of their interests in institutions). Wild animals have **sovereignty** over their territories; “liminal” animals (pigeons, rats) a **denizen** status.

Key work. Donaldson & Kymlicka, *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights* (Oxford University Press 2011, ISBN 9780199599660).

What it grounds. It translates abstract rights into concrete political duties and institutions — connectable to the bundle’s political-economy layer.

Limits. Transferring political categories (citizenship, sovereignty) to animals is demanding and partly metaphorical; practical implementation is contested.

6. Feminist / care-ethics line — Carol Adams (and Lori Gruen)

Core idea. Instead of rationalist principles, relationship, embodiment and context are central (care ethics). Adams’s key term: the “**absent referent**” — the living animal disappears behind the product “meat”; the same conceptual veiling, she argues, links the exploitation of animals and the objectification of women.

Key work. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990); complementarily Gruen, *Entangled Empathy* (2015).

What it grounds. An ideology-critical and affect-theoretical bridge to Layers 9 (affect/taboo) and 12 (marxism); it explains *why* the violence stays invisible.

Limits. The animal-woman link is analytically strong but contested as an analogy; care ethics offers less sharp decision rules in conflict cases.

7. The convergence argument — the real point

Six theory families with *irreconcilable* foundations — consequentialist (Singer), rights-deontological (Regan), Kantian (Korsgaard), Aristotelian-capabilities (Nussbaum), political (Donaldson/Kymlicka), feminist (Adams) — run toward the same practical conclusion: **industrial animal exploitation is unjustifiable where plant-based alternatives are available.**

This is methodologically the ethical counterpart to scientific consilience (0090-B2): when mutually independent groundings hit the same point, the conclusion is more robust than any single theory. One can reject a school without toppling the result. The convergence is not coincidence but an indicator: it typically appears where the underlying matter (avoidable, mass suffering for trivial ends) is morally clear.

8. The hard counter-positions — fairly treated

Whoever takes the convergence argument seriously must know the strongest objections.

8.1 Carl Cohen (rights presuppose moral capacity). Cohen argues rights can belong only to beings who can make and recognise moral claims — hence not animals. The other side's reply: the **argument from marginal cases** (infants, the severely demented also make no claims yet have rights) — to which Cohen answers with “species normality”. A genuine, unresolved debate.

8.2 Roger Scruton (conservative-relational). Animal welfare yes, animal rights no: moral duties arise from concrete relationships and “piety”, not abstract rights; traditional husbandry is compatible with respect. Weakness in context: this at most fits peasant, not industrial, husbandry.

8.3 R. G. Frey / preference scepticism. Doubt that animals have interests in the morally load-bearing sense. Increasingly under pressure from sentience and cognition research (fish pain, cf. 0090-B-EN/Layer 13).

8.4 Contractualism (Scanlon). Morality as agreement among rational agents excludes animals. Reply (Rowlands): an impartial contract behind a “veil of ignorance” would include sentience.

8.5 The predation problem. If animal suffering counts, one would also have to combat suffering in nature (predators) — a reductio? Most positions distinguish between *causing* and *not-preventing*, and between human responsibility for self-made systems (CAFOs) and wild nature.

8.6 The structural objection (link to Layer 12). Individual consumption morality can *distract* from political responsibility (Wadiwel, Nibert): not the individual eater but the industrial structure is the primary addressee. This does not weaken the ethical argument but shifts its *address* from the purchase decision to collective change.

9. What ethics can do — and what it cannot

Ethics cannot decide empirical questions (the science layers do that) and supplies no algorithm for every case. It can show that a practice is unjustifiable under *several* independent standards — and that is exactly what the convergence argument achieves for *industrial* animal production in societies with alternatives.

The inward ethical limit — the caveat is itself a moral requirement. Subsistence pastoralism, indigenous food sovereignty and poverty contexts are not mere “exceptions” granted generously: food sovereignty and cultural self-determination are *independent* claims of justice. An animal ethics that overrides them becomes itself unjust (colonial). The critique therefore targets *industrial* animal exploitation in societies with freedom of choice — and precisely *not* the Maasai, Inuit, or smallholder mixed farming.

10. Synthesis

First: six methodologically independent ethical schools converge on the unjustifiability of industrial animal exploitation where alternatives exist — a robust result not hanging on any single theory.

Second: the strongest counter-positions (Cohen, Scruton, contractualism, predation) are real and not waved away; but they mostly strike the *abstract rights grounding* or *subsistence husbandry*, not the core finding about *industrial* production.

Third — the caveat is firm and ethically grounded: freedom of choice (shown biologically in 0090-B4) is the condition of the ethical question; where it is absent (subsistence, indigeneity, poverty), universalisation does not apply, and imposing it would itself be a wrong. The structural objection, finally, shifts the address from individual purchase-guilt to collective political responsibility — at which point the ethical strand passes into the political-economy layer (12).

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As of: 2026-06-16 · Deep-dive on Layer 11; Nussbaum 2023 and Korsgaard 2018 web-verified, remaining works established primary literature.