**Assignment 1: Critical Response**

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**Reading:** All Animals are Equal by *Peter Singer*

**Word Count:** 585

In Peter Singer's essay, "All Animals are Equal", he argues that equality should not be confined to identical treatment, but rather equal moral consideration. Singer extends this concept to include animals, arguing that if humans deserve equal moral consideration due to their sentience, animals should similarly receive such consideration. In doing so, Singer challenges the notion of speciesism as a valid determinant of equality, suggesting that the differences between humans and animals should be viewed as a continuum rather than a rigid categorical divide.

However, while Singer calls for increased ethical consideration for animals, his conclusion that animals should be regarded as equal to humans presents significant challenges. This critique proposes that equality itself should be viewed as a spectrum, with degrees of equality determined by several factors, including sentience, cognitive ability, and emotional connection.

Singer's arguments appear to contradict itself when he argues that equality should not be treated as an "assertion of fact" while simultaneously advocating for equal consideration between humans and animals based on sentience. This approach fails to acknowledge differences in cognitive abilities among different animal species, over simplifying the sentiency argument into a categorical distinction - either an entity is sentient or not. Moreover, drawing parallels between speciesism to racism and sexism overlooks essential distinctions between these forms of discrimination. It also results in the exclusion of non-sentient entities such as plants from moral consideration.

Nevertheless, Singer's assertion that equality should not be arbitrarily determined remains valid when equality is viewed as a spectrum defined by sentience, cognitive ability, and emotional connection. For example, humans often perceive dogs as more equal to humans than fish due to perceived cognitive similarities. Dogs can adapt their behavior to coexist with humans, and some can even understand human needs. Therefore, dogs' ability to emotionally connect with humans makes humans perceive them as more equal than fish. While it is generally accepted that consuming fish is moral, consuming dog meat is not. In addition, to account for inequality towards plants, it can be argued that, since they possess arguably limited sentience and cognitive ability, plants do not deserve equal consideration. This approach aligns with Singer's intention to extend equal consideration to all sentient beings while justifying differences in the way we treat different species.

This perspective inevitably raises the issue if humans with severe cognitive impairments should be considered equal to humans due to their reduced cognitive ability and potentially emotional ability. However, when we consider that they are sentient and can often still emotionally interact with other humans, we can justify extending equal consideration to these individuals.

Nonetheless, it is crucial to consider the context and purpose of equality when determining which entities should be considered equal. To avoid reaching absurd conclusions where all organisms are granted equal moral status, from plants to humans, it is important to establish parameters for equal consideration based on the degree of similarity in cognitive and emotional ability. This approach allows us to define the circumstances in which certain groups or entities should be regarded as equals, thus preserving the essence of Singer's argument.

In conclusion, while Peter Singer's call for equal consideration of animals is compelling, his approach encounters difficulties when advocating for the complete equality of all animals and humans. By adopting a spectrum-based approach that considers sentience, cognitive ability, and emotional ability, we can achieve a more balanced and nuanced understanding of equality. This approach recognizes the complexities of moral consideration and allows us to make more informed ethical judgments when considering human-animal relationships.