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ARTICLES

Animal Abolitionism and 'Racism without Racists'

Luis Cordeiro-Rodrigues[1]

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Abstract Abolitionism is an animal rights' philosophy and social movement which has recently begun to grow. It has been largely contested but the criticisms directed at it have usually been articulated outside academia. In this article, I wish to contend that one of the criticisms directed at abolitionism—that it contains racist implications—is correct. I do this by defending the idea that abolitionism engages in what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva classifies as 'racism without racists'—an unintentional and subtle form of racism. I present three ways in which abolitionism may be considered racist and then address some possible objections to my view.

Keywords Racism without racists · Animal abolitionism · Disempowerment · Animal ethics · Racialised communities

Introduction

The way individuals relate to animals has, throughout history, been one way to categorise communities into hierarchies that reinforce dominant cultural norms and further perpetuate discrimination and prejudice towards racialised groups.[1] For example, in Ancient Greece, Ancient Egyptians were sometimes considered inferior because of the way they related to animals—which animals they ate, how they ate them, among other kinds of relationships (Isaac 2006). Many philosophers have also contended that animal cruelty laws are unevenly applied to racialised communities.

[1] The term 'racialised groups' refers to those groups that are ascribed an ethnic or racial identity. In the literature, the term refers to groups which are somehow disadvantaged in relation to the dominant group and, thereby, racialised refers to blacks, Latinos, Arabs, etc., but not to the white dominant culture. Thus, when I use the concept of 'racialised' it is a short for 'disadvantaged racialized'.

✉ Luis Cordeiro-Rodrigues
Lccmr1984@gmail.com

[1] Department of Philosophy (Zhuhai), Sun Yat-sen University, Zhuhai, China

Indeed, many scholars, such as Deckha (2013), Kim (2015) and Kymlicka and Donaldson (2014) have highlighted how laws that regulate animal use tend to perpetuate prejudicial treatment. By contrast, very little has been written on how the implications of philosophical doctrines themselves may negatively impact racialised communities, that is, through the reinforcement and perpetuation of bias, and the imposition of unfair burdens and discrimination.[2]

In this article, my objective is precisely to address this deficiency in the literature and examine the negative implications of a particular philosophical view of animals, abolitionism, for racialised groups. My argument is that the abolitionist approach, as it is currently set out, engages in a racist logic that does not properly consider the negative impact that racialised groups would suffer, as a result of the wholesale application of abolitionist theory.

The article is constructed as follows. In the first section, I summarise the key features of abolitionist doctrine. In the section following, I explain the concept of racism without racists. In the third section, I argue that abolitionism can be conceptualized as a form of racism without racists. The fourth section addresses the objection that my characterisation of abolitionism as racist is mistaken. The final section addresses the objection to analysing abolitionism as a non-ideal theory, when it should rather be understood as an ideal theory.

Three important comments ought to be made. Firstly, there are other defences of veganism besides abolitionism which may not animate a racist dynamic. To understand if these defences indeed do contain such dynamics, they need to be addressed by an independent article and analysis. Secondly, even though there are other forms of discrimination that may be encountered in abolitionism, such as sexism and ableism, it is outside the scope of this article to address these; each of these comprises a complex issue that requires the focus of an independent article. Thirdly, I assume a list of fundamental interests', which refer to human basic needs, i.e., minimum requirements for individuals' well-being. Particularly relevant for this article are the fundamental needs of subsistence, life, health, freedom from social prejudice and the need for autonomy.

The Animal Abolitionist Approach

In this section, I wish to outline the abolitionist approach to animal rights. This approach to animal rights is mainly defended by the philosophers, Gary Francione and Anna Charlton, and I will base my outline on their ideas. Charlton and Francione created the abolitionist movement because, according to them, a significant number of animal advocates endorsed a welfarist philosophy which they consider to be harmful to animals. According to abolitionists, welfarism is the kind of approach that is defined by two main characteristics. Firstly, welfarists ascribe moral status to animals, but this is a moral status that is substantially inferior to humans' moral status. Secondly, even though animals have moral status, the use

[2] Perhaps some of the few exceptions are A. Breeze Harper and Kathryn George.

of animals can be morally justified if this use is deemed 'humane' and 'necessary' (Francione 1996).

Abolitionists argue that welfarists usually define 'humane' as harming an animal as little as possible and consider 'necessary' as 'necessary for humans' well-being'. Abolitionists contend that such an approach offers insufficient protection to animals in the sense that animals' interests are substantially violated by any kind of human use. They have, therefore, rejected this movement and designed a new approach, abolitionism, that, they believe, is ethically superior with regards to the moral status of animals (Francione and Charlton 2015).

Taking this on board, abolitionism is a deontological philosophical approach and social movement that addresses the moral status of animals. Abolitionism can be said to have six main features.[3]

The first important feature of abolitionism is the moral relevance given to sentience, i.e., the capacity to experience subjective awareness and thereby be capable of having recognisable interests (e.g., preferences and desires) and being able to perceive and experience the world (Francione 2009). For abolitionists, sentience is what confers moral status upon a being. From an abolitionist point of view, the reason why sentience confers moral status to beings is because moral status is based on interests and being sentient is a necessary condition for having interests (Francione 2009).

The second important feature of abolitionism is how it compares the moral value of human with non-human sentience. According to abolitionists, there is no morally significant difference between the sentient experiences of humans and non-human animals (Francione and Charlton 2013, 2015). One implication of this is that the moral status of humans and non-humans is the same and, thereby, their interests ought to be equally considered. In particular, abolitionists hold that there are two universal interests common to all sentient beings that ought to have equal consideration: namely, the interest in not suffering and the interest in not being killed (Francione 2009; Francione and Charlton 2015).

The third feature of abolitionism is that all sentient beings, human and non-human, have the basic right to not be treated as the property of others, by virtue of being sentient. Abolitionists contend that this right is a consequence of the sentience criterion because being considered as property is incompatible with being a member of the moral community, to the extent that to be property entails being a thing that only has value as means for something other than itself, which is inconsistent with having moral value in and of itself. Routinely, abolitionists present this through the example of human slavery. At least one of the reasons why human slavery is morally wrong, they underscore, is because human slaves are treated having only instrumental rather than intrinsic value (Francione 2009; Francione and Charlton 2015).

The fourth abolitionist feature is the practical implication of the right to not be treated as property with regard to animal use. According to abolitionists, this right

[3] Francione describes the abolitionist approach as a six-principle doctrine. The description I make here is faithful to the features of abolitionism, but the core characteristics described are those relevant to the topic under discussion.

entails that all forms of animal use should be abolished because they are all a form of animal exploitation that necessarily violates the right of a sentient being not to be used as property. They claim that it is not possible to use animals without violating this right (Francione and Charlton 2013, 2015).

The fifth feature of abolitionism is the idea that veganism is a universally moral imperative. As Francione contends: "Veganism is not a matter of opinion, lifestyle, or *particular circumstances* [my emphasis]. It is a moral obligation that binds us—all of us—just as do moral obligations that involve the fundamental rights of humans" (Francione 2016). Hence, independent of one's identity, situatedness, ethnicity, class, age and so forth, one has the moral obligation to restrain from the consumption of animal products. Abolitionists maintain that this is a universal duty because they believe that in the contemporary world no-one is unreasonably burdened if they become vegan. That is, abolitionists reject the idea that there is such a thing as a "necessary" use of animals and, therefore, maintain that no exemptions to this universal duty should be given. In particular, they contend that no exemptions ought to be granted because it is not medically necessary for anyone to eat animals. Additionally, abolitionists maintain that vegan supplements and meat substitutes can be easily obtained by everyone (Francione 2009, 2016; Francione and Charlton 2013, 2015; Francione and Garner 2010).

A sixth characteristic of abolitionism is that it rejects various forms of human discrimination; namely, racism, sexism, heterosexism, ageism, ableism, and classism, as mentioned in the abolitionist texts. This issue of human discrimination is underdeveloped in abolitionist writings, but the rationale offered is that, like speciesism, these forms of discrimination use a morally irrelevant criterion (e.g., race) to discount and devalue the interests of sentient beings.

The New Dynamic of Racism

The main thesis of this article—that abolitionism has racist implications—requires the clarification of the meaning of the idea of racism. The dynamic of racism has changed in the West throughout time (Bethencourt 2015). Indeed, until the 1960s, racism was considered to have two necessary and jointly sufficient components: difference and power. With respect to difference, it was considered that for racism to exist, necessary requirement was for there to be a perceived racial difference between at least two groups, sufficient to categorise one of the groups as inferior. This sense of difference, in turn, can be seen to offer a rationale for using power to treat the perceived inferior group in a cruel and unjust way. Thus, racism was understood to be about a socially relevant physical difference perceived as inferior, one that gains social relevance to the extent that it justifies unfair treatment of a group (Fredrickson 2003).

However, racism does not always manifest itself in the same way and therefore, some scholars have contended that there is not one single racism, but that there are instead *many racisms* (Bethencourt 2015). Particularly, various scholars contend that since the 1960s, predominantly, the dynamic of racism has changed from an obvious sort of racism to a more *subtle racism* (Balibar and Wallerstein 2011;

Bonilla-Silva 2017). Until this period, racist discourse, policies, attitudes and so forth were generally socially acceptable, even considered morally legitimate (Balibar and Wallerstein 2011); for example, the existence of racial segregation laws in the United States and European Colonialism in Africa, which continued until the 1960s.

Nevertheless, if racism could be expressed and institutionalised more explicitly until this decade, after this, generally speaking, its manifestations became increasingly subtle and institutionalised in more inconspicuous ways. It became, in general terms, socially unacceptable to express racist views and, therefore, both discourse and action had to adapt to a new social reality. This is because of a variety of political events that deemed racism socially unacceptable, most particularly, the decolonisation of African countries and the rise of civil rights movements (Bethencourt 2015; Bonilla-Silva 2017).

In addition to this, the western experience with Nazi and fascist regimes, which had strong racist institutions and ideologies, provided a negative mirror in which western constructions of identity could be positively reflected. That is, the negative experience of these regimens helped create a European identity that came to see itself and its wishes committed to reflecting values opposite to Nazism and Fascism (Bethencourt 2015; Bonilla-Silva 2017).

This new dynamic did not however totally replace the old racism, for this still exists. However, the point is that routinely racism *manifests* in a more subtle way rather than the previously constructed, obvious way. This new dynamic can be said to contain four main characteristics. Firstly, the new manifestations of racism became, broadly speaking, increasingly subtle. Particularly, this new racism avoids the use of racial terminology which covers power relations and the mechanisms of racial inequality (Bonilla-Silva 2017). Moreover, routinely, but not always, this new expression of racism is made with reference to cultural differences rather than physical differences (Cordeiro-Rodrigues 2015). For instance, rather than affirming that Africans are naturally lazy, in the language of new racism it is affirmed instead that African culture promotes laziness.

Secondly, and broadly speaking, the new dynamic of racism consists in disempowering members of a certain racialised community by placing blocks or imposing unfair burdens on their ability to access the fundamental interests[4] of human beings (Balibar and Wallerstein 2011; Bonilla-Silva 2017). Thus, the new dynamic of racism consists of disempowering racialised groups by producing barriers to the access and distribution of fundamental interests based on perceived race or cultural affiliation (Bonilla-Silva 2017). We can see therefore that he component of old racism that relates to perceived difference became diluted, with the new dynamic of racism mostly centred on the power aspect. That is, even though the difference component is sometimes present, individuals do not have to necessarily perceive or express that the other group is inferior due to a specific difference; however, the power relations between racialised groups are generally maintained.

[4] See "Introduction" for a short list of fundamental interests.

Thirdly, the new dynamic of racism works in terms of cultural-socio-economic structures that unfairly constrain the options of individuals with respect to a fundamental aspect of their lives. In other words, this new dynamic consists of constraining the agency of individuals to pursue fundamental interests (Balibar and Wallerstein 2011; Bethencourt 2015; Cordeiro-Rodrigues 2015; Bonilla-Silva 2017). For example, legally speaking, African-Americans have the right to education, but routinely, there are various institutions which condition the agency of African-Americans to study, for example, through limiting access to credit.

Fourthly, the new dynamic of racism reproduces many forms of the racial and cultural power relations that existed in racism prior to the 1960s. In particular, the main victims of racism continue to be the same groups, which continue to suffer similar kinds of inequality (e.g., social prejudice, economic disadvantage).

To understand this new dynamic of racism, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva offered the term 'racism without racists'. This is racism without racists to the extent that racial-based injustices still exist but individuals who maintain and perpetuate racist structures do not necessarily do so intentionally, consciously, expressively, or directly.

Abolitionism: A Form of 'Racism Without Racists'

In this section, I wish to show how the abolitionist approach engages in a kind of racism without racists as described in the previous section. To clarify, my argument is not that abolitionism is a racist philosophical approach because their defenders deliberately believe that there is a superiority of a race or a culture. Neither is it that they deliberately wish to create institutions that favour some racialised groups over others. Rather, my argument is that abolitionism, if applied in practice, would entail a racist dynamic to the extent that, if put into practice, it would maintain, reinforce and create the disempowerment of racialised groups by making these groups have limited or fewer opportunities and face more barriers in accessing their fundamental interests.

The first set of racist dynamics animated by abolitionism show that individuals would be placed in a situation where they would have to make an unfair choice between two fundamental interests. This dynamic of placing individuals against a set of unfair choices happens in at least two different ways.

One way that this dynamic is set in motion, is by forcing some racialised communities to choose between having even more food insecurity[5] and their own subsistence. That is, abolitionism would force individuals to choose either to eat vegan but in a non-nutritious and unhealthy way or eat in a nutritious and healthy vegan way but with the consequence that this will substantially curtail the means of subsistence of individuals who already struggle to survive every day.

The reason for this choice set is that, contrary to what abolitionists contend, vegan diets are not easily accessible to everyone and eating vegan may place

[5] Food security is defined as having the means to access sufficient and healthy nutritious food at all times (Gottlieb and Joshi 2013).

unreasonable economic burdens on some communities (Counihan 2012; Gottlieb and Joshi 2013). To understand this, it is important to first look at how one can have a healthy and nutritious vegan diet. According to the American Dietetic Association, in order to have a healthy and nutritious vegan diet, broadly speaking, the following conditions need to be met: (1) a broad variety of fruit and vegetables every day, (2) inclusion of legumes and grains, (3) vitamin B12 supplements, and (4) exposure to sunlight to obtain vitamin D (Craig et al. 2009).

However, access to all of these is significantly dependent on geographic location and economic power (Harper 2010; Liu and Apollon 2011; Counihan 2012; Gottlieb and Joshi 2013). In particular, discriminated racialised communities tend to have less economic means (such as access to credit, and income) for purchasing food or travel costs for food; they also tend to live in geographical locations where food in general is scarce, with vegan alternatives tending to be more available in urban centres (Harper 2010; Gottlieb and Joshi 2013).

Take the cases of suburban neighborhoods in Southern California, Detroit and townships in South Africa. These are three examples of areas which are located outside the urban centre, where grocery stores are concentrated, and are inhabited, broadly speaking, by racialised communities—namely, blacks and Latinos (Harper 2010; Liu and Apollon 2011; Counihan 2012). Urban centres are not always readily accessible in South Africa or in the Southern Californian and Detroit suburbs, and when they are what they offer is costly (Harper 2010; Swartz 2010; Liu and Apollon 2011; Counihan 2012; Gottlieb and Joshi 2013). Hence, owing to the fact that it is extremely expensive for many racialised groups to travel to urban centres to purchase a variety of vegetables, fruit, and supplements that are largely unaffordable anyway for individuals on a lower income, a vegan diet is not a viable economic option for individuals living in these locations. In other words, if these individuals, who already are in a very difficult economic situation, were to travel to access the ingredients necessary for a vegan diet, their budget would be substantially curtailed, making it even more difficult for them to survive each day. In the end, these individuals are given an unfair binary choice: either they become vegan but without access to all the necessary ingredients and, thereby, risk damaging their health or they are able to access the necessary ingredients but struggle even more for daily survival.

Taking this on board, the point is that access to wholesome foods is extremely difficult for some racialised groups who may have to contend with a scarcity of grocery stores in their neighborhoods, smaller, expensive and poorly stocked food shops, no land or means to produce their own food crops, and lack of access to transportation to take them to food stores farther afield (due to poor public transportation and low automobile ownership among lower-income residents).

Abolitionism would also place individuals in another set of binary choices between fundamental interests. Namely, abolitionism imposes an unfair choice on some individuals between them being classified/considered part of a moral underclass or significantly burdening or risking their lives. That is, they are given the choice between being negatively classified and/or socially perceived as people whom, because of personal failings and an inferior nature, are incapable of being fully moral and taking significant risks (George 1994a) and risks and harms to their

health and life. The reason why this is the choice being given is because not all individuals' bodies have the ability to easily synthesise the food supplements that are suggested necessary if not relying on animal products. Research suggests that this ability to synthesise supplements without animal products is only dominant in white males and, thus, other groups are not able to synthetise them as well (George 1994a, b). As a result, for those who are naturally incapable of being vegan or for whom it is more difficult to be a vegan, there are only two options; one is not to be vegan and thereby be allocated a status of moral inferiority, at least by those who hold abolitionist views, for not being naturally capable of expressing a full morality; the other is to be vegan and by doing so, put one's health and life at risk. Both options block access to the individuals' fundamental interests.

Being relegated to a low moral status sets up a logic of domination to the extent that the conditions for lowered self-esteem (George 1994a, b), negative stereotypes, and dominance policies are primed. Abolitionism sets the conditions for it to the extent that it provides a societal image, which may be interiorised, whereby certain bodies are inferior. With respect to negative prejudice and dominance policies, the classification of a certain group (once extrapolated beyond the individual to others who find themselves similarly situated) as morally inferior, sets the conditions for other groups to discriminate, look down upon, and justify policies that favor one group over another.

These implications are familiar ones in the history of racism and colonialism. The imposition of a hierarchy of bodies is a familiar form of racism. Racist history is strongly marked by oppressed groups having their bodies surveilled, compared and attributed negative characteristics, in comparison to the dominant group, with these negative appraisals being used to justify oppression. This is well exemplified when we look at the Enlightenment, when various rankings of the beauty of bodies and levels of intelligence were developed. These placed whites at the top of the hierarchy, Asians in the middle and blacks at the bottom (Balibar and Wallerstein 2011; Fredrickson 2003). This assigned inferiority, linked to the physical body, has been routinely internalised by those at the bottom. An example of this phenomenon is the self-perception of beauty interiorised by some black women in South Africa today, one based on a notion of the inferiority of appearance ascribed to blacks during apartheid. This has left many South African black women ashamed of the appearance and texture of their hair, which was previously classified as 'Kaffir hair'[6] (Swartz 2010).

The so-called inferiority of black people as elaborated on from at least the Enlightenment to the end of colonialism in the twentieth century and beyond, has long justified white power and dominance. For example, various theories of racism during the Enlightenment put forward that the master–slave relationship was mutually beneficial because white masters could take care of black slaves, who were unable to take care of themselves (Bethencourt 2015). Additionally, European colonial rule was very much justified by the so-called 'civilizing mission', which was the idea that whites had the duty to civilise black people (Deckha 2013).

[6] Kaffir is an offensive term, a slur, that carries with it connotations of ugliness and inferiority.

In the abolitionist ideology, a similar logic takes place with the hierarchy of bodies relating to their capacity to be vegan, and possibly creating the same internalising effect and the same kind of dominance expressed by white individuals over racialised people. If a universal norm is set up whereby veganism is promoted, with no animal use morally allowed, then those who do not have bodies that can fit such a diet, are relegated to an uncivilised moral underclass, with all its attendant consequences.

The other option, open to those who cannot tolerate a strict vegan diet, as it would put them at risk in terms of both health and life, is also problematic, since individuals have a fundamental interest in life and health. There are various non-white communities in such a situation. The most extreme case is perhaps that of the Inuit in the Canadian North. The Inuit have always had a high meat diet and, as a result, are physiologically unfit to change it to one free from such ingredients. Ultimately, if the Inuit do not eat meat, they will either get extremely ill or they will die (Barsh 2001).

It is also the case that vegan diets have a strong negative impact on the bone health of some racialised groups. Compared with other groups, Asian women, especially Hong Kong Chinese and Japanese, have been found to have a particularly thin, small-boned frame, a diet low in calcium and difficulty in synthetising supplements (George 2000). These factors contribute to Asian women being more likely to suffer from osteoporosis and bone fracture. Without eating animal products, including dairy (for those who can tolerate it) along with sardines, mackerel and salmon (with bones), the risk of osteoporosis and bone fracture substantially increases, even if taking supplements (Bow et al. 2012; Tucker 2014).

A similar burden is put on Arabic and Indian women if they adopt a vegan diet. Research suggests that a vegan diet is more likely to lead to anemia in Indian and Arabic women (Rammohan et al. 2011). Thus, as in the previous case, a great burden would be put on this these racialised women, if they were required to become vegan.

A third form of racist power hierarchy that is a consequence of abolitionism is the favouring of a neo-colonial economic system in Africa and Latin-America. By a neo-colonial economic system I mean an economic system where former colonial powers try to recover and/or maintain power over former colonies by creating economic dependency of former colonised countries in relation to former colonies (Nkrumah 1974).[7]

In particular, abolitionism overlooks the negative neo-colonial impact of veganism on racialised groups that occurs in the context of post-colonial, developing countries such as those in Africa and Latin-America. In the African case, the abolitionist approach applied to African economies would require a form of economic dependency for many African countries on former colonisers, to whom they are still tied (through food, medical need, military and agricultural aid, as well as economic development activities, including the exploitation of natural resources and labour), and from whom they have already been attempting to gain degrees of

[7] Freedom from neo-colonial domination is a fundamental interest because this freedom refers to individuals' interest in autonomy.

autonomy from for decades (Oro 2012). That is, endorsing the abolitionist approach would make Africans vulnerable supplicants to neo-colonial powers to the extent that a lack of economic resources would force them to comply with the requirements of neo-colonial powers with little bargaining power of their own. This would happen because a prescription for veganism applied to developing African countries would substantially diminish the economic autonomy of various African countries as for many African countries a plant-based agriculture is not a viable option; indeed, veganism would require food to be imported on a large scale to adequately feed their populations. In other words, various African countries would have to import food, rather than produce it to meet the requirement of a vegan diet, therefore, creating economic dependency from the outside, which is precisely what comprises neo-colonial domination. To be precise, in many African countries such as Zambia, Malawi, Zaire and Madagascar, for example, the soil is unsuitable for conventional agricultural production because of "permanent water-logging, low bearing capacity, weak anchorage for plants, subsidence upon drainage, frequent micro-nutrient deficiencies and irreversible shrinking of the organic material upon drying" (Sant'Anna 2016). Importing food, the obvious immediate solution, would cause great economic dependence on former colonisers, which is exactly what the African decolonisation project aims to avoid (Oro 2012). Therefore, the vegan diet as prescribed by abolitionism animates a logic of racism to the extent that it ignores that idea that adopting abolitionism would facilitate a neo-colonial agenda of economic dependence, disempowering African countries vis-a-vis their former colonisers.

In the case of Latin-America, a similar neo-colonial dynamic would affect various indigenous groups who live in isolation from mainstream societies such as the Toromona and Yuqui in Bolivia, the Ayoreo in Paraguay, and the Apiaká in Brazil. Requiring these indigenous groups in Latin-America to become vegan would require that they significantly restructure their economy in a way that is, again, dependent on outside powers. These indigenous are hunter-gatherers and their small-scale economy depends on fishing and hunting (Sawyer et al. 2004). To change this would require outsiders to carry out a variety of tasks with skills that the indigenous lack, including: deforestation of the environment to create the possibility of a plant-based agriculture, the creation of an irrigation system, and the teaching of skills to equip the indigenous to carry out plant-based agriculture. Therefore, like in the case of Africans, rather than having an autonomous economy, they would be highly dependent on neo-colonial powers to provide them with skills, technology and so forth, thus perpetuating hierarchies of racial power. Taking this on board, the vegan option would create a power hierarchy whereby indigenous communities would be vulnerable supplicants to predominantly white neo-colonial powers.[8]

[8] This option has additional problems, including deforestation, which would exert a strong negative impact on many animal species, causing them to potentially die.

Questioning Abolitionism's Racist Dynamic

In the previous section, I identified the kinds of racist dynamic present in abolitionism. I wish to now address some of the possible objections that can be raised against the presence of racial hierarchies in abolitionism.

The first set of objections may be directed at classifying the set of binary options between subsistence and food insecurity as racist. Firstly, it may be contended that this set of options is not racist because the examples I predominantly refer to are economic structures rather than racial structures. Taking this on board, it may be that I misconceptualised the issue in terms of racist power hierarchies.

In reply, I wish to contend that obviously racist dynamics are, indeed, routinely intertwined with economic disempowerment. This is noticeable in various periods of history, with slavery, Jim Crow, Anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany, among other examples, giving rise to examples of economically disempowered racialised individuals. The reason is because economic disempowerment encompasses such crucial aspects of individuals' lives and, therefore, fundamental interests are consequently affected by this. Put differently, economic disempowerment is a powerful way to disadvantage racialised communities. It is thus widely accepted that economic factor is one key element of racism. This disempowerment is still racist because it systematically and predominantly undermines the fundamental interests of members of racialised groups. Additionally, it is worth noting that a form of discrimination can have many dimensions, as injustices are intertwined; however, this does not mean that one ought to classify a form of discrimination as solely racist, sexist, and so forth. For example, if someone affirmed that black women cannot drive, this statement would have both a sexist and racist element, because these are the factors contributing to the discriminatory belief.

Another possible counter-argument against my view may be that my argument leads to an illogical conclusion. Most particularly, the case that meat eating has similar racist implications. For example, meat production in Amazonia deforesters the environment of the indigenous people living there, making it impossible for them to continue with their way of life (Kemmerer 2016; Sawyer et al. 2004). Also, many racialised communities are lactose intolerant and promoting drinking milk as fundamentally healthy is not only to assume that the white male body is the only acceptable moral standard, but also to deceive racialised communities into consuming consume a product that will impact badly on their health (Harper 2010; Kemmerer 2016). This is problematic for my argument to the extent that if the world of ethics is, as abolitionists contend, binary, I cannot cast two opposite actions as morally wrong. This breeds a contradiction, for if one is wrong; the other has to be right, as they are opposites. For instance, it cannot be the case that aborting a fetus and not aborting one are both morally wrong or both morally right.

This argument, however, consists of a false dichotomy. Firstly, this argument assumes that only two choices are presented, while more exist. In particular, another relevant option is that not prescribing a racist diet consists of attending to the various structures that condition individuals' choices. Thus, the evidence of this argument, rather than showing that my argument is illogical, demonstrates that the

moral requirements of diets ought to reflect the fundamental needs and social circumstances of the individuals involved. Thus, the guiding idea ought to be that a different diet should be prescribed to each according to her needs and circumstances, rather than universalizing a diet that neglects specific needs and circumstances. Both can be racist, however, if they do not attend to relevant moral circumstances.

The other set of possible counter-arguments challenge the idea that the binary choice between being part of a moral underclass or burdening or risking their lives significantly is a racist one. These counter-arguments were previously directed to Kathryn George, who has defended a similar argument to what I am defending now (George 1994a).

One possible argument may be that nutritional studies about the adequacy of a vegan diet are in dispute and there is no reliable evidence to support the argument. Moreover, other critiques contend that George's argument is based on outdated studies (Adams 1995; Gaard and Gruen 1995; Varner 1994).

In reply, firstly, the studies I present are based on recent and scientific research. Secondly, my argument does not depend on currently disputable evidence; namely, some of the facts that are not in dispute suggest that Asians are more predisposed to anemia, osteoporosis and bone fracture, with veganism increasing the risk of lowering levels of calcium, iron and B-12, thereby making it more likely for an Asian vegan to suffer from the aforementioned health issues. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that science is falsifiable; hence the validity of an argument based on empirical evidence is very much dependent on the current, available data and it might change. Therefore, even though my argument is compelling now, it may change in the future, depending on the evidence available.

Another criticism to of the physiological argument is that the approaches George criticises are not dependent on physiological norms (Donovan 1995). Even though this may be the case for approaches to animal rights by philosophers such as Tom Reagan, this is not the case for the abolitionist approach. As already seen, this approach very much depends on everyone being able to convert to veganism very easily, with abolitionists contending that all human beings can easily adopt veganism, with no necessity to use animals for dietary (or any other) purposes.

Finally, the other possible counter-argument is that if colonial power is the most well justified moral outcome, then one ought to defend colonialism. That is, if there are compelling arguments that colonial domination is morally better than the alternative, then colonialism ought to be endorsed (Gilley 2017). Thus, if abolitionism can offer compelling moral arguments that provide a case for neo-colonial domination, then one ought to stop thinking of colonialism as bad, and instead cast it as something good.

Nevertheless, my argument is that abolitionists do not offer sufficiently compelling moral reasons for endorsing neo-colonial domination. Abolitionism defends a strict egalitarianism, that is, where humans and animals have the same moral status, with fundamental interests that ought to be protected irrespective of the consequences. However, abolitionism does not have the philosophical resources for advising how to decide to act when two competing fundamental interests are in conflict; abolitionists just assume that all animal use is based on trivial human

interests. The problem, then, is that in a situation such as this one, where there is a fundamental interest of animals to not be harmed as well as the fundamental interest of humans to not suffer from neo-colonial domination, abolitionism does not offer the philosophical resources necessary for deciding which one ought to be given priority. In other words, owing to the fact that humans and animals have the same moral status, abolitionism theory does not have the compelling moral arguments needed to justify a neo-colonial agenda.

Abolitionism and Ideal Theory

A possible criticism to the views presented in this paper is that abolitionists aim to present an ideal theory of how to treat animals, while I am assessing it as if it were a non-ideal theory. The distinction between ideal and non-ideal theory in contemporary philosophy is most well-known through John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* (Rawls 1971). An ideal theory enquires as to which principles of justice would regulate a perfectly (or nearly perfectly) just society. Ideal theory makes at least two assumptions. The first is that the relevant agents comply with the demands of justice, where "(nearly) everyone strictly complies with…the principles of justice" (1971: 13); the second assumption is that natural and historical conditions are favourable—that is, society has sufficient economic and social resources to realise justice (Rawls 1971, 2001). Contrastingly, non-ideal theory enquires as to which principles regulate a society where perfect justice is a distant goal. Hence, in contrast with ideal theory, non-ideal theory corresponds to the negation of these two assumptions. Non-ideal theory addresses obstacles to a well-ordered society due to lack of compliance and unfavorable socio-economic circumstances (Stemplowska and Swift 2012).

To this criticism I reply, first, that the version of abolitionism I analyse does not intend to offer an ideal theory in the sense just described. Rather, this version of abolitionism wishes to offer a theory which is not only more normatively binding than other animal ethics' theories, but also is *more effective in practice* in terms of addressing injustices towards animals. Abolitionists construct a theory which partly aims at precisely addressing a non-ideal world with unfavorable socio-economic conditions, a world where most individuals disrespect animals' moral status. Charlton and Francione do not ignore the facts of the word to build up their theory; however, as I argue in this article, they do *miscalculate* both compliance and socio-economic conditions.

There are three ideas helpful for understanding the point that abolitionists do not aim to construct an ideal theory. Firstly, abolitionists have directly addressed the problems of non-compliance and socio-economically unfavorable situations to show that abolitionism can be adopted in a non-ideal world. Most particularly, in their book *Eat Like You Care*, where Francione and Charlton aim to demonstrate that the abolitionist requirement of 'going vegan' is a realistic goal that everyone ought to, and can, follow. Hence, in this book, they address various possible socio-economic difficulties and forms of lack of compliance that individuals may face to become vegan in the real world; after analysing a long list of possible forms of non-

compliance and socio-economic difficulties, they contend that none of them is significant to the extent that someone would be justified in not turning vegan. They affirm, for instance, and without citing any source, that everyone can obtain sufficient iron and calcium from the food they eat, but without consuming meat. In terms of lack of compliance, in this same book, Charlton and Francione address hypocrisy, and family and partner pressure. They argue that the 'suffering' someone may get from this kind of pressure is not sufficiently morally important to prioritise it over the suffering of animals waiting to be killed. Thus, they conclude that the core abolitionist demand—to become vegan—is a morally realistic one, and that there are not enough significant socio-economic or non-compliance barriers for people not to follow it. Abolitionism is, then, according to them, a theory that is to be followed in the real non-ideal world.

Secondly, the abolitionist approach to animal rights was born because Francione considered that mainstream animal advocates offered a morally wrong and *practically ineffective* approach to defending animals' interests. He considered that most mainstream animal advocates have embraced the view that even though one should abolish animal use, in terms of campaigning, one should advocate for the improvement of treatment and then, step-by-step, advocate for abolition. As he states in *Rain Without Thunder*:

> the modern animal "rights" movement has explicitly rejected the philosophical doctrine of animal rights in favor of a version of animal welfare that accepts animal rights as an ideal state of affairs that can be achieved only through continued adherence to animal welfare fare measures (Francione 1996, 3).

Francione and Charlton started the abolitionist movement because it was believed that this strategy was morally unacceptable to the extent that it did not respect the moral status of animals. Additionally, they contended that this view was promoting the mistreatment of animals because advocating for 'humane treatment', was just about making individuals feel better for using animals, something more and more people were doing. Thus, the mainstream approaches of animal advocates were, according to abolitionists, perpetuating speciesism. In contrast, abolitionists asserted that abolitionism, through advocating the non-use of animals, would not promote good feelings about using animals and would be a much better approach to adopt in the real world. In short, part of the motivation for the birth of abolitionism was precisely the creation of a social movement to effectively deal with the moral challenges faced by animals in the real world.

This takes me to my third point; the other reason why abolitionism is not an ideal theory is because its champions contend that, in contrast with mainstream animals' advocates, the abolitionist approach does not perpetuate other forms of injustice, such as sexism or racism. According to abolitionists, various animal groups consider that only some uses of animals are morally unacceptable, therefore they carry on campaigning for single-issue abolishment, such as anti-fur or anti dog fighting campaigns; this, in turn, unjustly others women and racial discriminated minorities as the agents of animal mistreatment. This is because by engaging in such campaigns one is creating or reinforcing a stereotype whereby only these particular groups are cruel to animals. To avoid this, abolitionists contend that it is necessary

to engage in campaigns where address animal use in general, rather than cite specific use. This is, according to Charlton and Francione, precisely what abolitionism does: by considering all animal uses morally unacceptable it condemns them, thus not allowing certain groups to be matched with issues of animal exploitation. The above arguments suffice to demonstrate that in fact abolitionism is not an ideal theory. However, for the sake of the argument, suppose that it were an ideal theory of animals and that abolitionists would argue that their objective is to provide fundamental guidance in thinking about a non-ideal theory. This is the argument formulated by John Rawls, as the below passage exemplifies:

> the idea of a well-ordered society should… provide some guidance in thinking about non-ideal theory, and so about difficult cases of how to deal with existing injustices (Rawls 2001, 13).

Thus, the question posed is this: if one assumes that abolitionism was designed as an ideal theory, is abolitionism an ideal theory for providing the necessary guidance on how to treat animals in real life?

I wish to preface my negative reply to this question by starting to contend that the methodology of ideal theory, which abstracts from facts, inevitably meets some epistemological barriers which undermine the enterprise of ethics. The enterprise of ethics involves systematising, analysing, defending and recommending concepts of right and wrong which, in turn, serve as guidance for individuals' actions (Mills 2005). However, even though individuals can try to totally abstract, pure abstract knowledge is not completely possible. All knowledge is socially situated in the sense that social conditions such as economic status, ethnicity, species, gender, geographical reason, nationality and so forth influence (although do not determine) what one knows. Thus, knowledge always, at least partially, mirrors its place, with abstraction depending on the conditions in which ideas form (Olivier 2016).

Through abstracting, ideal theory tends to make invisible harms and injustices that only appear in the non-ideal world. Abstracting from real life situations renders invisible certain forms of racial discrimination that are only visible outside these models (Mills 2005; Anderson 2013; Hendrix 2013). This does not mean that non-ideal theory can absolutely solve the problem by having access to more evidence—the abolitionist approach as non-ideal theory is precisely the proof of that. However, what it can do is to broaden horizons, thus helping individuals step out of their particular social privilege (gender, ethnicity, nationality, and so forth).

In addition to this, I wish to contend, along with Sen (2006), that it is not necessary to have an ideal theory in order to have guidance in real life. As Sen argues, to assess if social arrangement x is better than social arrangement y there is no need to have social arrangement w (the best social arrangement). The reason why it is not needed is because it plays no necessary role in judging the relative merits of the two alternatives; rather, these arrangements can be judged simply by comparing their two main characteristics. As Sen's example shows, if one is trying to decide whether Kanchenjunga or Mont Blanc is the highest mountain, one does not need to know that Everest is the tallest in the world to make such a decision. There is no need to refer to the best alternative (the highest) to judge the properties of the other two alternatives. Likewise, there is no need for the ideal form of justice to judge the

relative merits of the two alternatives. For example, one does not need an ideal theory of animal treatment to know whether it is better for a cow to live on a farm where it has restricted movement. Simply, one needs simply to know the relevant neurophysiological capacities that contribute to well-being and suffering and be able to measure and compare them (Harsanyi 1955). Animal science has researched substantially on this issue and there is extraordinary data on this with respect to various species (Colin et al. 2006).

A final form of criticism based on ideal theory is that in a perfect just society, with favorable socio-economic conditions, the criticisms I made would not hold. The criticisms made in the previous section are broadly speaking contingent to the extent that they do not refer to the theory of abolitionism itself, but to circumstantial misfortunes.

This objection is partially correct; moreover, a charitable interpretation of abolitionism[9] shows that it does have philosophical resources to address *some* of the aforementioned injustices. One helpful philosophical resource here is the commitment to sentience. Abolitionists believe that sentience confers individuals with interests; some of these interests are *fundamental interests*, and as such, "we should protect them irrespective of consequences" (Francione and Charlton 2015, 5). This, in turn, implies that when the fundamental interests of human beings, in terms of having food security, subsistence or freedom from neo-colonial domination, are being violated, what abolitionism prescribes is not the reinforcement of these unfair structures of power; rather, the implication is to prescribe a state of affairs where these fundamental interests are aligned with the commitment to become vegan.

Most especially, by virtue of its concern with the fundamental interests of sentient beings, the abolitionist approach would support dispensing aid to developing countries that would allow these countries to set up alternative agriculture (hydroponics, intensive small plot farming, permaculture, soil enrichment, etc.), that would allow them to grow food in their own countries instead of relying on them being imported. These subsidies, however, need to be offered, rather than loaned and temporary rather than permanent. The reason is that if they are loans they just perpetuate dependence from former colonisers and if they are permanent it means they are not effective in aiding the independence of former colonies.

For individuals who cannot afford vegan food the implication of abolitionism is that they should receive supplement subsidies to purchase food, while people with more of the risks associated with vegan diets should receive extra support. So, the solution prescribed by abolitionism to address the tension between veganism/poverty is not to do less, but to do more. That is, the implication that results from abolitionist theory is that there is a duty to address these forms of inequality so that individuals are empowered, rather than that veganism should be abandoned. In fact, abolitionism is committed to the idea that racism, sexism, ableism, classism and so

[9] The following interpretation of abolitionism is not necessarily agreed upon by abolitionists, but my point is simply that there are philosophical resources available for formulating a response to some of my criticisms.

forth are morally wrong and the implication has to be that speciesism cannot be fought at the price of growing other inequalities.

The other helpful philosophical resource is the right of every sentient being to not be treated as property. Abolitionists could argue that the situation of individuals living in the Detroit and South Californian suburbs and the South African townships and so forth, as well as those locked into neo-colonial economic dependencies, can be considered as experiencing a form of being treated like a slave/property. Consequently, abolitionists could contend that to the extent that these individuals are being treated as property, their situations are morally objectionable.

To recall, being property means to be a thing that exists exclusively as a resource for others. Slavery is a form of being property because individuals in this situation have no power to make decisions about their lives—this power is owned by the owners. Thus, following a Marxist rationale, it could be claimed that a radically unfair distribution of resources, where individuals' means of subsistence are too dependent on their employers, is a form of being owned or experiencing wage slavery (Engels 2013/1843; Marx 2000; Marx et al. 2012). Various Marxists have classified wage labour as a wage slavery condition, meaning that even though *de jure* individuals are not owned by their employers and are voluntarily employed, they are de facto slaves to the extent that their salaries are poor and the exit opportunities so few that the labourer is compelled to work in return for payment of a wage in order to subsist. Put differently, it can be argued that wage slavery is akin to chattel slavery because workers are forced to sell their labour in order to survive. Even though the strong links between slavery and wage labour are a post-nineteenth century Marxist interpretation, Marx and Engels did emphasise the differences between the two and the idea that there is some compelling analogy. For instance, according to Engels:

> The slave is sold once and for all; the proletarian must sell himself daily and hourly. The individual slave, property of one master, is assured an existence, however miserable it may be, because of the master's interest. The individual proletarian, property as it were of the entire bourgeois class which buys his labor only when someone has need of it, has no secure existence (Engels 2013/1843, 205).

Applied to what was argued previously in this article, what this means is that economically disempowered individuals living in a neo-colonial setting, in Detroit, South California and South African townships, as well as those individuals who generally do not have means to purchase the right food supplements, are being treated as property to the extent that they, just like slaves, have no to little power over their lives, and are highly subject to forces (employers/owners, landlords, etc.) greater than themselves. Likewise, the neo-colonial economic dependency of former colonies is also a form of violation of the right to not be property, that is precisely for the same reason, that there is little power of the colonisedover their own lives. Indeed, many African countries' labour market resembles an example of slave-labour (Ryan 2012). Taking this on board, abolitionists can contend that these forms of inequalities should be addressed along with speciesist discrimination inasmuch as they are a violation of the right to not be treated as property. As stated then, the

implication of abolitionism is that more should be done, so that veganism can be applied without perpetuating other forms of injustice.

However, these responses are insufficient to fully address all the objections. Because abolitionists consider that only sentience is morally relevant and that there is no morally significant difference between sentient beings, the theory provides no groundwork for addressing the question of what to do when confronted with a situation like the Inuit. Here, where one has to inevitably choose between the lives of the Inuit or of non-human animals, abolitionism cannot offer a moral solution because for abolitionists both lives have the same value and there is no criterion to distinguish which should be prioritised. Thus, as previously argued, when there is a conflict of fundamental interests, abolitionism provides no guidance on how to act.

Conclusion

In this article, my objective was to question whether the animal abolitionist approach has racist implications. I reply to this question affirmatively: abolitionism, as it is currently set out, engages in a form of racism without racists. More precisely, Charlton and Francione's version of abolitionism is racist to the extent that, in a real world, it would disempower racialised communities from accessing fundamental interests. This theory does not mean that veganism ought to be rejected, however. There are different moral justifications for veganism and, in some cases, it may be possible to find an approach which does not have racist implications. Further research should be carried out on other philosophical approaches to animals' interests. In particular, it is important to analyse whether the theory of philosophers such as Peter Singer and Alasdair Cochrane may have racist implications and whether they can offer a solution to it.

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