

Dissolving the colour line: L. T. Hobhouse on race and liberal empire

European Journal of Political Theory

1–22

© The Author(s) 2022



Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/14748851221093451

journals.sagepub.com/home/ept**Benjamin R Y Tan** 

Trinity College, University of Cambridge, UK

Abstract

L. T. Hobhouse (1864–1929) is most familiar today as a leading theorist of British new liberalism. This article recovers and examines his overlooked commentary on the concept and rhetoric of race, which constituted part of his better-known project of advancing an authoritative account of liberal doctrine. His writings during and after the South African War, I argue, represent a prominent effort to cast liberalism as compatible with both imperial rule and what he called ‘the idea of racial equality’. A properly liberal empire, he asserted, would dissolve the colour line. This article traces the arguments Hobhouse advanced to make this claim, and explores his motivations for doing so. I contend that Hobhouse drew on the idiom of race as a form of exclusionary rhetoric, to delegitimise rival accounts of liberal empire and to cast his own as properly cosmopolitan. This recovery, I suggest, offers payoffs for our understanding of both Hobhouse’s political thought and, more broadly, the uses of ‘race’ in twentieth-century liberalism.

Keywords

Empire, Hobhouse, imperialism, liberalism, new liberalism, race, white supremacy

Introduction

Today, Leonard Trelawny Hobhouse (1864–1929) is best known today as a leading theorist of British new liberalism (Clarke, 1978; Collini, 1979; Freedon, 1978; Simhony and Weinstein, 2001; Weinstein, 2007b). His most enduring work, *Liberalism* (1911a),

Corresponding author:

Benjamin R Y Tan, Trinity College, University of Cambridge, Cambridge CB2 1TQ, UK.

Email: rybt2@cam.ac.uk

sought to synthesise Victorian liberal ideas with the claims of neo-Hegelianism, socialism, and evolutionary theory. The book is also notable as an early example of ‘liberalism’ being theorised as a systematic body of thought, rather than a disposition or set of policies (Freeden, 1996: 195).¹ What has gone largely unnoticed, however, is the way that Hobhouse – philosopher, journalist, and sociology professor – also sought to cast liberalism as a political creed committed to what he called ‘the idea of racial equality’ and ‘racial justice’ (1904: 36, 89; cf. 1911a: 233).

Such claims pose a puzzle for political theorists and historians of political thought, given the uses of ‘race’ in prevailing liberal debates about empire. In the long nineteenth century, self-proclaimed liberals routinely relied on the assertion of racial hierarchies to render colonial domination natural and progressive, and to restrict their universalist commitments to the domain of whiteness – what scholars, following W. E. B. Du Bois, have termed the drawing of the global colour line (Lake and Reynolds, 2008).² This was most prolific precisely during Hobhouse’s lifetime, when ‘race’ was used by liberals to recode the concept of civilisation in rigidly hereditarian terms, and became a central category with which they envisioned and defended empire (Bell, 2016; Pitts, 2019: 455–62). As one British liberal declaimed in 1900: ‘What is Empire but the predominance of race?’³ Most of Hobhouse’s new-liberal contemporaries subscribed to a vision of empire in which the so-called ‘lower races’ were effortlessly relegated to despotic rule.⁴ Moreover, as scholars have rightly noted (Bell, 2016: 345–54; Boucher, 2018: 1193; Schwarz, 2011: 322–3), Hobhouse himself articulated a white supremacist account of world politics, at the apex of which stood a British empire held together by the ‘sentiment of unity pervading its white population’ (Hobhouse, 1911a: 239).

Yet, in his critiques of what had become known as ‘the new imperialism’, Hobhouse insisted that liberalism, properly conceived, was compatible with *both* imperial rule and a commitment to ‘racial equality’. The present essay recovers Hobhouse’s curious commentary on race and liberalism in the Edwardian period. It suggests that doing so offers payoffs for our understanding of both Hobhouse’s political thought and, more broadly, the uses of ‘race’ in twentieth-century liberalism. In what follows, I show that, contained within Hobhouse’s better-known project of articulating an authoritative account of liberalism, was an attempt to disentangle it from prevailing notions of racial hierarchy. I argue that this was an effort by Hobhouse to offer a *redemptive critique of empire* – to point the way to the reconstitution of imperial legitimacy on what he believed to be a more cosmopolitan foundation. What was needed, on his account, was the moral and psychological transformation of the imperial metropole, in which liberals disavowed their dangerous ‘[b]elief in race’ (Hobhouse, 1902d: 502). In making this case, Hobhouse critiqued the status of race within liberal discourse, while also redrawing the boundaries of what was considered properly ‘liberal’.

Recent scholarship has explored Hobhouse’s attentiveness to questions of imperial and international politics, which he insisted any adequate account of liberalism should confront. Yet, in seeking to integrate Hobhouse into the broader currents of Anglo-American liberal internationalism, this work has inadvertently downplayed his preoccupation with race.⁵ This omission is striking, not least because the new liberal was recognised in his lifetime as an *expert* on race. In 1909, Hobhouse convened the

first meeting to plan the Universal Races Congress, held in 1911 to discuss relations ‘between so-called white and so-called coloured peoples’ (Rich, 1984: 535; Spiller, 1911: v), and had earlier helped establish the Sociological Society in London, which in its early years debated the significance of racial difference (Rich, 1990: 93–6).⁶ Later, he served as the president of the 1910 conference on ‘Nationalities and Subject Races’, and though Hobhouse was not present at the conference, the chair in his opening address lamented Hobhouse’s absence, for ‘he would have been able to speak to them with all the weight of acknowledged authority’.⁷

In recovering this apparent authority, the present article also offers a prominent case study in how liberalism, often theorised in the late-nineteenth century by imperial and colonial elites as exclusive to the white world, became re-articulated in the twentieth as a political creed *inherently* opposed to the colour line. Prevailing scholarly accounts suggest that early-twentieth-century liberals began to distance themselves from overt claims of white supremacy in order to occlude imperial violence, what Jeanne Morefield (2014) calls a liberal strategy of deflection.⁸ This was a symptom of what John M. Hobson (2012: 320) terms ‘colonial-racist guilt syndrome’ among liberals, spurred on by fracturing imperial legitimacy and rising anti-colonial resistance. In Hobhouse’s thought, however, the language of race was intended not to deflect from imperial violence, but rather to call attention to it; he used race as *exclusionary rhetoric*, which tainted rival liberalisms as insufficiently cosmopolitan. Attending to how and why Hobhouse effected this intervention, I suggest, offers a more textured account of ideological innovation around ‘race’ in the history of liberal thought.

Liberal hypocrisy and illiberal empire

One consequence of Britain’s unprecedented imperial expansion after 1870 was the proliferation of creative and vehement critiques of empire in the metropole. The South African War (1899–1902), in particular, sparked ambitious accounts of imperial overextension among British intellectuals. Hobhouse was part of a wider group of self-styled ‘progressives’, gathered loosely around the Rainbow Circle discussion group in London, who diagnosed recent conquests as a project of elite self-aggrandisement.⁹ Drawing on a traditional radical idiom and more recent critiques of capitalism, they cast the ‘new imperialism’ as a conspiratorial threat to social democracy at home – an argument most famously articulated in J. A. Hobson’s *Imperialism: A Study* (1902). Crucially, these progressives, including Hobson and Hobhouse, rarely rejected empire as an ideal form of political organisation, critiquing instead what they saw as its ‘insane’ or malignant forms.¹⁰

Of these *fin-de-siècle* imperial sceptics, Hobson remains the most studied.¹¹ By contrast, Hobhouse’s imperial thought, when it receives attention, is typically characterised as dovetailing with Hobson’s better-known account of imperialism as a diseased growth upon capitalism.¹² Hobhouse departed from his friend’s better-studied account, however, in theorising imperialism as an ideational and psychological, as opposed to economic, phenomenon. While Hobson often treated imperial apologetics as epiphenomenal to underlying capitalist forces, Hobhouse saw imperial expansion as principally the result

of a moral and intellectual breakdown among progressives – what he called ‘a reaction against humanitarianism’ (Hobhouse, 1904: 57). Imperialism was thus not a problem simply for the political economist to confront, through a demonstration that trade did not in fact ‘follow the flag’; nor could imperialism be adequately explained by reference to what Hobson (1902: 76–93) called its ‘economic taproot’, namely over-saving by capitalists and their parasitic encroachment upon state power. Indeed, Hobhouse (1899: 204–5; 1904: 30), while citing the empirical data drawn together by Hobson, largely bypassed the latter’s economic arguments. Instead, in critiquing imperialism, Hobhouse (1901b: 102) took as his unit of analysis what he called, in an idealist idiom, ‘the growth of the Imperial spirit’. This was the ‘spirit of domination which rejoices in conquest’, which he claimed had come to dominate British politics since 1870 (Hobhouse, 1904: 36, 29).

In the years during and after the South African War, explaining the recent emergence of this ‘Imperial spirit’ became a central preoccupation for Hobhouse. At the core of his diagnosis, he argued, was a specific brand of liberal hypocrisy: contemporary liberals were lending vigorous support to what he saw as a patently illiberal empire. He advanced this view in a string of anti-war editorials for the liberal *Speaker* published in 1902, at the height of the conflict in South Africa. In *Democracy and Reaction* (1904), a polemical analysis of imperialism which incorporated these earlier articles, Hobhouse characterised this hypocrisy as the result of a grand deception:

The trap laid for Liberals in particular consisted in this – that they were asked to give in their adhesion to Imperialism as representing admiration for an Empire which more and more has been shaped upon Liberal lines. Having given their assent, they were insensibly led on to the other meaning of Imperialism – a meaning in which, for all practical purposes, these principles are set aside. (Hobhouse, 1904: 48)

The empire, then, once was – and could still become – compatible with liberal principles. But Hobhouse’s fellow liberals were *insensibly* supporting an illiberal empire. They had, on his account, blindly renounced ‘the central principle of Liberalism [...] self-government’ in their support for its ‘antithesis’: ‘present-day Imperialism, the operative principle of which is the forcible establishment and maintenance of racial ascendancy’ (Hobhouse, 1904: 47). This liberal capitulation to the ‘imperial idea’, he asserted, was responsible for the late-Victorian expansion into Africa and Asia.

Hobhouse’s writings on empire focused on how this liberal deception had come to pass, and it is in *Speaker* editorials in particular that we see him make his most striking claims about race. What is worth noting, in the first instance, is the way Hobhouse distinguished the current, malignant empire from his ideal vision, a contrast that underpinned his charge of liberal hypocrisy. What current liberals had failed to notice, he argued in the *Speaker*, was the *reintroduction* of racialised slavery in the colonies:

Thirty years ago, the whole Empire was anti-slavery. Now, far from putting it down, we are adding provinces of which the industry is to be built up upon some form or other of forced labour. (Hobhouse, 1902d: 501)

Recent liberals, he continued, had betrayed the abolitionist ethos of the earlier empire: ‘if our grandfathers declared that the black man was a man and a brother, we reply that he is but the son of the bondwoman, born to be a hewer of wood and drawer of water to the stronger race’ (Hobhouse, 1902d: 501–2). For Hobhouse (1902d: 501), this eroding commitment to abolition marked the prevailing ‘intellectual reaction’ in Britain. Here, he was drawing on arguments prevalent among British anti-slavery lobbyists that cast imperial authority, in allowing the ‘new slaveries’ of chartered companies, as renouncing its ‘civilising’ duties to non-European subjects.¹³ These were arguments with which he was closely familiar: during the war, Hobhouse had petitioned the government to protect ‘native rights’ against the exploitation of chartered companies in Africa, on behalf of both the Aborigines’ Protection Society and the Protection of the Native Races Society in Manchester (Barnett et al., 1908; Hobson, 1931: 38f; Satre, 2005: 120).

Hobhouse’s focus on racialised slavery in the colonies, as the key marker of the empire’s illiberal turn, was unusual among liberal critics of empire. In indicting ‘insane’ imperialism, his liberal contemporaries preferred instead to point to the perceived maltreatment by the empire of *white* settlers, most notably the Dutch Boers. The South African conflict had been widely characterised by its critics as the conquest of, and despotic rule over, another white race – and thus ran afoul of the Gladstonian ideal of a self-governing, multinational empire (Ellis, 1998: 49–64). By contrast, the status and treatment of non-white ‘natives’ were marginal in liberal debates about the ‘new imperialism’, figuring largely as a means to attack the role of chartered companies in Africa (Porter, 2008: 64–9). It was Britain’s erosion of white racial solidarity during the war that was seen, especially among parliamentary Liberals, as a foremost betrayal of liberal principles (Mackley, 2018). Hobhouse, as a vocal ‘pro-Boer’ and older brother of Emily Hobhouse who was instrumental in exposing British use of concentration camps in the war, also advanced this argument.¹⁴ But, in distinguishing his ideal empire from the current one, he homed in on the status of its non-white subjects.

This line of argument enabled Hobhouse to make a specific charge of hypocrisy against his liberal contemporaries. In a *Speaker* editorial titled ‘Democracy and Imperialism’, Hobhouse pointed to the existence of Britain’s recently acquired ‘tropical dependencies’:

Here is a form of government which frankly involves the overthrow of all democratic principles and the admission that they are not applicable except to white men. True or false, this admission has certainly weakened the fibre of English democratic sentiment. After all, the white man’s claim to rule the black because he is wiser and more capable is essentially the same as the noble’s claim to rule the commonalty for their good as much as for his own. (Hobhouse, 1902b: 444; cf. 1904: 25–26)

In other words, the white man’s claim to rule the tropical dependencies made him no better than that perennial target of British radicals, the aristocrat. Both asserted hereditary rank as overriding the claim to self-government. Elsewhere, he repeated this case against white settlers in South Africa, arguing that their prejudice towards Blacks was ‘precisely analogous’ to the ‘essence of aristocratic, anti-popular sentiment [that] lies in the belief

that people of a different class do not bleed when they are pricked, as the aristocrat bleeds' (Hobhouse, 1899: 213). Metropolitan liberals, to Hobhouse's dismay, were failing to notice their own acceptance of aristocratic principle: 'They were becoming Imperialists in their sleep' (1911a: 221).

Hobhouse, in invoking a celebrated radical tradition, aimed his argument squarely at fellow liberals. The problem of white despotism was not primarily the harm done to non-white colonised subjects, who he regarded as 'savage' (e.g. Hobhouse, 1899: 212; 1901a: 345; 1911a: 43–4; 1915: 24). He remained preoccupied, instead, with the waning of *English* democratic sentiment, the necessary precondition for social reform at home. As he argued in 1911, a putatively democratic metropole governing undemocratic colonies represented a 'contradiction [...] a standing menace to domestic freedom' and would provoke an 'important reaction on our own domestic constitution' (Hobhouse, 1911a: 236–7; 1911c: 145). Similarly, Hobhouse in 1928 would write to his occasional interlocutor W. E. B. Du Bois: 'There is nothing of greater importance *for the future of white civilisation itself* than the establishment of more just and humane relations across the colour line' (Hobhouse, 1928; emphasis added; cf. 1911c: 144–5).¹⁵

For Hobhouse, white imperial despotism represented a betrayal of *liberal* principle; this, however, was a claim that flew in the face of contemporary liberal sensibility. The idealist philosopher and new-liberal D. G. Ritchie, for instance, expressed a view common among liberal imperialists from the 1860s: evolutionary science had demonstrated that 'the white races are, on the whole, much higher than the negro', and it was inevitable that vigorous and enterprising white races should overflow into other lands as it is 'that water should run down hill' (Ritchie, 1902: 32, 164). He thus argued that despotic rule over 'the less advanced races' was a matter of moral duty, representing 'a higher stage' of world politics (Ritchie 1902: 158; cf. Bell 2020: 323–28). The liberal and classicist Gilbert Murray defended the forced labour of non-whites on account of the 'race-pride' of whites, a psychological condition white people simply could not help. He argued that this 'curious feeling, a compound in which physical repulsion, race-hatred, and pride of birth seem to be accentuated' meant that laws forbidding forced Black labour in South Africa and other settler colonies would 'do more harm than good' (Murray, 1900: 142).¹⁶ Similarly, Hobson, even as he decried the 'aggression of white races upon "lower races"', remained committed in *Imperialism* to the view that there existed 'countries inhabited by what appear to be definitely low-typed unprogressive races' who should be governed despotically (Hobson, 1902: 132, 237).¹⁷

Hobhouse could not simply assert, then, that support for white despotism in the colonies was illiberal; this needed to be argued. We thus see him subtend this claim with an historical account of liberalism as a global agent of emancipation. Liberalism's role, he argued in the opening chapter of *Liberalism* (1911a: 19), was 'a destructive and revolutionary criticism [...]. It finds humanity oppressed, and would set it free'. Liberalism, so conceived, was more than a set of domestic policies or a moral disposition; it was a world-historical movement. As Bell (2016: 81–3) has argued, Hobhouse was an early and prominent theorist who presented 'liberalism' as a cohesive tradition that stretched back to the early-modern period, a narrative that only became widespread from the interwar period. He cast the Whigs as 'pioneer liberals' responsible for advocating pre-political rights and governmental restraint

that in turn emancipated Britain's oppressed classes (Bell, 2016: 83). These same Whigs, in asserting self-government for white settlers, were also the architects of the liberal empire that had reconciled self-government with imperial authority (Hobhouse, 1904: 16–28). Their nineteenth-century heirs, Hobhouse (1904: 57–8) argued, had continued this 'great humanising movement' by the expansion of suffrage in Britain and 'the abolition of negro slavery'. In this imagined history, liberal complicity with racial violence and domination had emerged only recently – coeval with Britain's imperial expansion from the 1870s, and which represented a deviation from liberalism's origins.

This historical narrative grounded, in turn, what Hobhouse claimed to be the duties of liberal empire to the figure of the 'native'. In *Liberalism* (1911a: 43), he argued that these included protecting what he called the natives' 'elementary rights', including the right to suffrage under imperial authority. In a letter to the *Times* in 1903, as the post-war settlement in South Africa was being debated, he argued in a classic radical idiom that 'no special taxation, even for revenue, should be placed upon the Kaffirs [in South Africa] until they are enfranchised' (1903a: 10). Hobhouse departed from Victorian liberal imperialists, most notably J. S. Mill, in rejecting perceived backwardness as grounds for exclusion from colonial self-government, even as he asserted the 'savagery' of non-Europeans.¹⁸ In *Liberalism* (1911a: 235), he argued that 'an impression of existing inertness or ignorance is not a sufficient reason for withholding responsible government or restricting the area of the suffrage'.¹⁹ While doubtful that enfranchisement might secure 'even-handed justice' in the face of 'an oligarchy of white planters', Hobhouse (1911a: 235–6, cf. 43–4) argued

that which is most apt to frighten a governing class or race, a clamour on the part of an unenfranchised people for political rights, is to the democrat precisely the strongest reason that he can have in the absence of direct experience for believing them fit for the exercise of civic responsibility.

Hobhouse's argument here was, in part, a criticism of the 1909 South Africa Act, in which the imperial parliament recognised the right of self-government for white settlers and effectively ceded to the latter's demand of non-white exclusion. In the second, 1909 edition of *Democracy and Reaction*, Hobhouse (1909: xxv; cf. 1912: 346) not only gestured towards multi-racial democracy in the colonies as an ideal towards which liberals should aspire, but also suggested that the metropole had a duty to intervene against the exploitation of white settlers 'on behalf of justice to a weaker race'. Elsewhere, Hobhouse (1902a: 389; cf. 1911b: 5) also suggested that imperial federation could serve to both guarantee white-settler autonomy from the metropole while protecting non-whites from subjugation by white settlers. It was on these grounds that he claimed that empire, properly constituted, would be compatible with 'the idea of racial equality' (Hobhouse, 1904: 36).

This was an iteration of the civilising mission, albeit one focused on the formal guarantee of rights, rather than a more ambitious project of social transformation. It was underpinned by Hobhouse's consequentialist defence of individual rights (including that of the franchise) as necessary for the development of both individual 'personality'

– which he regarded, drawing on Mill, as an other-regarding and ‘spontaneous development of faculty’ (Hobhouse, 1911a: 111).

However, even as Hobhouse acknowledged the capacity of non-whites to develop their ‘personality’, he held that it could only be achieved in the context of a liberal community. He envisioned this community as a network of mutual obligations and social bonds, what he called in *Liberalism* ‘the permanent conditions of social health’ (Hobhouse, 1911a: 108; Weinstein, 2007b: 81–90). These, he asserted, were necessary to ‘create the conditions under which morality can develop’, which in turn enable individual flourishing (Hobhouse, 1911a: 143; 1915: 61–4). This conception of community helps to explain why Hobhouse, while more open to the enfranchisement of colonised peoples than many of his contemporaries, never approached an anti-colonial argument: he held an abiding commitment to empire as the vehicle for the globalisation of liberal community, emanating outwards from Britain as the epicentre of liberalism and the ‘civilised’ world. This process of globalisation, in which ‘Fellow-Greeks, co-religionists, fellow-white men, ultimately fellow-men, enter the circle to which obligations apply’, was the telos of liberal progress (Hobhouse, 1915: 316).

In *Liberalism* (1911a: 240, 241), he made clear that the British empire, envisioned as a loose, federated ‘democratic alliance’, was the key mechanism by which this community could be achieved. While he was generally uninterested in proposing blueprints for a future world-state or a League of Nations, he pointed to the empire as ‘a model, and that on no mean scale, of the International State’. It was the polity able to deliver on his commitment to local self-government and fashion a universal liberal community, in which moral personality could be maximally developed. Thus, Britain had a moral duty not merely to enfranchise all its colonial subjects, but also to keep them within its imperial bounds.²⁰

The barbaric ‘belief in race’

As we have seen, however, Hobhouse was deeply troubled by how far the British empire had fallen from his imagined ideal. Rather than taking aim at City financiers, as his friend Hobson was doing, Hobhouse’s stated targets were closer to home: liberals such as ‘Lord Rosebery, who runs Mr. [Joseph] Chamberlain hard for the post of Jingo leader’ and those who espoused ‘the creed of Liberal Imperialism’ – liberals who disagreed sharply with Hobhouse on imperial policy, but remained self-proclaimed liberals (Hobhouse, 1899: 202; 1902e: 75). These liberals, he repeatedly warned, were not only assenting to the despotic and exploitative rule of the ‘native’, but also claimed this to be compatible with liberal doctrine. In his Edwardian writings, Hobhouse described this hypocrisy, in a characteristic polemical style, as a kind of mass psychosis. Liberals had become beholden to their base instincts for domination, and thus betrayed their core normative commitment to universal self-government.

Underpinning Hobhouse’s case was the view that assertions of white racial superiority, especially those grounded in biology, produced a flawed argumentative logic – what he called a barbaric ‘mode of reasoning’ (Hobhouse, 1902b: 444). He censured, in particular, ‘the prevailing, though perhaps veiled, opinion [...] that the black man must pay

in meal or in malt for his racial inferiority. The white man is the stronger, and to the strong are the earth and the fruits thereof' (Hobhouse, 1902d: 501). This line of argument, he argued, was the 'seduction' leading liberals to endorse what he saw as an illiberal imperialism. The assertion of white superiority as a matter of political desert, Hobhouse argued in the *Speaker*, was what enabled them to make white despotism compatible with a commitment to self-government – allowing them to claim that liberal morality ceased to operate in imperial and international domains. 'The rule of right, it appears, stops short at the frontier' (Hobhouse, 1902d: 502).

Hobhouse took specific aim at invocations of biological evolution, arguing in the *Speaker* that:

Belief in race itself is necessarily of a reactionary tendency, and such a belief is fostered by modern biology. [...] Such a belief induces the temper of mind ready to acquiesce in those inequalities and injustice which the whole movement of civilisation has set itself to remedy, but which are now declared to be essential to the progress of civilisation itself. (Hobhouse, 1902d: 502)

This 'belief' in race thus had a deeply ironic effect: it threatened the 'barbarisation' of a 'civilised' metropole, even as its adherents claimed to advance civilisation. This 'biological theory of society' – Hobhouse named Charles Darwin, Karl Pearson, and Walter Bagehot as its foremost proponents – engendered a 'pseudo-scientific fatalism' that allowed the liberal to doubt 'whether humanity has any fundamental rights' (Hobhouse, 1902d: 501). He rejected the prevailing use of race among social Darwinists, as both a descriptor of and explanation for civilisational status; on his account, race and civilisation were not conterminous.²¹ This argument was a variation of Herbert Spencer's warning (1902: 122ff.) about the 're-barbarisation' of Britain as a militant society, whose writings on social evolution Hobhouse first encountered as an undergraduate at Oxford (Hobhouse, 1901a: vi).²² Like Spencer, he understood the hierarchy of civilisation as a dynamic one, which opened up the possibility that 'civilised' whites could lose their assumed position at its apex.

Note, though, that in decrying claims to white racial superiority, Hobhouse did not reject the idea of race or racial hierarchy wholesale. He viewed humanity as divided into distinct and immiscible races. What he rejected was the ideological role that racial hierarchy played within liberal discourse, where it was mobilised to draw a sharp distinction between domestic and international politics. Race-based arguments for imperial rule fatally compromised liberal morality, by smuggling in an 'aristocratic' logic. This was a barely veiled indictment of his liberal contemporaries, including Ritchie and Murray, who defended direct rule over non-European colonial subjects, typically on the basis of an evolutionary account of permanent racial hierarchy. He warned that framing progress as white racial domination and racial struggle, as the eugenicist Pearson (1901) was doing, was not only historically inaccurate, but served to sanction continued expansion (Hobhouse, 1904: 114–15).

We see Hobhouse's emphasis on the significance of 'race' for his analysis of imperialism in the very way he defined the latter. In a *Speaker* editorial titled 'The Growth of

Imperialism', he opened with the dramatic line: 'In embracing Imperialism – that is, the doctrine of racial ascendancy and territorial aggression – Democracy sins against its own principles' (Hobhouse, 1902c: 474). Later, in *Democracy and Reaction*, Hobhouse (1904: 45) claimed that 'the new Imperialism stood [...] for a hard assertion of racial supremacy and material force'. He repeatedly returned to this formulation, that imperialism's 'aims, succinctly stated, are aggression and race ascendancy' (Hobhouse, 1902b: 444). Note that Hobhouse was deploying relatively new terms: 'racial domination' and 'racial ascendancy' only appear in British parliamentary debates or in Anglophone print from the 1880s.²³ Moreover, the accusation of 'racial ascendancy' bore the sting of irony: it had been used in the war to describe the Boers as barbaric and cruel; Hobhouse turned this charge onto the British.²⁴

To be sure, Hobhouse's new-liberal contemporaries sometimes decried eugenicist theories of 'race struggle' (Hobson, 1902: 165) and 'pseudo-Darwinisms' (Hammond, 1900: 171) as excuses for imperial expansion. Hobhouse, however, went further than his contemporaries in recasting 'race' as *dogma* – a corrupting and atavistic belief. A sharp polemicist, Hobhouse characterised the effect of 'race' as a collective psychosis, a regressive 'temper of mind'. Criticising invocations of Anglo-Saxon 'manifest destiny', he argued in *Democracy and Reaction* (1904: 94) that 'by the conception of destiny the check on the moral consciousness is paralysed'. 'Against this stony fatalism', he continued, 'the sense of justice cries out in vain' (Hobhouse, 1904: 95).

Such claims, though theatrical, were more than a rhetorical flourish. By 1901, Hobhouse had already established himself as an expert on comparative psychology in both Britain and the United States (Radick, 2007: 211–14). The work responsible for this reputation was *Mind in Evolution* (1901a), in which Hobhouse laid out his theory of social evolution, evidenced by his 1890s experiments on animal intelligence.²⁵ Pointing to the popularity of 'prints of Boers skewered like hogs by a British lance' in England and to the eagerness of white settlers to publicly execute non-white natives 'like ninepins', Hobhouse (1901a: 345; 1899: 213) claimed that the belief in racial superiority aroused a base instinct for domination. This belief occluded the liberal's 'moral consciousness' and led them to endorse the new imperialism of Joseph Chamberlain and capitalists like Cecil Rhodes; it was pathological.

Hobhouse thus advanced a polemical account of how liberals could 'become Imperialists in their sleep', and in doing so sought to undermine one of the most potent and widely used concept in imperial apologetics: race. Doing so at a time when liberal discourse in Britain was deeply fractured and overdetermined, Hobhouse should be read, I suggest, as engaged in adjudicating what constituted a properly *liberal* justification for empire. Intense debate had already taken place in the 1880s over Gladstone's invasion of Egypt and Irish Home Rule, which led to Chamberlain's defection from the Liberal Party. As Hobhouse wrote, disagreements over the South African War had brought the Liberal Party to the brink of disintegration. The 'Liberal Imperialist' wing of the party (so-called after 1898), including H. H. Asquith and Rosebery, hardened their stance on territorial expansion and occupation through their support of the war, distancing them selves from more radical liberals such as John Morley and Hobhouse (Matthew, 1973: 171–8).

In characterising liberals who employed ‘racial inferiority’ to justify imperial commitments as beholden to their base instincts for domination, Hobhouse declared them beyond the pale. His analysis of corruptive effects of ‘race’ on the *liberal* mind was an overt ploy to wrest the mantle of liberalism away from his more expansionist peers. They were, he insisted in a diagnostic mode, victims of psychosis. This argumentative move unfolded in *Democracy and Reaction* and, less prominently, in *Liberalism*, where Hobhouse (1904: 65) sought more broadly to diagnose the perceived ‘decay of Liberalism’ in the last third of the nineteenth century. His broad prescription for the moral and electoral failures of liberals was, of course, to call for a ‘new’ liberalism, which would take up the now-lost cause of earlier Whigs. Part of this renewed vision was a reconfiguration of the status of ‘race’ in the history and moral cosmology of liberalism. As we have seen, he rejected assertions of racial superiority as incompatible with the liberal tradition, and claimed the ideals of non-white suffrage and multi-racial imperial democracy as intrinsic to it.

‘Progress is not racial, but social’

Such claims stood in sharp disagreement with prevailing accounts of liberal progress, which were often articulated in *intra-racial* terms. In the long shadow of Darwinian evolution, white Anglophone liberals framed progress as dependent primarily upon the hereditary and civilisational improvement of the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ or ‘Teutonic race’ (Koditschek, 2011; Steinberg, 2019). The mission to ‘civilise’ the ‘lower races’, long called upon by Victorian thinkers to justify imperial commitments as consistent with liberal universalism, was not just impracticable, but also unnecessary for the overall advance of civilisation (Hall, 2002; Mantena, 2010). We thus see liberal thinkers at the turn of the century propose novel forms of racially exclusive political organisation – for instance, American federation – as means to secure world peace and human progress (Bell, 2020; Vucetic, 2011). For these thinkers, the historical movement of the Anglo-Saxon race *itself* constituted progress.

As such, the claim that ‘race’ was an illiberal *fallacy*, rather than a hereditary index for progress, would have been perplexing – even offensive – to many of Hobhouse’s liberal contemporaries. Unsurprisingly, then, we see Hobhouse attempt in various fora to deconstruct the validity of ‘race’ as a social-scientific concept. As he declaimed in a lecture at Columbia University: ‘Progress is not racial, but social’ (Hobhouse, 1911c: 39; 1911d: 297). This claim sought to undermine the view that ‘race’, and heredity more broadly, could serve as the primary object of social reform and a scientific marker of progress. At this point, Hobhouse stood at the centre of this formative period for British sociology, seeking to wean it away from the rising influence of eugenics and fuse it with his own account of liberal progress (Halliday, 1968; Renwick, 2012). He argued that sociology, conceptualised as the science whose very object was to determine the direction of social progress, should draw its data ‘not, primarily, [from] biology, but above all things history [...] the broad history of ideas, beliefs, customs, institutions’.²⁶ The ‘biological terms of race and environment, nature and nurture’, Hobhouse (1911d: 291) argued in the *Sociological Review*, ‘are not categories to satisfy sociologists’.

In his philosophical tracts, Hobhouse offered his most comprehensive response to eugenicists and other race theorists: he advanced his own positive account of social evolution in which race was cast as an atavistic principle of social organisation. He termed his idealist theory ‘orthogenic evolution’, laid out in *Mind in Evolution* (1901a) and *Morals in Evolution* (1915 [1906]). Here, he envisioned human development as propelled not by the modification of collective heredity, or ‘race’, but by the accumulation of human wisdom over generations. This process culminated with the realisation of a cosmopolitan ideal of ‘Humanity’, a concept Hobhouse drew from Auguste Comte and British Positivists, with whom Hobhouse was personally familiar (Hobhouse, 1901a: 347).²⁷ His emphasis on mental development as the engine of social progress reflected his close engagement with neo-Hegelian idealists such as T. H. Green and the pragmatism of William James (Kloppenber, 1986: 306–7). The precise nature of Hobhouse’s cosmopolitanism, Bertrand Russell (1907: 208) would complain, was vague; nonetheless, it had for Hobhouse (1901a: 345) had a basic tenet at its core: ‘Our social morality rests on our knowledge that others are made of like clay to ourselves’. Mental development would thus culminate with the ‘dawning consciousness of a common human nature’ (Hobhouse, 1901a: 344), a realisation that would enable social reform to be directed by a community’s collective will, rather than by class interest or crude biological imperatives.

This unique idealist-evolutionary framework served as the scaffolding in which Hobhouse constructed his liberal-internationalist vision of world politics. Drawing heavily from Spencer and Green, Hobhouse (1901a: 372) theorised world politics as a teleological movement from a biological struggle for existence towards the ‘domination of rational spirit in the world’ characterised by perpetual peace. A cosmopolitan morality, he claimed in *Mind* (Hobhouse, 1901a: 339), would supplant the ‘primitive egoism’ that fuelled earlier stages of human development, by providing the affective bonds and moral justification required for the emergence of a single world community. In effect, the mutual aid emerging in England would extend to the world writ large. This vision was premised on an assimilationist logic, in which progress was not confined to the white race – but would emanate from and ultimately transcend it.

In *Morals in Evolution*, we see Hobhouse flesh out this argument: race was a socio-historical artefact of primitive societies, and an *imagined* social relation. Hobhouse (1915: 68–9) delineated human history in a stadial typology of three ascending ‘forms of social union’: Kinship, Authority, and Citizenship. Early societies, he argued, were defined by the crude ties of ‘kinship’, in which Hobhouse (1915: 52n2) included familial relations, and those of ‘clan or race or caste’. What these types of relations had in common, he argued, was the ‘fiction’ of blood ties between strangers, sustained by ritual and habit, which ‘makes the community of blood in part at least imaginary’ (Hobhouse, 1915: 53). On this view, customs of marriage in these societies created merely the *impression* of physical relation, which was the basis of racial ‘kinship’. By contrast, the most advanced ‘Citizenship’ stage of social union was marked by (among other things) the breakdown of such ties, including those of race (Hobhouse, 1915: 60–8).²⁸ In his account of evolutionary progress, Hobhouse thus characterised race as an imagined relation sustained by social custom (i.e. marriage), and relegated this type

of kinship to an earlier stage of human evolution. Contrary to eugenicists and other social Darwinists who used racial change to demarcate historical time – and consigned non-white races to an earlier, ‘savage’ time (Koditschek, 2011: 212–4) – Hobhouse inverted the framework: an historical analysis of custom was used to explain the emergence of the *idea* of race over time.

Crucially, progress on Hobhouse’s account required overcoming race as an organising principle. As we have seen, he was clear-eyed about the failures of the current empire to relinquish race and allow all ‘fellow-men’ to ‘enter the circle’ of this white, liberal community. In *Morals in Evolution* (1915: 315–7; cf. 1911c: 26–8), he argued that modern Britons had naively clung to a commitment to ‘the colour line’, which he termed ‘the last ditch of group-morality’: a parochial mode of moral reasoning, developed at a pre-modern stage of human evolution, which was therefore inimical to a genuine cosmopolitan morality. He repeatedly invoked the Roman empire as an imperial exemplar, which in his view ‘gradually approached the ideal of a world state’ by extending imperial citizenship and the franchise across the colour line (Hobhouse, 1915: 261; cf. 1901a: 347; 1911c: 144). The Romans had produced Stoicism, which he likened to his own conception of cosmopolitanism. It was an ‘ethical creed’ that he claimed was ‘instrumental in breaking down the barriers raised by differences of race, nationality, and even caste’ (Hobhouse, 1901a: 347).²⁹

In placing ‘differences of race’ in opposition to a broader commitment to ‘Humanity’, Hobhouse drew on existing arguments advanced by Comtean Positivists. Late-Victorian Positivists, as Gregory Claeys (2010: ch. 1) has shown, often described their commitment to ‘humanity’ as overriding the narrow demands of ‘race patriotism’, and used this claim to criticise European imperial aggression as illegitimate.³⁰ The prominent Positivist and jurist Frederic Harrison, for instance, claimed that the Positivist conception of ‘Humanity’ repudiates all kinds of exclusion: of race, of country, of class, of sect’ (quoted in Claeys, 2010: 85). Hobhouse mobilised this line of argument to construe his vision of liberal empire as antithetical to ‘the colour line’. In doing so, he folded ‘race’ into other categories, including ‘class’ and ‘sex’, as those that liberals should disavow in delimiting the bounds of community.

Race as exclusionary rhetoric

What Hobhouse offered, then, was what we might think of as a redemptive critique of imperialism. He castigated liberal discourse for its reliance on ‘race’ as a justification for empire and as a marker of progress, censuring it as an atavism. But he also held out the possibility of a genuine cosmopolitanism, the achievement of which necessitated a liberal empire. The metropole could remedy its ‘insane’ imperialism, enabled crucially by the ‘belief in race’, by rejecting what he called ‘the colour line’ – a term Hobhouse may have taken from Du Bois, but deployed in a narrower sense to refer to the use of ‘race’ in political discourse and specific politico-legal hierarchies in the colonies, especially restrictions on the franchise.³¹

This renunciation of the colour line, in Hobhouse’s idealist scheme, was foremost a cognitive exercise for the metropolitan liberal, of acknowledging the common humanity

of colonial subjects, currently prevented by prevailing notions of racial difference. While Hobhouse was an advocate of native 'rights', more urgent in his thinking was the metropole's work of self-cultivation, to free itself from the pernicious 'belief in race'. Only this would revive imperial authority abroad and enable social reform at home. To borrow a formulation from Mantena (2010: 11), Hobhouse shifted the burden of imperial legitimation away from an assessment of the nature and capabilities of colonised peoples, and onto the metropole. The illiberal empire could be reformed, but only if liberals could awaken from their imperialist slumber. This account denied agency to colonised peoples, casting them as subjects of the imperial authority's work of self-improvement.

Upon closer inspection, Hobhouse's anti-racialist posture is ridden with internal tensions, especially if we home in on the practical implications of his liberal imperialism. Crucially, he did not address the conflict between his view that the empire had been historically held together by racial affect – what he called in *Liberalism* 'the sentiment of unity pervading its white population' (Hobhouse, 1911a: 239) – and the moral duty to extend political rights within the empire to all races. We see him recapitulate a decades-old vision of Anglo-Saxon imperial federation as a mechanism to prevent the empire's fragmentation, in the same text that he defended the 'colour-franchise' (Hobhouse, 1911a: 239–40). He also went to great lengths to commit to 'free national self-direction' for the white settler colonies, viewing this as necessary to keep them within the imperial fold (Hobhouse, 1911a: 238). Against this imperative for white federation, the fate of non-European peoples remained insignificant.³² Left unanswered, then, is how the British empire, so apparently reliant on the white 'sentiment of unity', would evolve into an institution of world governance compatible with 'racial equality' (Hobhouse, 1911a: 238).

Put another way, the assumption of white civilisational superiority that underpinned Hobhouse's liberalism pulled the latter in two opposing directions, between inter-racial assimilation and white racial solidarity. Sometimes, the latter clearly emerged as the dominant concern. In *Liberalism*, Hobhouse defaulted to the prevailing view among British liberals, particularly when it came to the question of South African reconstruction, that blacks be separated from whites, on account of past atrocities committed by whites against the 'native' (Hobhouse, 1911a: 43–4). This suggestion, as Schwarz (2011: 323) observes, was a philanthropic variation of the segregationist argument advanced by contemporaries such as Jan Smuts. Thus, Hobhouse's vision of a multi-racial empire free of 'race-domination' (Hobhouse, 1911c: 27–8) quickly collapses under the weight of its internal contradictions. His arguments on race appear to leave intact the racially stratified political imaginary that Edwardian liberals drew upon to defend empire.

In view of these contradictions, we might decode Hobhouse's imperial thought as deploying what Morefield (2014) calls the liberal-imperialist strategy of deflection. On this view, Hobhouse closely tracked the arguments of other contemporary imperialists, such as Smuts and those of the Round Table group, who re-imagined empire as a multi-racial 'commonwealth' and in doing so occluded the racialised violence underpinning imperial rule.³³ This, Morefield argues (2014: 15), was a creative process of 'unbinding the liberal imperial state (and its people) from its illiberal past and present', in order to legitimate imperial authority. As Morefield and others have argued (Lorimer, 2013:

chs. 5–6; Rich, 1990: ch. 3; Thakur and Vale, 2020; Füredi, 1998), British imperialists around the First World War became more eager to defend imperial rule on explicitly multiracial grounds, viewing it necessary to stave off insurrection. Indeed, Hobhouse deployed many of the rhetorical strategies that Morefield argues was (and continues to be) characteristic of liberal-imperialist deflection, including a nostalgic invocation of the empire's 'true' liberal character.

Such an interpretation would rightfully draw attention to the way Hobhouse occluded both the white supremacy latent in his own imperial ideal and the actual structures of domination on which the British empire was built. It would also help us position Hobhouse within the broader history of liberals sustaining what Mills (1997) calls the racial contract. Indeed, as one of the first British thinkers to theorise 'liberalism' as a cohesive theoretical tradition, Hobhouse should receive closer attention in this broader history than currently exists.

However, reading Hobhouse as primarily *deflecting* from the empire's violence risks mischaracterising what I call his provincial intent, and the ideological work 'race' was doing for him. His inconsistencies on the practicalities of imperial policy indicate a fundamental disinterest in the work of imperial reform and legitimation. Being neither a colonial administrator nor a policymaker, Hobhouse largely bypassed questions of institutional design in his writings on empire. As his readers have long noted (Collini, 1979: 235; cf. Sylvest, 2009: 197–214), Hobhouse espoused a 'severely moral conception of politics' in which the institutional details, particularly those pertaining to international and imperial governance, would follow from – and were secondary to – the underlying moral commitments. Rather than dwelling on the practical implementation of his imperial ideal, he was far more concerned with the nature of liberal discourse *about* empire, and in enforcing what he saw as its moral rectitude.

Recognising this preoccupation brings into sharper view the novelty of Hobhouse's commentary on race. We see the language of race in Hobhouse's writings, rather than diverting attention away from imperial violence, routinely call attention to it. He reached for relatively new idioms in liberal discourse, such as 'race-domination' and 'racial equality', not to press for the emancipation of colonial subjects, but to point instead to what he saw as the moral failings of contemporary liberals – those he preferred to denigrate as 'pseudo-Liberal', who he tainted as both psychotic and aristocratic (Hobhouse, 1899: 199). The language of race here was intended to cast such liberals as insufficiently cosmopolitan – or simply anti-democratic. In seeking to subvert the close association between 'race' and 'empire' in liberal thought, Hobhouse offered his account of liberal empire as a vision of radical cosmopolitanism. In short, we might read Hobhouse's use of racial idioms as *exclusionary rhetoric*, to denigrate the legitimacy of competing liberalisms. His gambit was to assert that only those who declared opposition to 'the colour line', as his did, could credibly claim the mantle of authentic liberalism.

Given the central role race played in liberal discourse as a powerful alibi for empire, this was by no means a straightforward argumentative strategy.³⁴ As we have seen, it involved the zealous claim that those who still espoused the 'belief in race' suffered from psychosis, and a positive theory of social evolution that grounded progress in an

assimilationist logic. It also was subtended by an historical account of empire that effaced racial violence prior to 1870, which Hobhouse (1904: 28) saw as the start of the 'reign of Imperialism'. The account of liberalism that emerged was, on his own account, faithful to its pre-modern origins as a global movement against despotism – including that of 'race-domination'.

Conclusion

Today, Hobhouse is read primarily as a leading and innovative theorist the 'new', collectivist strain of liberalism at the turn of the twentieth century – and has emerged as a canonical figure in the history of liberal thought. As Michael Freeden (2005: 21) puts it, Hobhouse consolidated recent shifts in liberal discourse by characterising it as an evolutionary body of thought, adapting and reforming from within. He sought to expand the range of domestic state action justifiable by liberal doctrine, and supply the latter with a cohesive history that stretched back to pre-modernity. This essay has drawn attention to a neglected aspect of that project of rewriting liberalism: Hobhouse's attempt to reject racial domination from the history and moral cosmology of liberalism, by positioning himself against the racial determinism of the post-Darwinian period. He sought to reorient liberalism as a doctrine which promised, through imperial rule, to dissolve 'the colour line'.

This account of Hobhouse is indicative for how we might understand the emergence of the now-pervasive notion of Anglophone liberalism as intrinsically anti-racist. Prevailing accounts cast liberal thinkers as making this assertion primarily with the intent to occlude white supremacy – a symptom of 'colonial-racist guilt syndrome' (Hobson, 2012: 320; Morefield, 2014: 7–11). Particularly from the interwar period, liberals found themselves increasingly unable to turn away from anti-colonial nationalism and became far less inclined to invoke the language of racial hierarchy in imperial apologetics, what one scholar characterises as a desire to 'curb open manifestations of white racism in order to contain reactions to it' (Füredi, 1998: 2).

The case of Hobhouse suggests that we might achieve a sharper understanding of this history if we also attend to the provincial dynamics animating ideological innovation around 'race'. The language of race could be marshalled by liberals not simply as a way to occlude the domination of colonised peoples, though this certainly was a routine move; it could also be used as a rhetorical tool in debates within the metropole to contest liberal identity. In the Edwardian period, Hobhouse mobilised the language of racial equality and hierarchy to call attention to what he saw to be liberal hypocrisy and to undermine competing accounts of liberal empire. Rather than seeking to reform the late empire or shore up its eroding legitimacy, he had a far more self-interested aim: to advance his version of liberalism as *the* authoritative account in a fiercely contested field. Concerned less with racialised violence than his contemporaries' support of it, Hobhouse declared his opposition to 'race-domination'. Defending this position demanded extensive intellectual labour, and in undertaking it Hobhouse offered a novel vision of liberalism against 'race'.

Acknowledgements

For helpful comments on earlier versions of this article, I am grateful to Deborah Clutton, Elisabeth Eibner, Maximilian Fenner, James Hunt, Ben Jackson, Michael Kretowicz, Amira Möding, and the participants of the Histories of Race graduate workshop at Cambridge. I am particularly grateful to Duncan Bell, the journal editors, and the two anonymous reviewers for their valuable feedback. All errors are my own.


Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and publication of this article: This research was supported by an External Research Studentship and the Prince of Wales Studentship from Trinity College, Cambridge, and a Cambridge Trust Scholarship.

ORCID iD

Benjamin R Y Tan  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6278-4996>

Notes

1. While the English term ‘liberalism’ took on a specifically political meaning in the early-nineteenth century, only in the last three decades of that century did it come to denote a coherent set of principles (Collini, 1991: 181). Even then, the term was little-discussed as an intellectual tradition, in the sense that Hobhouse uses it, until the interwar period (Bell, 2016: 74).
2. Though the use of ‘race’ to justify imperialism appears much earlier, here I discuss Anglophone liberalism, which as a reflexive political category dates to the early-nineteenth century.
3. Lord Rosebery, University of Glasgow Rectorial Address, 16 November 1900, reprinted in Rosebery (1921: 258).
4. For example, Hobson (1902: 237).
5. Holthaus (2018), Sylvest (2009: 211–16), Weinstein (2007b). Notable exceptions include Bell (2016: 349–54), Schwarz (2011: 322–3), discussed below.
6. See, for instance, the early issues of the Society’s journal, the *Sociological Review*, first issued in 1908; Hobhouse served as its inaugural editor.
7. Nationalities and Subject Races Committee (1910: 2). The conference brought together anti-colonial activists and sympathetic British progressives, and called for ‘the ideal of a many-coloured cosmopolitanism of free nations as opposed to a colourless and mechanical cosmopolitanism of big Powers and subject races’ (Nationalities and Subject Races Committee, 1910: viii).
8. Füredi (1998), Lauren (1988, ch. 4). For an alternative and influential historical account, see Barkan (1992).

9. Porter (2008), Claeys (2010), Taylor (1991). On the Rainbow Circle, see Freeden (1989). On their use of the label 'progressive', see Clarke (1974).
10. For example, Hobhouse (1901b). On the contemporary language of 'sane' and 'insane' imperialism, see Boucher (2018).
11. This status is explained, in part, by the theoretical ambition and scope of Hobson's *Imperialism: A Study*, and its reception among later socialists, most notably Vladimir Lenin.
12. See, for example, Claeys (2010: 272–5), Sylvest (2009: 211–16), Bell (2016: 341–62), Clarke (1978).
13. On the abolitionist discourse around the 'new slaveries' in the *fin de siècle*, see Grant (2005), Lorimer (2013: chs. 7–8), Satre (2005).
14. For example, Hobhouse (1904: 35–6). On Emily Hobhouse's role in the war, and her place in the broader pro-Boer movement, see Auld (1975), Davey (1978) and Riedi (2013).
15. Though I find no evidence that the two men met, they exchanged letters in the 1920s and Hobhouse would endorse the work of Du Bois's National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Du Bois, 1922; Hobhouse, 1928). It is possible they corresponded earlier, given their shared involvement in the 1911 Universal Races Congress.
16. On Murray's liberal imperialism, see Morefield (2005).
17. Notably, Hobhouse (1902e), in his generally favourable review of *Imperialism* for the *Speaker*, conspicuously omitted Hobson's prolific use of the term 'lower races'.
18. On Mill's use of civilisation, see Pitts (2005: 133–62), Mantena (2010: 30–9). For an alternative reading of Mill on imperial domination, see Marwah (2019).
19. As discussed below, however, Hobhouse was not consistent in his advocacy of the 'colour-franchise'.
20. Note, however, that Hobhouse (1911a: 43) sometimes speculated about the incompatibility of 'white civilisation' with the rest of the world, which rested on the claim of non-white backwardness: 'A specious extension of the white man's rights to the black may be the best way of ruining the black'.
21. One definition of race listed in the first edition of the Oxford English Dictionary was: 'The fact or condition of belonging to a particular people or ethnical stock; *the qualities, etc., resulting from this*' (Murray, 1914: 87; emphasis added).
22. On Hobhouse's use of Spencer's thought, see Collini (1979: 162–3), Sylvest (2009: 210–15).
23. Based on searches of Hansard and Google's digitised Anglophone corpus accessed via Google Books and Google Ngram.
24. For instance, Leander Starr Jameson, of the abortive Jameson Raid (1895) and later prime minister of the Cape Colony (1904–8), was quoted in the *Review of Reviews* (1904: 339) as describing the Boers as motivated by 'the principle of racial ascendancy, [who] utterly refused to accept the principle of equal rights'.
25. See, too, the inclusion of Hobhouse's psychological ideas in Park and Burgess (1921: 190–3).
26. Hobhouse (1903b: 345). Here, Hobhouse was reviewing American sociologist Lester Ward's *Pure Sociology*, published in 1903.
27. On Hobhouse's affinities with Comtean Positivists, see Collini (1979: 152n16), Claeys (2010: 272ff). While Hobhouse used the term 'humanitarian' rather than 'cosmopolitan', here I follow Weinstein (2007a) in using the latter to refer to his prioritisation of individual autonomy, rather than that of nationalities or states, in his writings.
28. Hobhouse (1915: 61) distinguished the Citizenship stage by its recognition and protection of individual autonomy: 'Its component members or units are not groups, but individuals. In the clan and the tribe [...], the individual has no legal position'.

29. On the use of the Romans and Greeks among Edwardian imperialists, see Bell (2006), Morefield (2005: 72–95).
30. On Edwardian notions of race patriotism, see Bell (2020: 279–300).
31. Though Hobhouse did not cite Du Bois explicitly, he likely knew of Du Bois's writings. See n15 above.
32. This is broadly the interpretation advanced by Bell (2016: 350–4).
33. On the uses of 'race' by the Round Table figures, see Rich (1990, ch. 3), Thakur and Vale (2020), Morefield (2014: ch. 4), Kripp (2021).
34. The term alibis of empire is taken from Mantena (2010).

References

- Auld JW (1975) The liberal pro-Boers. *Journal of British Studies* 14(2): 78–101.
- Barkan E (1992) *The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States Between the World Wars*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Barnett SA, Birmingham C, Bourne HRF, et al. (1908) A Surviving Slavery: To the Editor of the Times. *The Times*, 21 November, 10.
- Bell D (2006) From ancient to modern in Victorian imperial thought. *The Historical Journal* 49(3): 735–759.
- Bell D (2016) *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Bell D (2020) *Dreamworlds of Race: Empire and the Utopian Destiny of Anglo-America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Boucher D (2018) 'Sane' and 'insane' imperialism: British idealism, new liberalism, and liberal imperialism. *History of European Ideas* 44(8): 1189–1204.
- Cain P (2007) Radicalism, gladstone and the liberal critique of disraelian 'imperialism'. In: Bell D (ed) *Victorian Visions of Global Order: Empire and International Relations in Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 215–238.
- Claeys G (2010) *Imperial Sceptics: British Critics of Empire, 1850–1920*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Clarke PF (1974) The progressive movement in England. *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 24: 159–181.
- Clarke P (1978) *Liberals and Social Democrats*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Collini S (1979) *Liberalism and Sociology: L. T. Hobhouse and Political Argument in England, 1880–1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Collini S (1991) *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Davey A (1978) *The British Pro-Boers, 1877–1902*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.
- Du Bois WEB (1922) Memo to Mr. L. T. Hobhouse, chairman of the proposed British committee on the Negro problem, ca. 1922. Amherst: MS 312 W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries. Available at <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b019-i333> (accessed 9 February 2021).
- Ellis JS (1998) 'The methods of barbarism' and the 'rights of small nations': War propaganda and British pluralism. *Albion* 30(1): 49–75.
- Freeden M (1978) *The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

- Freeden M (ed.) (1989) *Minutes of the Rainbow Circle, 1894–1924*. London: Royal Historical Society.
- Freeden M (1996) *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Freeden M (2005) *Liberal Languages: Ideological Imaginations and Twentieth-Century Progressive Thought*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Füredi F (1998) *The Silent War: Imperialism and the Changing Perception of Race*. London: Pluto Press.
- Grant K (2005) *A Civilised Savagery: Britain and the New Slaveries in Africa, 1884–1926*. New York: Routledge.
- Hall C (2002) *Civilising Subjects: Colony and Metropole in the English Imagination, 1830–1867*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Halliday RJ (1968) The sociological movement, the Sociological Society and the genesis of academic sociology in Britain. *Sociological Review* 16: 377–398.
- Hammond JL (1900) Colonial and foreign policy. In: Murray G, Hirst FW and Hammond JL (eds) *Liberalism and the Empire: Three Essays*. London: R. Brimley Johnson, pp. 158–211.
- Hobhouse LT (1899) The foreign policy of collectivism. *The Economic Review* 9: 197–220.
- Hobhouse LT (1901a) *Mind in Evolution*. London: Macmillan.
- Hobhouse LT (1901b) A sane imperialist. *The Speaker*, 26 Oct, 102–103.
- Hobhouse LT (1902a) Democracy and liberty. *The Speaker*, 4 January, 443–389.
- Hobhouse LT (1902b) Democracy and imperialism. *The Speaker*, 18 January, 443–445.
- Hobhouse LT (1902c) The growth of imperialism. *The Speaker*, 25 January, 474–475.
- Hobhouse LT (1902d) The intellectual reaction. *The Speaker*, 1 February, 501–502.
- Hobhouse LT (1902e) Democracy and empire. *The Speaker*, 18 October, 75–76.
- Hobhouse LT (1903a) The native question in South Africa, to the editor of the Manchester Guardian. *The Manchester Guardian*, 6 February, 10.
- Hobhouse LT (1903b) Sociology in America. *The Speaker*, 11 July, 344–345.
- Hobhouse LT (1904) *Democracy and Reaction*. London: T. Fisher Unwin.
- Hobhouse LT (1909) *Democracy and Reaction*. 2nd ed. London: T. Fisher Unwin.
- Hobhouse LT (1911a) *Liberalism*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Hobhouse LT (1911b) The new spirit in America. *Contemporary Review* 100: 1–10.
- Hobhouse LT (1911c) *Social Evolution and Political Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hobhouse LT (1911d) The value and limitations of eugenics. *The Sociological Review* 4(4): 281–302.
- Hobhouse LT (1912) The prospects of Anglo-Saxon democracy. *The Atlantic Monthly* 109: 345–352.
- Hobhouse LT (1915) *Morals in Evolution: A Study in Comparative Ethics*. 3rd ed. London: Chapman & Hall.
- Hobhouse LT (1928) Letter from L. T. Hobhouse to W. E. B. Du Bois, 30 October 1928. Amherst: MS 312 W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries. Available at <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b043-i455> (accessed 9 February 2021).
- Hobson JA (1902) *Imperialism: A Study*. London: James Nibset.
- Hobson JA (1931) L. T. Hobhouse: A memoir. In: Hobson JA and Ginsberg M (eds) *L. T. Hobhouse: His Life and Work*. London: George Allen & Unwin pp. 15–96.
- Hobson JM (2012) *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory, 1760–2010*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Holthaus L (2018) *Pluralist Democracy in International Relations: L. T. Hobhouse, G. D. H. Cole, and David Mitrany*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Koditschek T (2011) *Liberalism, Imperialism, and the Historical Imagination: Nineteenth-Century Visions of a Greater Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kloppenbergt JT (1986) *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870–1920*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kripp J (2021) The creative advance must be defended: Miscegenation, metaphysics, and race war in Jan Smuts’s vision of the League of Nations. *American Political Science Review*. Epub ahead of print 6 Dec 2021. DOI: 10.1017/S0003055421001362.
- Lake M and Reynolds H (2008) *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lauren PG (1988) *Power and Prejudice: The Politics and Diplomacy of Racial Discrimination*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Lorimer D (2013) *Science, Race Relations and Resistance: Britain, 1870–1914*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Mackley S (2018) Liberal Party politics, the South African War, and the rhetoric of imperial governance. *Twentieth Century British History* 29(1): 1–24.
- Mantena K (2010) *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Marwah IS (2019) *Liberalism, Diversity and Domination: Kant, Mill, and the Government of Difference*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Matthew HCG (1973) *The Liberal Imperialists: The Ideas and Politics of a Post-Gladstonian Élite*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mills CW (1997) *The Racial Contract*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Morefield J (2005) *Covenants Without Swords: Idealist Liberal Imperialism and the Spirit of Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Morefield J (2014) *Empires Without Imperialism: Anglo-American Decline and the Politics of Deflection*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Murray G (1900) The exploitation of inferior races in ancient and modern times. In: Murray G, Hirst FW and Hammond JL (eds) *Liberalism and the Empire: Three Essays*. London: R. Brimley Johnson, pp. 118–157.
- Murray JAH (ed.) (1914) *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Nationalities and Subject Races Committee (1910) *Nationalities and Subject Races: Report of Conference Held in Caxton Hall, Westminster June 28–30, 1910*. London: P. S. King & Son.
- Park RE and Burgess EW (1921) *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Pearson K (1901) *National Life from the Standpoint of Science*. London: Adam and Charles Black.
- Pitts J (2005) *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Pitts J (2019) Ideas of empire: civilization, race, and global hierarchy. In: Breckman W and Gordon PE (eds) *The Cambridge History of Modern European Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 447–469.
- Porter B (2008) *Critics of Empire: British Radicals and the Imperial Challenge*. 2nd ed. London: I. B. Tauris.
- Radick G (2007) *The Simian Tongue: The Long Debate About Animal Language*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Renwick C (2012) *British Sociology’s Lost Biological Roots: A History of Futures Past*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Review of Reviews (1904) Character sketch: Dr. Jameson, prime minister of the Cape. *Review of Reviews* 29(172): 328–340.
- Rich PB (1984) ‘The baptism of a new era’: The 1911 Universal Races Congress and the liberal ideology of race. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 7(4): 534–550.
- Rich PB (1990) *Race and Empire in British Politics*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Riedi E (2013) The women pro-Boers: gender, peace and the critique of empire in the South African war. *Historical Research* 86(231): 92–115.
- Ritchie DG (1902) *Studies in Political and Social Ethics*. London: Swan Sonnenschein.
- Rosebery Lord (1921) *Miscellanies: Literary and Historical*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Russell B (1907) The development of morals. *Independent Review* 12: 204–210.
- Satre LJ (2005) *Chocolate on Trial: Slavery, Politics, and the Ethics of Business*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press.
- Schwarz B (2011) *Memories of Empire, Volume I: The White Man’s World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Simhony A and Weinstein D (eds) (2001) *The New Liberalism: Reconciling Liberty and Community*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Spencer H (1902) *Facts and Comments*. London: Williams & Norgate.
- Spiller G (ed.) (1911) *Papers on Inter-Racial Problems Communicated to the First Universal Races Congress, Held at the University of London July 26–29, 1911*. London: P. S. King & Son.
- Steinberg OY (2019) *Race, Nation, History: Anglo-German Thought in the Victorian Era*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Sylvest C (2009) *British Liberal Internationalism, 1880–1930: Making Progress?* Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Taylor M (1991) Imperium et libertas? Rethinking the radical critique of imperialism during the nineteenth century. *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 19(1): 1–23.
- Thakur V and Vale PCJ (2020) *South Africa, Race and the Making of International Relations*. London: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Vucetic S (2011) *The Anglosphere: A Genealogy of a Racialized Identity in International Relations*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Weinstein D (2007a) Consequentialist cosmopolitanism. In: D Bell (ed.) *Victorian Visions of Global Order: Empire and International Relations in Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 267–290.
- Weinstein D (2007b) *Utilitarianism and the New Liberalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.