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CHAPTER 1

Introduction



Reordering the World

[C]entral to the lives of all empires have been the ways in which they have been constituted through language and their own self-representations: the discourses that have arisen to describe, defend, and criticize them, and the historical narratives that have been invoked to make sense of them.¹

—JENNIFER PITTS

From the earliest articulations of political thinking in the European tradition to its most recent iterations, the nature, justification, and criticism of foreign conquest and rule has been a staple theme of debate. Empires, after all, have been among the most common and the most durable political formations in world history. However, it was only during the long nineteenth century that the European empire-states developed sufficient technological superiority over the peoples of Africa, the Americas, and Asia to make occupation and governance on a planetary scale seem both feasible and desirable, even if the reality usually fell far short of the fantasy. As Jürgen Osterhammel reminds us, the nineteenth century was “much more an age of empire than . . . an age of nations and nation-states.”² The largest of those empires was governed from London.

Even the most abstract works of political theory, Quentin Skinner argues, “are never above the battle; they are always part of the battle itself.”³ The ideo-

¹ Pitts, “Political Theory of Empire and Imperialism,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 13 (2010), 226.

² Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Princeton, 2014), 392. On the nineteenth-century imperial order, see also C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914* (Oxford, 2004); Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History* (Princeton, 2010), chs. 10–11. On some of the distinctive features of Victorian imperialism, see Duncan Bell, “Victorian Visions of Global Order,” in *Victorian Visions of Global Order*, ed. Bell (Cambridge, 2007), 1–25.

³ Skinner, *Hobbes and Republican Liberty* (Cambridge, 2008), xvi.

logical conflict I chart in the following pages was one fought over the bitterly contested terrain of empire. The main, though not the only, combatants I survey are British liberal political thinkers—philosophers, historians, politicians, imperial administrators, political economists, journalists, even an occasional novelist or poet. Multifaceted and constantly mutating, liberalism was chiefly a product of the revolutionary ferment of the late eighteenth century, of the complex dialectic between existing patterns of thought and the new egalitarian and democratic visions pulsating through the Euro-Atlantic world. A squabbling family of philosophical doctrines, a popular creed, a resonant moral ideal, the creature of a party machine, a comprehensive economic system, a form of life: liberalism was all of these and more. Intellectuals were central to the propagation and renewal of this expansive ideology, though they were far from the only agents involved. From Bentham to Hobson, from Macaulay to Mill, from Spencer to Sidgwick, a long parade of thinkers helped sculpt the contours of the evolving tradition, elaborating influential accounts of individual freedom, moral psychology, social justice, economic theory, and constitutional design. Liberal thinkers wrote extensively about the pathologies and potentialities of empire, developing both ingenious defenses and biting critiques of assorted imperial projects. The conjunction of a vibrant intellectual culture and a massive and expanding imperial system makes nineteenth-century Britain a vital site for exploring the connections between political thought and empire in general, and liberal visions of empire in particular. The vast expanses of the British empire provided both a practical laboratory and a space of desire for liberal attempts to reorder the world.

Reordering the World collects together a selection of essays that I have written over the last decade. Some explore the ways in which prominent thinkers tackled the legitimacy of conquest and imperial rule, while others dissect themes that pervaded imperial discourse or address theoretical and historiographical puzzles about liberalism and empire. They are united by an ambition to probe the intellectual justifications of empire during a key period in modern history. The materials I analyze are the product of elite metropolitan culture, including works of technical philosophy and recondite history, but also pamphlets, speeches, editorials, periodical articles, and personal correspondence. Such sources helped constitute the intellectual lifeblood of Victorian political discourse, feeding into the creation of a distinctive “imperial commons,” a globe-spanning though heavily stratified public constituted in part through the production and circulation of books, periodicals, and newspapers.⁴ The bulk of the volume focuses on the late Victorian and Edwardian eras, the years that Eric Hobsbawm once characterized as the “age of empire.”⁵

⁴ See Antoinette Burton and Isabel Hofmeyr, “The Spine of Empire?,” in *Ten Books That Shaped the British Empire*, ed. Burton and Hofmeyr (Durham, NC, 2014), 1–28. Later, of course, radio, cinema, and television added new dimensions to the imperial commons.

⁵ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875–1914* (London, 1987).

During that period the empire assumed a newfound significance in political argument, looming large over debates on a plethora of issues from social policy to geopolitical strategy and beyond. However, I also explore earlier currents of political thinking, and trace some of the echoes of nineteenth-century ideologies across the twentieth century and into the present.

Political Thought and Empire

As late as 2006 Anthony Pagden could write that the study of empire had until recently been “relegated to the wastelands of the academy.”⁶ It was dragged in from the cold during the 1980s as postcolonial scholarship percolated through the humanities (and more unevenly across the social sciences). Imperial history was rejuvenated, moving swiftly from the periphery to the center of historical research, where it remains ensconced to this day.⁷ Political theory, like political science more broadly, has proven rather more resistant to the imperial turn. During the postwar years the field was characterized by a revealing silence about both the history of empire and the wave of decolonization then overturning many of the governing norms and institutions that had shaped the architecture of world order for five centuries.⁸ Adam Smith remarked in the *Wealth of Nations* that the “discovery” of the Americas was one of the “most important events recorded in the history of mankind,” and he and his contemporaries, as well as many of their nineteenth-century heirs, wrestled incessantly with its meaning and consequences.⁹ Political theorists barely registered its passing.¹⁰ Mainstream approaches to the subject, at least

⁶ Pagden, “The Empire’s New Clothes,” *Common Knowledge*, 12/1 (2006), 36.

⁷ For accounts of the revival, see Linda Colley, “What Is Imperial History Now?,” in *What Is History Now?*, ed. David Cannadine (Basingstoke, 2002); John Mackenzie, “The British Empire,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 43/1 (2015), 99–124; Dane Kennedy, “The Imperial History Wars,” *Journal of British Studies*, 54/1 (2015), 1–22.

⁸ For exceptions that prove the rule, see Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* [1951] (New York, 1985), pt. 2; John Plamenatz, *On Alien Rule and Self-Government* (London, 1960); Louis Hartz, ed., *The Founding of New Societies* (New York, 1964). Yet imperial questions often intruded in unexpected places; see, for example, James Tully’s analysis of the subtle imperial entailments of Isaiah Berlin’s seminal essay on liberty. Tully, “‘Two Concepts of Liberty’ in Context,” in *Isaiah Berlin and the Politics of Freedom*, ed. Bruce Baum and Robert Nichols (Abingdon, 2013), 23–52.

⁹ Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* [1776], ed. R. H. Campbell, Andrew S. Skinner, and W. B. Todd (Oxford, 1976), bk. 4, ch. 7, p. 166. The only other event of equal significance, he wrote, was the opening of “a passage to the East Indies by the Cape of Good Hope.” For a brilliant account of Smith and his context, see Istvan Hont, *Jealousy of Trade* (Cambridge, MA, 2005); Hont, *The Politics of Commercial Society*, ed. Béla Kapossy and Michael Sonenscher (Cambridge, MA, 2015).

¹⁰ The same was true of much postwar social science. For conflicting interpretations of the role of empire and decolonization in International Relations, the scholarly field dedicated to the analysis of world politics, see Nicolas Guilhot, “Imperial Realism,” *International History Review*, 36/4

in the Anglo-American tradition, continue to argue about the nature of justice, democracy, and rights, while ignoring the ways in which many of the ideas and institutions of contemporary politics have been (de)formed or inflected by centuries of Western imperialism—“this half millennium of tyranny against diverse civilisational forms of self-reliance and association”¹¹—and the deep complicity in this enterprise of the canon from which they draw inspiration, concepts, arguments, and authority. While a persistent tattoo of criticism has been maintained by dissident scholars, it has made little impact on the core concerns or theoretical approaches of the field.¹²

Historians of political thought have been more willing to take empire and its multifarious legacies seriously, tracing the ways in which European thinkers grappled with projects of imperial conquest and governance.¹³ One of the guiding themes of this scholarship—sometimes rendered explicit, sometimes lurking in the wings—has been a concern with the relationship between liberal political thought and empire, between the dominant ideology of the contemporary Western world and some of the darkest, most consequential entanglements of its past.¹⁴ Both the political context for this scholarly reorientation and the stakes involved in it are clear. Against a backdrop of numerous “humanitarian intervention” operations, blood-letting in Iraq, Afghanistan and beyond, the forever war against terror, challenges from competing theocratic fundamentalisms, the specter of neoliberal globalization, and a burgeoning interest in questions of global poverty and inequality, the ethico-political status of liberalism has been put in question. Is it necessarily an imperial doctrine or a welcome antidote to imperial ambition? Perhaps liberals should face up to their imperial obligations rather than ducking them? “Nobody likes empires,” Michael Ignatieff argues, “but there are some problems for which there are only imperial solutions.”¹⁵ If so, what are they? Alternatively, is it possible to foster anti-imperial forms of politics, liberal or other-

(2014), 698–720; Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics* (Ithaca, 2015). See also John Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics* (Cambridge, 2012), chs. 8–13.

¹¹ James Tully, “Lineages of Informal Imperialism,” in *Lineages of Empire*, ed. Duncan Kelly (Oxford, 2009), 29.

¹² For acute criticisms of this tendency, see Charles Mills, “Decolonizing Western Political Philosophy,” *New Political Science*, 37/1 (2015), 1–24. The partial exception to this claim is the literature on historical injustice.

¹³ For influential examples, see Richard Tuck, *The Rights of War and Peace* (Oxford, 1999); Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World* (London, 1995); David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 2000). The literature is discussed in Pitts, “Political Theory of Empire”; David Armitage, *Foundations of Modern International Thought* (Cambridge, 2013), pt. 1.

¹⁴ Valuable earlier accounts include Bernard Semmel, *Imperialism and Social Reform* (Cambridge, MA, 1960); Semmel, *The Rise of Free Trade Imperialism* (Cambridge, 1970); Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India* (Oxford, 1959); A. P. Thonton, *The Imperial Idea and Its Enemies* (London, 1959); Donald Winch, *Classical Political Economy and Colonies* (Cambridge, 1965).

¹⁵ Ignatieff, *Empire Lite* (London, 2003), 11.

wise, in an increasingly interdependent world? Such concerns permeate the febrile debate. In chapter 2 I discuss some of the main trends in the scholarship, as well as identifying some of its weaknesses

Throughout the book I treat liberalism chiefly as an actor's category, a term to encompass thinkers, ideas, and movements that were regarded as liberal at the time. (In chapter 3, I discuss the origins and development of liberal discourse in Britain and the United States.) Nineteenth-century British liberalism drew on multiple sources and was splintered into a kaleidoscope of ideological positions, some of which overlapped considerably, while others pulled in different directions. Indeed one of the main purposes of *Reordering the World* is to highlight the ideological complexity and internal variability of liberalism, and in doing so to call into question sweeping generalizations about it. Benthamite utilitarianism, classical political economy, the historical sociology of the Scottish Enlightenment, Comtean positivism, partially digested German, French, and Greek philosophy, an emergent socialist tradition, the expansive legacies of republicanism, assorted forms of political theology, miscellaneous evolutionary theories, the democratic ethos inherited from the revolutionary era, the comforting embrace of Burkean organicism: all (and more) fed the cacophony. They cross-fertilised to spawn various identifiable articulations of liberal thinking, several of which are discussed in the following chapters. These include liberal Whig ideology (Macaulay, for example), forms of radical liberalism (including, in their different ways, Richard Cobden, John Stuart Mill, and Herbert Spencer), and late Victorian "new liberalism" (most notably J. A. Hobson and L. T. Hobhouse).¹⁶ This list is far from exhaustive, of course, and the period was also populated by multiple ideological hybrids, idiosyncratic figures whose ideas are hard to categorize, and less conspicuous or long-lived threads of political thinking. While they differed in many respects, including the philosophical foundations of their ideas and the public policies they endorsed, all shared a commitment to individual liberty, constitutional government, the rule of law, the ethical significance of nationality, a capitalist political economy, and belief in the possibility of moral and political progress.¹⁷ But the ways in which they interpreted, combined, and lexically ordered these abstract ideas, as well as the range of institutions they prescribed as necessary for their realization, varied greatly. So too did their

¹⁶ For different perspectives on Victorian liberalism, see Richard Bellamy, *Liberalism and Modern Society* (Cambridge, 1992); Bellamy, ed., *Victorian Liberalism* (Abingdon, 1990); John Burrow, *Whigs and Liberals* (Oxford, 1988); Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists* (Oxford, 1991); Michael Freedon, *The New Liberalism* (Oxford, 1978); Elaine Hadley, *Living Liberalism* (Chicago, 2010); Simon Gunn and James Vernon, eds., *The Peculiarities of Liberal Modernity in Imperial Britain* (Berkeley, 2011); Peter Mandler, ed., *Liberty and Authority in Victorian Britain* (Oxford, 2006); J. P. Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism* (Cambridge, 2009).

¹⁷ Note that this is an empirical claim about the ideological commitments of Victorian liberalism, not a conceptual or normative evaluation of the necessary or sufficient elements of liberal political thinking in general. For further discussion on this methodological issue, see chapter 3.

attitudes to empire, though few rejected all its forms, and most (as I will argue) endorsed the formation of settler colonies.

British imperial expansion was never motivated by a single coherent ideology or a consistent strategic vision. This was the grain of truth in the historian J. R. Seeley's famous quip that the empire seemed to have been "acquired in a fit of absence of mind."¹⁸ Characterized by instability, chronically uncoordinated, and plagued by tensions between and within its widely dispersed elements, it was "unfinished, untidy, a mass of contradictions, aspirations and anomalies."¹⁹ Yet despite this, or perhaps because of it, the empire was a subject of constant deliberation, celebration, denunciation, and anxiety.²⁰ It was, as Jennifer Pitts notes in the epigraph, partly constituted (and contested) through language and legitimating representations. One of the main goals of imperial ideologists was to impose order on the untidy mass, to construct a coherent view of the past, present, and future that served to justify the existence of the empire, while their critics repeatedly stressed the manifest dangers of embarking on foreign conquest and rule. Imperial themes were woven through the fabric of nineteenth-century British political thinking, from the abstract proclamations of philosophers to the vernacular of parliamentary debate through to quotidian expressions of popular culture. Conceptions of liberty, nationality, gender, and race, assumptions about moral equality and political rationality, debates over the scope and value of democracy, analyses of political economy, the prospects of "civilization" itself: all were inflected to varying degrees with imperial concerns, explicit or otherwise.

While each chapter can be read as a self-contained study of a particular topic, two general themes run through the book. The first is the pivotal importance of *settler colonialism*. As I argue in greater detail in chapter 2, the welcome revival of imperial history in the 1980s produced its own lapses and silences, one of the most significant of which was the sidelining of settler colonialism—or "colonization" as it was called at the time—in accounts of the long nineteenth century. There is a considerable historical irony involved in this redistribution of attention, given that the sub-discipline of imperial history was created at the turn of the twentieth century as part of a conscious effort to proselytize the superiority of the settler empire over other imperial

¹⁸ Seeley, *The Expansion of England* (London, 1883), 8.

¹⁹ John Darwin, *The Empire Project* (Cambridge, 2011), xi. Darwin's work offers a powerful structural account of the empire as a fragile, fragmented system, the fate of which was ultimately dependent on wider geopolitical currents largely outside British control. For some brief reflections on his work, see Duncan Bell, "Desolation Goes before Us," *Journal of British Studies*, 54/4 (2015), 987–93.

²⁰ My understanding of ideology has been influenced by the work of Michael Freeden and Quentin Skinner. See, for example, Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory* (Oxford, 1998); Freeden, *The Political Theory of Political Thinking* (Oxford, 2013); Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 2002). See also the discussion in chapter 4, section 2.

spaces, above all India.²¹ While (what became) Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa were far less heavily populated than India, they nevertheless played a crucial role in the liberal imperial imagination, especially during the “age of empire.” In recent years the imbalance has been corrected and settler colonialism is once again a lively source of historical debate.²² Replicating the earlier pattern of omission, however, much of the literature on nineteenth-century British imperial political thought has consistently underplayed the significance of the colonies. Among other things, this has led to a skewed understanding of liberal accounts of empire. As I hope to demonstrate, acknowledging the importance of settler colonialism in nineteenth-century political thought unsettles some of the main ways in which scholars have interpreted the nature of “imperial” and “anti-imperial” arguments since the late eighteenth century.

The second recurrent theme is the multivalent role that historical consciousness performed in shaping visions of empire. While it is certainly arguable that political economists were the most influential imperial ideologists in the first half of the century, historians assumed this mantle in the second half. From James Mill and Macaulay to Froude and Seeley, historians were among the most prominent imperial thinkers, writing and rewriting the history of empire to bolster specific political projects.²³ Their messages resonated in a culture obsessed with the past and the lessons it purportedly encoded.²⁴ The “English,” Seeley observed in 1880, “guide ourselves in the great political questions by great historical precedents.”²⁵ Historical-mindedness, as it was often called, structured political argument, rendering some lines of reasoning more intelligible, more perspicacious, and more plausible, than others. Precedent, tradition, organic development: all were invoked *ad infinitum*. It was this obsession with history that prompted A. V. Dicey to complain that it was better to be found guilty of “petty larceny” than to admit to skepticism about the universal validity of the historical method or to remain unconvinced by

²¹ See, in particular, Amanda Behm, “The Bisected Roots of Imperial History,” *Recherches Britanniques*, 1/1 (2011), 54–77. For the educational networks binding Greater Britain, see Tamsin Pietsch, *Empire of Scholars* (Manchester, 2013).

²² See the references in chapter 2, section 3.

²³ On James Mill, see Javeed Majeed, *Ungoverned Imaginings* (Oxford, 1992); on Macaulay, see Catherine Hall, *Macaulay and Son* (London, 2012); on Seeley, see chapter 11. Tadhg Foley argues that from the 1830s onwards, colonization was “theorized and justified by the hired-prize fighters of empire totally in economic terms.” Foley, “An Unknown and Feeble Body;” in *Studies in Settler Colonialism*, ed. Fiona Bateman and Lionel Pilkington (Basingstoke, 2011), 10. However, this sweeping contention is implausible, especially when directed at the second half of the nineteenth century.

²⁴ For an insightful recent analysis, see Theodore Koditschek, *Liberalism, Imperialism, and the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge, 2011).

²⁵ Seeley, “Political Somnambulism,” *Macmillan’s Magazine*, 43 (1880), 32.

the patent superiority of “historical-mindedness.”²⁶ Three of my chapters are thus dedicated to the imperial thought of renowned late Victorian historians. But the imaginative significance of history was not confined to the writings of professional scholars. Rather, a sense of the importance of historical time—of the legitimating functions of precedent and tradition, of appeals to ancient authorities and the rhetoric of longevity, of the temporal logic of decline and fall, of the uses and abuses of historical analogies and metaphors, of the political possibilities inherent in the technological “annihilation” of time and space—helped animate and condition imperial discourse.

Structure of the Book

Offered as an invitation for further reflection rather than an exhaustive account of the topic, *Reordering the World* seeks to illuminate significant aspects of imperial debate and potentially open up new lines of inquiry. The book is divided into three parts. The first, “Frames,” contains three essays that probe the diverse meanings of liberalism and empire. Part II, “Themes,” comprises four historical essays that examine some salient topics in Victorian imperial thought (and beyond). The six chapters in the third part, “Thinkers,” dissect the imperial political thought of influential philosophers and historians, focusing in particular (though not exclusively) on their accounts of settler colonialism. Chapter 2 was written especially for this volume, while chapter 11 combines new research with some previously published materials.²⁷ The remaining chapters were originally published in edited volumes and academic journals spanning the fields of political theory, history, and international relations. I have made only minor changes to them, occasionally excising some of the original text to avoid undue repetition, correcting stylistic infelicities where possible, and identifying connections and disjunctions between the chapters where appropriate.

Chapter 2 opens with a discussion of the mutable vocabulary of empire and liberalism, before analyzing some of the most important recent scholarship on the subject. I argue that despite the excellence of much of this work, it exhibits two recurrent flaws. First, it tends to overlook the significance of set-

²⁶ Dicey, *Introduction to the Study of the Law of the Constitution*, 4th ed. (London, 1893), 14. On the ubiquity of “historical mindedness” in Victorian culture, see also Lord Acton, “Inaugural Lecture on the Study of History,” in *Lectures on Modern History*, ed. J. N. Figgis and R. V. Laurence (London, 1906), 22. On the role of historical imagination in Victorian political thinking, see especially John Burrow, *Whigs and Liberals* (Oxford, 1988); Stefan Collini, Donald Winch, and John Burrow, *That Noble Science of Politics*, (Cambridge, 1983), chs. 6–7.

²⁷ As well as including a considerable amount of new research, chapter 11 synthesizes material from several chapters of Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain* (Princeton, 2007); as well as Bell, “Unity and Difference,” *Review of International Studies*, 31/3 (2005), 559–79.

tlar colonialism in the political imagination of the Victorians and their successors. In particular, many British liberals regarded settler colonialism as a preferable model of empire to the conquest and alien rule associated with India, and they invested their hopes in assorted projects of colonial reform. The colonies, they argued, were spaces of political freedom for their (white, “civilized”) inhabitants, and as such they were not burdened by the moral and political dangers associated with the despotic rule prevalent throughout the rest of the empire. This made them ideal communities for the articulation of liberal ideas and institutions. Second, I argue that much work on political theory and empire is constrained by “canonical” approaches to intellectual history. Focusing on a narrow range of “major” thinkers can be illuminating—I do so myself in several chapters—but it can also lead to oversights and omissions, especially when trying to capture broad patterns of thinking. In particular, attempts to divine a connection between the inner essence of liberalism and imperialism efface the complexity and messiness of the historical record. To investigate imperial discourse it is necessary to dig deeper into the imperial commons, incorporating an extensive archive of intellectual production.

The following two chapters explore each side of the “liberal empire” compound. Isaiah Berlin once described freedom as “a term whose meaning is so porous that there is little interpretation that it seems able to resist.”²⁸ Something similar could be said about liberalism. Challenging conventional understandings of the liberal tradition, chapter 3 presents both a theoretical argument and a historical interpretation. Theoretically, I propose that liberalism can be characterized as the sum of the arguments that have been classified as liberal, and recognized as such by other self-proclaimed liberals, over time and space. The historical argument suggests that between 1850 and 1950 the meaning of liberalism was transformed in the Anglo-American world. For most of the nineteenth century, liberalism was commonly viewed as a product of late eighteenth-century revolutionary turmoil, but it was reimagined during the opening decades of the twentieth century, its origins pushed further back in time and its scope expanded massively, such that it came to be seen as the overarching ideology of Western modernity. This transmutation was profoundly influenced by the wars fought against “totalitarianism,” both hot and cold. I illustrate this example of ideological shape-shifting by tracing how John Locke came to be conscripted as a paradigmatic liberal during that period. Demonstrating the instability of “liberalism” as a category, this analysis challenges the unreflective manner in which the term is employed in contemporary scholarly inquiry—including (but not only) in debates over liberalism and empire. The final chapter in the section anatomizes different types of argument made about empire, especially during the last couple of hundred years. I distinguish between political ideologies, theories, and imaginaries,

²⁸ Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty” [1958], in *Liberty*, ed. David Miller (Oxford, 1991), 168.

before sketching an ideal-typical account of ideologies of justification, governance, and resistance. Throughout, I emphasize the variety of arguments available to both advocates and critics of empire and colonialism, the patchwork forms they often assumed in political disputation, and some of their contemporary legacies.

Chapter 5 examines how historical time was conceptualized in imperial debate, focusing in particular on the diverse invocations of classical models of empire. Contrary to most scholarship on the subject, I argue that Victorian imperialists were often keen to escape the gravitational pull of the ancients, because the resonant lesson they drew from the Romans and the Greeks was that empires were self-dissolving, that they were fragile and temporary forms of political order rather than the basis for permanence and stability. Roman experience taught that empires eventually collapsed in ruins, Greek experience that settler colonies only thrived when formally independent of the “mother country.” Neither vision appealed to those aiming to create a resilient imperial formation, and so they borrowed selectively from the hallowed past, arguing that unlike its predecessors and potential competitors the British empire was not condemned to repeat the ostensible pattern of all human history. I demarcate two popular argumentative strategies. One attempted to reconcile progress and empire by insisting that the British were unique in some important respect—usually their self-proclaimed ability to harmoniously combine “*libertas et imperium*” in a manner appropriate for an industrial, democratic age.²⁹ The other was to argue that Greater Britain—the settler colonies plus the “mother country”—constituted a radically new type of political association. According to such accounts, empire was transfigured into something else: a federation, a transcontinental state, a multinational commonwealth. It had transcended its originary form. This novel type of polity was not subject to traditional anxieties about dissolution, corruption, or over-extension, but was instead a pioneering manifestation of political trends reshaping world order at the time. It heralded the future rather than embodying the past.

Chapters 6 and 7 analyze aspects of the debate over Greater Britain that I didn’t cover in my earlier book on the subject.³⁰ The first discusses how the monarchy was figured in arguments about imperial federation. Queen Victoria was assigned two main functions. First, it was argued that the august institution of the monarchy could act as a marker of stability and constitutional fidelity in a globe-spanning imperial polity, thus reassuring skeptics that a strong thread of historical continuity ran through proposals for uniting Brit-

²⁹ The problematic of liberty and empire ran through modern European political thought. For the period until the end of the eighteenth century, see David Armitage, “Empire and Liberty,” in *Republicanism*, vol. 2, ed. Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge, 2002), 29–47.

³⁰ Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*.

ain and the settler colonies. The British political tradition would be reinforced, rather than undermined, by the creation of an imperial federal structure. This line of argument formed the basis for an audacious account of constitutional patriotism. Secondly, an idealized representation of Victoria served as an anchor for national identity across vast geographical distances, her popularity binding the far-flung peoples of her realm in close communion. Or so it was claimed. I also contend that the way in which she was often represented in imperial debate echoed an older civic humanist language of “patriot kingship,” a fantasy vision of the monarch as the enemy of corruption, the protector of the people, and the strong but benevolent leader of a dynamic commercial people. Chapter 7, meanwhile, argues that the purported scope of the “people” and the “public” was transformed in debates over colonial unification. Both were conceptually decoupled from the state and imaginatively extended to encompass the geographically fragmented settler empire. As innovative communications technologies revolutionized understandings of time and space, so thinkers began to envision new forms of political and cultural solidarity on a global scale.³¹ Greater Britain was conceptualized as a discrete political space populated by a unified “people”—coded typically as either a superior “race” or “nation”—and governed by a constitutional monarchy sensitive to the preferences of an emergent transoceanic public. This spatial extension prefigures recent debates about the possibility of creating a global public sphere.

The final chapter in the section steps back from the patterns of Victorian political argument, and seeks to locate the intellectual history of the British empire in a wider frame. It reads the debates over Greater Britain as a formative moment in what I term the “project for a new Anglo century”—the repeated attempt to create the political and social conditions necessary to secure the global domination of the “Anglo-Saxon” or “English-speaking” people. These were variations on the theme of white supremacy, a racial vision of global governance that frequently served as both a grounding assumption and a prescriptive conclusion throughout the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century. Towards the close of Victoria’s reign Gilbert Murray, leading classicist and liberal political thinker, voiced a widely shared supposition.

There is in the world a hierarchy of races. The bounds of it are not, of course, absolute and rigid . . . but on the whole, it seems that those nations which eat more, claim more, and get higher wages, will direct and rule the others, and the lower work of the world will tend in the long-

³¹ For more on the transformation of conceptions of time and space, see Duncan Bell, “Dissolving Distance,” *Journal of Modern History*, 77/3 (2005), 523–62; Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, ch. 3.

run to be done by the lower breeds of men. This much we of the ruling colour will no doubt accept as obvious.³²

While the specific theoretical frameworks and vocabularies used to justify this “hierarchy of races” mutated over time, it was nevertheless usually accepted as “obvious,” the commonsense of the geopolitical imagination. After outlining the overlapping debates about Greater Britain and the possibilities of an Anglo-American (re)union, I follow these ideas through the twentieth century and into our own world. I delineate four models that drew inspiration (and sometimes personnel) from the earlier Victorian debates: Anglo-American, imperial-commonwealth, democratic unionist, and world federalist. I conclude by discussing recent accounts of Anglo-world supremacy, suggesting that they should be interpreted as the latest iterations of a long-standing racialized vision of world order.

Section III examines the political thinking of some key Victorian public intellectuals, chiefly historians and philosophers. I start with a reading of John Stuart Mill. Recent scholarship on Mill has greatly improved understanding of his arguments about the ethical defensibility of imperial rule, and in particular his account of India, but it has tended to ignore or downplay his extensive writings on colonization. Yet this was a subject that Mill returned to frequently throughout his long and illustrious career. While initially he regarded colonization as a solution to the “social problem” in Britain, he came to believe that its legitimacy resided primarily in the universal benefits—civilization, peace, and prosperity—that it generated for humanity as a whole. In the final years of his life Mill seemed to lose faith in the project. Confronted with the political intransigence and violence of the settlers, yet refusing to give up on the settler empire altogether, his colonial romance gave way to a form of melancholic resignation.

Chapter 10—which was co-authored by Casper Sylvest—discusses the content and boundaries of liberal internationalism. An ideology that imagined a world of self-determining nation-states gradually socialized into cooperative interaction through international commerce, law, and incremental democratization, it was typically predicated on a distinction between “civilized” and “uncivilized” peoples, applying one set of arguments to those within the privileged circle and another to those who fell outside it. Many (but not all) of its fundamental assumptions about the nature and direction of progress in the international system were shared by large swathes of the Victorian and Edwardian intellectual elites. It remains a potent force to this day, the domi-

³² Murray, “The Exploitation of Inferior Races in Ancient and Modern Times,” in *Liberalism and the Empire*, by F. W. Hirst, Gilbert Murray, and J. L. Hammond (London, 1899), 156. On Murray’s theoretical account of empire and international politics, see Christopher Stray, ed., *Gilbert Murray Reassessed* (Oxford, 2007), chs. 11–12; Jeanne Morefield, *Covenants without Swords* (Princeton, 2004).

nant internationalist ideology of the modern West.³³ The chapter examines how the very different philosophical systems crafted by T. H. Green, Henry Sidgwick, and Herbert Spencer issued in similar prescriptions for the international system.³⁴ They diverged, though, over the legitimacy of empire, with Sidgwick adumbrating a fairly conventional liberal civilizational imperialism, Green largely silent on the issue, and Spencer a fierce critic.

Then it is the turn of the historians. In an account of Edward Freeman's lifework, J. A. Doyle observed that it was "scarcely possible" to avoid comparisons between Froude, Freeman, and Seeley. All three scaled the heights of the blossoming professional discipline in Britain. Seeley was Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge from 1869–1895, Freeman held the equivalent chair in Oxford from 1884–1892, whereupon he was succeeded (albeit briefly) by Froude. All three were leading public moralists, contributing to debates on a plethora of issues beyond their putative historical expertise.³⁵ Despite their many and varied differences, there was one "point of community" that united them. "To each of them history was something more than an inspiring and impressive drama. Each fully acknowledged the truth . . . that the things of history happened for an example; that it is only by a knowledge of history that the citizen can attain a clear understanding of the duties and responsibilities which lie about him." Yet this similarity, Doyle continued, produced divergent conclusions: "[I]t would be hard to imagine political ideas or conceptions of national life differing more widely than did those held by Freeman and those of his two contemporaries."³⁶ So it appeared to each of them and many of their readers.

It was a late Victorian platitude that Seeley's *The Expansion of England* (1883) and Froude's *Oceana* (1886) played a pivotal role in reorienting British attitudes to the settler colonies and stoking the fire of popular imperialism. "The work of Seeley and Froude in one sphere of literary activity, of Kipling in another, and the strong personality of Mr. Chamberlain . . . combined to draw

³³ For a recent critical analysis, see Beate Jahn, *Liberal Internationalism* (London, 2013). For a more positive account, see John Ikenberry, "Liberal Internationalism 3.0," *Perspectives on Politics*, 7/1 (2009), 71–87. See also the essays in Tim Dunne and Trine Flockhart, eds., *Liberal World Orders* (Oxford, 2013).

³⁴ For a more detailed analysis, covering the work of historians and lawyers as well as philosophers, see Casper Sylvest, *British Liberal Internationalism, 1880–1930* (Manchester, 2009). For a general history, see Mark Mazower, *Governing the World* (London, 2012), pt. 1.

³⁵ Doyle, "Freeman, Froude, Seeley," *Quarterly Review*, 182/364 (1895), 296. Doyle was a Fellow of All Souls, Oxford, best known for his multivolume history of the British colonization of North America. Doyle, *The English in America*, 5 vols. (London, 1882–1907). For the institutional and cultural context of this professionalization, see Reba Soffer, *Discipline and Power* (Stanford, 1994); Philippa Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional* (Cambridge, 1986); Peter Sless, *Learning and a Liberal Education* (Manchester, 1986). Their intellectual and social milieu is brilliantly evoked in Collini, *Public Moralists*.

³⁶ Doyle, "Freeman, Froude, Seeley," 296.

the outposts of the realm into a closer union,” wrote one informed observer.³⁷ Half a century later Hannah Arendt underlined their significance in her discussion of imperialism in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.³⁸ Disagreeing fundamentally over the appropriate way to study and write history—Froude harking back to the narrative mode of Macaulay, Seeley impressed by the rigorous historical positivism imported from Germany—they were nevertheless both ardent imperial federalists, keen to formally unite the scattered elements of the British colonial system. C. A. Bayly has argued that the decades prior to the outbreak of war in 1914 can be seen as an “idealist” age, with both nationalism and empire “tinctured with religion.”³⁹ In chapter 11 I argue that Seeley’s political thought, including his wildly popular account of empire, was structured by concepts—nation, history, state, civilization—that he interpreted in theological terms. I read his vision of world order as an idiosyncratic expression of “cosmopolitan nationalism,” an attempt to reconcile human universality with national particularity. Moreover, I contend that although he never outlined his plans for Greater Britain in any detail, he was committed to the creation of a federal nation-state encompassing Britain and its settler colonies. Chapter 12 engages Froude’s elusive political thought. I start by distinguishing two modes of justifying imperialism, a “liberal civilizational” model (as articulated by John Stuart Mill) that did so principally in terms of the benefits that it bestowed on subject populations, and a “republican” model that focused instead on a specific set of benefits—glory, honor, virtue—that accrued to the imperial state. The remainder of the chapter offers a “republican” interpretation of Froude’s writings on settler colonialism, arguing that both his diagnosis of the problems besetting modern Britain and his prescribed solutions were derived in part from his reading of the fate of the Roman Republic.

Freeman pursued a relentless intellectual vendetta against Froude, frequently challenging his credentials as a serious historian.⁴⁰ Freeman and Seeley had more in common: both were fairly conventional liberals, albeit of different stripes, and both concurred on the intimate connection between history and politics. But Freeman scorned the vision of empire articulated by

³⁷ W. Alleyne Ireland, “The Victorian Era of British Expansion,” *North American Review*, 172/533 (1901), 563. See also Ireland, “The Growth of the British Colonial Conception,” *Atlantic Monthly*, April 1899, 488–98; J. H. Muirhead, “What Imperialism Means” [1900], in *The British Idealists*, ed. David Boucher (Cambridge, 1997), 244.

³⁸ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 181–82. For Arendt on empire, see Richard King and Dan Stone, eds., *Hannah Arendt and the Uses of History* (Oxford, 2007), pt. 1; A. Dirk Moses, “Das römische Gespräch in a New Key,” *Journal of Modern History*, 85/4 (2013), 867–913.

³⁹ Bayly, “Michael Mann and Modern World History,” *Historical Journal*, 58/1 (2015), 334.

⁴⁰ On Freeman’s campaign against Froude, see Ian Hesketh, “Diagnosing Froude’s Disease,” *History and Theory*, 47/3 (2008), 373–95.

Seeley and Froude. Chapter 13 unpacks the intellectual sources of his skepticism. Drawing in particular on the history of federalism—a subject on which he was the recognized authority—he argued that plans for uniting the colonies were absurd, based on a flagrant misunderstanding of both the federal idea and the true meaning of empire. Properly understood, the history of empire instilled the need for colonial independence, not unification. But it would be a mistake to exaggerate Freeman’s anti-imperial credentials, or characterize him (following Doyle) as the antithesis of Seeley and Froude, because he shared with them a belief in the unity and superiority of the “English-speaking race.” His preferred political vehicle for this racial vision of world order was an alliance, cemented by common citizenship, between Britain and the United States, countries that were ordained to lead and police the world.⁴¹ Like many critics of formal empire during the period, Freeman was nevertheless committed to a hierarchical conception of global politics predicated on white racial supremacy.

The final full chapter analyzes two renowned “new liberal” thinkers, J. A. Hobson and L. T. Hobhouse, focusing in particular on how they conceived of the relationship between democracy, empire, and international politics between the late 1890s and the First World War. I start by highlighting how they positioned themselves in relation to the past and present of the mutating liberal tradition, before turning to examine their writings on settler colonialism, showing how they both supported projects for the unification of Greater Britain, albeit in a qualified manner. Posterity has been kind to Hobson, who is usually remembered as one of the major anti-imperial thinkers of the twentieth century (not least because of his influence on Lenin).⁴² Yet his writings present a rather more complicated picture, for he was not opposed to empire in all its forms, only to what he saw as pathological variants of it, and he was a keen advocate of settler colonialism. Hobhouse, meanwhile, sketched an idealized account of the colonial empire. He argued that if transmuted into a federal institution it would be compatible with democracy, in a manner that traditional forms of empire were not, and as such it could serve as a privileged agent of progress, fermenting the democratization of the international system and acting as a template for a future “international state.” Like many liberal thinkers, both Hobson and Hobhouse invested far more political hope in settler colonialism than in other modes of empire-building.

⁴¹ For more on the late Victorian interest in cooperation (even union) with the United States, including visions of “isopolitan citizenship,” see Duncan Bell, “Before the Democratic Peace,” *European Journal of International Relations*, 20/3 (2014), 647–70; Bell, “Beyond the Sovereign State,” *Political Studies*, 62/2 (2014), 418–34. I address the topic in a forthcoming book, *Dreamworlds of Empire*.

⁴² Lenin, *Imperialism* [1917], in *Selected Works* (Moscow, 1963), 1:667–766.

In the brief coda, I revisit some of the main lines of argument developed in the preceding chapters. Reiterating the centrality of historical-mindedness and settler colonialism in nineteenth-century visions of empire, I finish with some tentative suggestions about the need to “de-colonize” liberalism, to seek ways to acknowledge and transcend the legacies of colonial occupation and rule, rather than either ignoring this tainted history or rejecting liberalism altogether.

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