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British Idealism, Imperialism and the Boer War¹

David Boucher

Abstract

Nothing more than in passing has been written on the division among British Idealists over the justice and conduct of the second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), yet this episode in international relations was the most popular and heated topic of discussion in Britain during the latter part of the nineteenth century. J. H. Muirhead, dramatically compared the war with the American Civil War, and the Irish Home Rule proposals of the 1890s in its ability to divide opinion within and between parties and among the general public.² This article argues that divisions among the British Idealists over the justice of annexing the Boer republics to the British did not amount to an aversion to imperialism *per se*. I begin by demonstrating that all of the British Idealists were pro-Empire and supported the idea of exporting civilisation to the less civilised portions of the world. They differed over the desirability of methods to achieve the end. Some such as R. B. Haldane, F. H. Bradley and David George Ritchie, could sympathise with the likes of Cecil Rhodes and Alfred Milner, who were British white race supremacists, viewing the Boers as lower on the scale of civilisation because of their primitive farming methods and rudimentary enterprise. What determined the division of opinion among the British Idealists over the Boer War was largely personal factors. Idealist who supporters of the war personally admired Alfred Milner, the British High Commissioner for Southern Africa and Governor of the Cape Colony from 1897. While the pro Boers among the Idealists waived as more information became available over the issue of *jus ad bellum*, their

¹ I am indebted to the two anonymous reviewers, and the editor, Iain Hampsher Monk for their insightful and invaluable comments.

² J. H. Muirhead, 'What Imperialism Means' (1900), reprinted in *The British Idealists*, ed. David Boucher (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 237-252.

anti-war stance hardened in relation to *jus in bello* with the introduction of Kitchener's scorched earth policy and the high mortality rates of Boer women and children in the British concentration camps.

British Idealism and Overseas Imperialism

British Idealism was the dominant philosophy in Great Britain and its white settler colonies at the height of imperialistic adventurism in the latter part of nineteenth century. The philosophy was Hegelian in its inspiration, but unlike G. W. F. Hegel, who believed that the philosopher comes on the scene after the event and too late to have any influence, his British followers believed, like the materialist Marx, that the point of philosophy was to change the world and not just to understand it. The title of Henry Jones' book, *Idealism as a Practical Creed*, betrays this commitment.³ For all of the British Absolute Idealists, the individual's attainment of freedom is achieved through the state, which is an ethical organism that expresses the rational self-consciousness of its people. Hegel argued that each state 'has a primary and absolute entitlement to be a sovereign and independent power *in the eyes of others*, i.e. *to be recognised by them*.'⁴ In this respect colonialism, or imperialism, the subjection of one people by another, is the suppression of freedom or national self-consciousness. However, a state must undergo a process whereby it attains its rational self-consciousness and must experience the harsh discipline of subservience, as Athens and Rome did before achieving full self-consciousness and individuality. The moral progress of a nation entails 'slavery and tyranny' as necessary stages and are therefore 'relatively justified'.⁵

Colonialism is, then, a form of subjection or suppression in so far as colonial territories are not fully recognised as states, and their citizens therefore cannot realise their freedom through them. The only

³ Henry Jones, *Idealism as a Practical Creed* (Glasgow, Maclehose, 1909). See also Henry Jones, *The Working Faith of the Social Reformer* (London, Macmillan, 1910). I am indebted to Camilla Boisen and Peter Nicholson for bringing to my attention some of the materials I have used in this article.

⁴ G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed., Allen W. Wood (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991), §331.

⁵ G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), §435

justification for colonialism, or imperialism, is that among some peoples rational-self-consciousness had not yet attained the level at which freedom could be realised. The struggle for recognition in opposition to a colonial power facilitates its attainment, as Frantz Fanon in his more Hegelian moments recognised, but it cannot come without violence and struggle.⁶

The British Idealists expressed this idea somewhat differently, by emphasising the responsibility of the coloniser to assist in the development of the principles and practices of civilisation in order to build the capacity of the colonised for self-determination and the attainment of freedom. Each of the British Idealists on this basis condemned any justification of Imperialism which entailed the economic exploitation of colonised peoples by the coloniser. Henry Jones, for example, contended that the nation has a personality and character, which may not be fully developed, but it must always be respected as an end in itself, and never treated as a means. Respect for the personalities of distant nations, of their rights and freedoms are the foundation upon which the Empire was built.⁷

Almost all of the British Idealists believed that before a people could be free it must reach a level of rational self-consciousness which may require benevolent intervention, or at least the amelioration of the more insidious manifestations of capitalist adventurers, among whom some would count Cecil Rhodes. It was the responsibility of civilised nations to promote civilisation among primitive peoples with the objective of preparing them for self-government within the Empire. In reality this was a response to the fact that native communities were growing and repopulating traditional homelands which incoming settlers also wanted to claim. As competition grew and relations became rancorous, creative strategies were adopted to ameliorate the pressures. R. B. Haldane, the Liberal Imperialist and philosophical Idealist, believed that the British Parliament itself 'held power only as trustees for the empire as a whole', and that the House of Lords held out the prospect of representing the empire as a whole by including

⁶ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* (London, Pluto, 2008) pp. 168-73.

⁷ Henry Jones, 'A League of Learning', *Rice Institute Studies*, VI (1919), p. 292; and, Henry Jones, *The Principles of Citizenship* (London, Macmillan, 1919) p. 26.

Colonial Prime Ministers, Agents-General, and distinguished representatives from different parts of the empire'.⁸ This was a reference to white-settler communities, among which South Africa was counted.

The British Idealists were opponents of what was known as aggressive, or 'insane', imperialism and most supported the Boer republics in their struggle against Chamberlain's policies in South Africa which appeared to be a pretext for annexing the Transvaal and Orange Free State. The Empire was the form of social organisation that would constitute the moral community that had the capacity to transcend the state by means of a new kind of federalism. Contrary to the view that was current, and which L. T. Hobhouse reinforced, that the Idealists were state worshippers,⁹ they envisaged the Empire, particularly the white settler communities constituting a broader universal nationality, in which each nation, large and small, was able to express itself and participate in the wider ethical community. J. S. Mackenzie noticed in 1900 that almost overnight British people had moved from individualism, to a social perspective, and from being a member of a country to that of an empire.¹⁰ This, for J. H. Muirhead, represented the really remarkable phenomenon of the early twentieth century, that is, the abandonment of the ideal of national commonwealths and the rise of the growing commitment to a future of world empires.¹¹ John Watson and R. B. Haldane, described as 'the avowed champion of Liberal Imperialism',¹² saw the Empire in terms of a higher nationality transcending the traditional boundaries of sovereignty. In relation to the South African War Haldane envisaged a resolution consistent with the white settler communities and 'infinitely better for the Boers themselves than the narrow and exclusive oligarchy which prevailed before the war'.¹³ He envisaged a time when the Boers and British would coexist peacefully, 'co-operating for the ends of civilization'.¹⁴ The British Empire, by which Watson meant the self-governing colonies,

⁸ 'Mr Haldane in Glasgow. The Influence of Imperialism on Politics', *Glasgow Herald*, 24 October, 1900.

⁹ L. T. Hobhouse, *Democracy and Reaction* (London, Fischer Unwin, 1904). The criticisms were repeated despite numerous rebuttals. L. T. Hobhouse, *Metaphysical Theory of the State* (London, Allen and Unwin, 1918).

¹⁰ J. S. Mackenzie, 'The Source of Moral Obligation', *The International Journal of Ethics*, 10 (1900) p. 469.

¹¹ J. H. Muirhead, *The Service of the State* (London, John Murray, 1908), 104.

¹² An Old Parliamentary Hand, 'Mr. Richard Burdon Haldane K.C.', *Eastern Daily Press*, 12 August, 1901.

¹³ 'Mr Haldane. M.P., on the Settlement', *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 5 October, 1901.

¹⁴ Cited in 'Speech by Mr Haldane', *London Daily News*, 5 October, 1901.

constituted a perfect example of that ‘unity in diversity’ which is necessary to the cohesiveness of a single nation. The Empire is a ‘modern State’ that exhibits a common or ‘real general will’ in which sovereignty ‘consists in the practical operation of the system of institutions as a whole’.¹⁵ The problem it posed was: how could an empire become a state in any meaningful sense of the word. Whatever one thought of the Empire and the brutal manner in which it was acquired, it was a fact and Great Britain had the moral duty to protect its native peoples from private profiteers by exercising responsible government, preparing the way for self-government where possible, and promoting the common good of the colonies and Empire as a whole.

All of the British Idealists were imperialists of one shade or another, falling somewhere on the scale between what was commonly referred to as ‘sane’ and ‘insane’ imperialism. In general, they believed that it was the responsibility of civilised nations to promote civilisation among primitive peoples with the objective of preparing them for self-government within the Empire. Edward Caird concurred with fellow heads of Oxford colleges in regarding it as a duty to prepare succeeding generations of young men to become leaders and administrators in the Empire, and more importantly to propagate an enlightened Christianity. The duty of bringing civilisation to the ‘savages’ was a common theme among all of the Idealists, and Caird expressed it in terms typical of the times. He maintained that it is the duty of every good man ‘to teach the highest truth he knew to the savage tribes, who to ordinary eyes were almost like animals’.¹⁶ Enthusiastically ‘raising barbarous races to civilisation and Christianity’ redounded to the ‘imperial glory of England’.¹⁷

¹⁵ John Watson, *The State in Peace and War* (Glasgow, Maclehose, 1919) p. 273. Also see Viscount (R. B.) Haldane, ‘The Higher Nationality: A Study in Law and Ethics’, in *The Conduct of Life* (London, John Murray, 1914) pp. 97-136.

¹⁶ Edward Caird, *Lay Sermons and Addresses: Delivered in the Hall of Balliol College, Oxford* (Glasgow, Maclehose, 1907) p. 223.

¹⁷ Caird, *Lay Sermons*, p. 254.

Caird believed that imperialism could be justified to the extent that it contributed to the spiritualisation of individuals.¹⁸ In addressing the students of Balliol, Caird perpetuates what came to be the predominant colonialist myth that Britain had made its government ‘tend to the good of the governed’ and had opened ‘to the governed all of the privileges of their governors’.¹⁹ ‘True imperialism’ for Mackenzie involved ‘the recognition that we have our part to play with others in the great task of advancing humanity, that we have to join heartily with others in the promotion of peace, liberty, justice, and enlightenment, to which we hope all nations will be more devoted’.²⁰

The British idealists cohere around a group of ideas that were largely in opposition to Liberal Imperialism, but some give qualified support to it when it conformed to moral rather than geopolitical or economic principles. Liberal Imperialism, although tolerating a variety of opinion, tended to be expansionist in aspiration, believing that Great Britain must hold its own in the scramble for new territories and resources. In 1898 Lord Rosebery, for example, the former Liberal Prime Minister (1894-5), argued that the struggle between European peoples for greater shares in the division of the world meant that in a short time there would be little left to acquire. Britain had to secure for itself a greater stake, and avoid conceding territories already in its possession. This required a strong navy which was the ‘common possession of the race of Englishmen all over the world’.²¹ They established the Liberal League in 1902 with Rosebery as its president. Liberal imperialism based its social policies on free trade. What differentiated Liberal and Unionist justifications of imperialist policies was that the former posited

¹⁸ Colin Tyler, *Idealist Political Philosophy: Pluralism and Conflict in the Absolute Idealist Tradition* (London, Continuum, 2006) pp. 126-7.

¹⁹ Caird, *Lay Sermons*, p. 114. He nevertheless believed that we should not be complacent and hold our government to task when we believe that it is corrupting the higher principles of imperialism. *Lay Sermons*, 254.

²⁰ Mackenzie, ‘The Source of Moral Obligation’, p. 477-8.

²¹ ‘Lord Rosebury On Great Britain and America’, *The Times*, Friday, July 8, 1898, p. 8. The Leader of the Liberal Party elected in January, 1889, Campbell-Bannerman, was far more ambiguous, and careful not to reveal his position clearly in public.

that Free Trade be subject to higher taxation on the profits, including those from imperialistic ventures which would finance social reform. The Unionists posited using the higher revenues from Tariff reform.

Among the Idealists David Ritchie, R. B. Haldane and F. H. Bradley supported Liberal Imperialism. Haldane commented, for example, that since Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee the colonies had a heightened recognition of being 'part of a great organic whole'.²² David Ritchie contended in good Liberal Imperialist fashion that it was inevitable that vigorous and enterprising white races would overflow into other lands as sure as water ran downhill, but governments should not, as in the past, absolve themselves on the grounds of non-intervention by granting charters to trading companies.²³

Those who opposed Liberal Imperialism accepted the fact that Britain had responsibilities to its overseas colonies, however disreputably they were acquired, but the point was 'that the future Imperialism would take the form of contraction and not expansion'.²⁴ Mackenzie, while applauding our 'enlarged consciousness of our relations with the world', very much regretted the 'disagreeable way' it had come about, through the perpetration of 'great crimes'.²⁵ Mackenzie hoped for a 'True imperialism', which recognised the responsibility of advancing humanity through the 'promotion of peace, liberty, justice and enlightenment'. If we fail to acknowledge and discharge these 'great obligations', and seize the occasion to celebrate the new duties imperialism brings: 'then, I dare say, like so many other nations before us, we shall have our decline and fall; and indeed, it will be high time that we should'.²⁶

South Africa and the Second Boer War 1899-1902

²² 'Mr Haldane in Glasgow. The Influence of Imperialism on Politics', *Glasgow Herald*, 24 October, 1900.

²³ Ritchie, *Studies in Social and Political Ethics*, p. 164.

²⁴ 'Britain's Coming "Colour Question": The Treatment of the Kaffirs', *The Manchester Guardian*, Tuesday, November 4, 1902, p. 9.

²⁵ Mackenzie, 'The Source of moral obligation', pp. 469 and 478.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 'The Source of moral obligation', p. 478.

For L. T. Hobhouse, the prominent New Liberal, the second Anglo Boer War (1899-1902) was ‘the test issue for this generation’.²⁷ It, nevertheless, served to cloud the issue of British Idealist support for imperialism. The War split the Liberal Party. Henry Campbell-Bannerman, Sir William Harcourt, John Morley and David Lloyd George, along with the majority of the Party in the House of Commons opposed the South African War, while Lord Rosebery (not without equivocation), H. H. Asquith, Edward Grey and R. B. Haldane supported the War along with a substantial minority of Liberals in the House.²⁸ Contrary to the views of Eric Stokes and Peter Clark,²⁹ to be pro-Boer in Britain by no means implied that one rejected British imperialism, nor, indeed, supported Afrikaaner imperialism.³⁰ We have to be careful not to confuse the condemnation of particular incidents such as the Jameson Raid, or conflicts such as the Boer War with hostility to imperialism.

In order to understand the significance of the Second Boer War to public debate in Great Britain we have to be cognisant the importance of the Transvaal Republic, headed by President Kruger, to the ambitions of imperialist adventurers and to the British State itself. The discovery of gold in Johannesburg in 1886 gave rise to the world's most momentous gold rush, which attracted an extraordinary array of entrepreneurs, financiers, prospectors, desperadoes, pimps, prostitutes, adventurers, fraudsters and a large number of workers, the majority of whom were Cornish and Irish. All of these were known as Uitlanders, or Outsiders, who potentially outnumbered the Dutch Afrikaans, making Kruger reluctant to afford them equal rights in order to forestall their potential political influence. The Boer leaders of the Transvaal Republic, were justified in their fears of extending the franchise to the Uitlanders, because their numbers,

²⁷ Peter Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1978) p. 68.

²⁸ Richard Burden Haldane, *An Autobiography* (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1929) p. 135.

²⁹ Eric Stokes, ‘*The Political Ideas of English Imperialism: An Inaugural Lecture*’ (Oxford, Oxford University Press) p. 16; Peter Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1978) p. 73.

³⁰ During the South African War in 1900, Sir Edward Grey estimated that eighty per-cent of the Liberal Party were ‘Liberal Imperialists’, while Arthur Symonds, an Officer of the National Reform Union, believed that eighty per-cent of the Party ‘are strongly against the war’. Cited in Bernard Porter, *Critics of Empire: British Radical Attitudes to Colonialism in Africa 1895-1914* (London, Macmillan, 1968) p. 76n.

if empowered, would overwhelm the Boer ‘white race’, potentially undermining the ideals of self-determination, sovereignty and freedom from British control.³¹ The problem for the Boers was that with the influence of British capital and the potential voting power of British allied Uitlanders the Republic’s freedom would be under threat from British domination, and its self-determination, and sovereignty compromised.³²

The mine owners in the Transvaal were seriously disgruntled by the constraints Kruger’s government imposed on their activities. Facilitating regime change was an attractive prospect to, among many, Cecil Rhodes and his close ally Leander Starr Jameson. It seemed opportune to use the grievances of the thousands of Uitlanders forcibly to oust and replace Kruger with a regime friendly to the mine owners.³³ This resulted in the ill-fated Jameson Raid of 29 December, 1895 to 2 January, 1896, which seriously damaged Cecil Rhodes’s reputation and resulted in the temporary imprisonment of Jameson and Rhodes’s brother Frank.³⁴ In light of the British led abortive coup, the South African Republic of the Transvaal engaged in a process of rearmament supported by the German government distrustful of British Imperialist ambitions in Africa. For this reason many British officials, government ministers, and members of parliament thought war almost inevitable.

³¹ Peter Baxter, *Gandhi, Smuts and Race in the Empire: Of Passive and Violent Resistance* (Barnsley, Yorkshire, Pen and Sword, 2017) p. 103.

³² Peter Baxter, *Gandhi, Smuts and Race in the British Empire: Of Passive and Violent Resistance* (Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Pen and Sword, 2017), 103.

³³ Robin Brown, *The Secret Society: Cecil John Rhodes’s Plan for a New World Order* (London: Penguin, 2015), 179-90.

³⁴ What was little noticed at the time and which escaped the attention of the Idealists and critics of Cecil Rhodes, who believed him to be complicit in trying to overthrow Kruger, was the role of the American adventurer John Hays Hammond who was on the ground in Johannesburg and failed to mobilise the Uitlanders in the way he had promised both Jameson and Rhodes. Hearing nothing from Hammond, Jameson attacked and was easily contained by Kruger’s commandos because the Uitlanders had no appetite to further the imperialist ambitions of Hammond and Rhodes. Charles van Onselen, *The Cowboy Capitalist: John Hays Hammond, the American West and the Jameson Raid* (London, Johnathan Ball, 2017) p. 206-11.

Following the Jameson Raid Alfred Milner, the Imperialist *par excellence*, was sent to South Africa in 1897 to assume the position of High Commissioner, which he coupled with Commander-in-Chief and Governor of the Cape Colony. The South African Chartered Company, of which Cecil Rhodes was Managing Director, subsequently came under greater scrutiny and had greater constraints imposed upon it by Chamberlain, Secretary of State at the Colonial Office. He was himself complicit in the Raid, but had not been fully aware of the circumstances. He was aware that if there was a rebellion in Johannesburg to depose President Kruger from the Transvaal, that the South African Chartered Company would provide support. He was not aware that Jameson intended to pre-empt the overthrow of Kruger.³⁵ Milner's main concern on arrival in 1897 was to ensure the British Government honoured its commitment to send reinforcements to the frontier of Natal as a deterrent, but not to provoke a South African war, for which the Imperial Government was ill-prepared.³⁶ Milner was uncompromising in his attitude to the Boers. He thought it impossible to placate the Boer 'panoplied hatred, insensate ambition, and invincible ignorance'.³⁷

Although Boer propaganda painted a picture that all had been well in South Africa before the Jameson Raid of 1895, in fact there was a deep chasm between the world-views of the Boer and the Briton that amounted to a clash of ideologies.³⁸ Hostility to the Boers was deeply ingrained in the British psyche as David Livingstone testifies. Because of their inefficient farming practices, their abhorrence for the abolition of slavery, and appalling attitude towards the native population, and the fact they fled the Cape with criminals and disreputable Englishmen, Livingstone denied that the Boers had any right to land ownership in the Transvaal and Orange Free State. Their appalling justification for the use of unpaid

³⁵ John S. Galbraith, 'The British South Africa Company and the Jameson Raid', *The Journal of British Studies*, 10 (1970), pp. 145-161. Leander Starr Jameson served as Rhodes' doctor, his right hand man in Rhodesia and was his successor as prime minister of the Cape Colony. Rhodes died in the arms of Jameson in 1902. Jameson died in 1917 and is buried in Bulawayo next to Rhodes.

³⁶ John Evelyn Wrench, *Alfred Lord Milner: the man of no illusions* (London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1958), p. 165; Peter Gibbs, *The Death of the Last Republic* (London, Muller, 1957), p. 79.

³⁷ Cited in Brown, *Secret Society*, 249.

³⁸ Wrench, *Alfred Lord Milner*, p. 168.

native labour was that ‘we make the people work for us, in consideration of allowing them to live in our country’.³⁹ The Boers, he believed, fled the Cape, with criminals and disreputable Englishmen, in order to escape English law. The English, on the other hand, had a ‘divine charter’ for colonisation in Africa. Nevertheless, in the Transvaal and Orange Free State, Kruger boasted, all of the territory acquired from the natives was purchased, in contrast with the despicable brutality of the English in acquiring their territories.⁴⁰

In the face of British hostility, ‘The Programme of Principles of the Afrikaner Bond’, 1882 formed the basis of an intensive propaganda campaign demanding the expulsion of the English from South Africa. The Bond advocated an independent and united South Africa emboldened by the motto ‘Afrika voorde Afrikands’.⁴¹

When the Boer War began the Unionist Party accused those Liberals who opposed it -- the Pro-Boers -- of betraying the Empire and of misrepresenting the views of the colonies which far from opposing government policy, as the pro-Boers insinuated, actually supported the annexation of the Boer Republics into the Empire.⁴² Haldane and fellow Liberal Imperialists were congratulated for being less parochial and ensuring ‘a wider foundation for our extended Empire’.⁴³ Haldane did not, however, favour annexation of the Boer republics, but instead their incorporation into the British Empire as self-governing territories.

At the centre of the division of opinion over the Boer War amongst the Idealists, and also amongst Liberals, stood the infamous Alfred Milner. He was an appointee of Joseph Chamberlain, Secretary of State for the Colonies under the Liberal Unionist Government, but gained the respect of most Liberal

³⁹ David Livingstone, *Livingstone's Travels and Researches in South Africa* (Philadelphia, J. W. Bradley, 1859, first published 1857), p. 30.

⁴⁰ David Livingstone, ‘The Transvaal Boers and Slavery’, ed. I. Schapera (Cape Town, Van Riebeeck Society, 1974, first published in 1858), p. 67–95.

⁴¹ Wrench, *Alfred Lord Milner*, 175.

⁴² Arthur Davey, *The British Pro-Boers 1877-1902* (Cape Town, Tafelberg Press, 1978).

⁴³ *Huddersfield Chronicle*, 30 August, 1900.

Imperialists, including the Idealists Haldane, Ritchie and Henry Jones. Milner himself was a socialist of the Ruskin kind. The three Idealists were certainly social liberals, with strong left-wing leanings in matters of domestic policy.⁴⁴ They were all relatively ignorant of affairs in South Africa, although Haldane took a more detailed interest, but because of censorship, Afrikaans and British propaganda, they relied heavily on Milner's expertise and judgement.

The Liberal Imperialist H. H. Asquith, for example, made it clear that it was Milner's judgment, rather than the detail of his policies, that he supported. Haldane was almost blindly loyal to Milner suggesting that the South African War was Milner's and not Joseph Chamberlain's. He contended that Milner, in acting early, averted the greater evil of the two white races at war with each other over the whole of South Africa.⁴⁵ In fact Milner was for Haldane 'one of the most capable and able men who served the Crown in the whole dominions of the King'.⁴⁶ To support Milner meant that the Liberal Imperialists would not have to place themselves in the embarrassing position of explicitly supporting Chamberlain.⁴⁷

Although not an Idealist, Milner had a direct connection with Idealism. He was a student of T. H. Green's, while at the same time was exposed to John Ruskin's ideas on imperialism, which, in modified form inspired the ambitions of many Oxford undergraduates. With D. G. Ritchie, Milner was invited by Arnold Toynbee to become a member of a small private society in 1879 devoted to the 'Regeneration of Humanity'.⁴⁸ Each member took a particular brief, Ritchie education and Milner foreign affairs.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Haldane, for example, was described as 'a woman's advocate, and would be corrector of woman's wrongs. He is a Social reformer, and is almost a Socialist'. Old Parliamentary Hand, 'Mr. Richard Burdon Haldane K.C.', *Eastern Daily Press*, p. 12 August, 1901.

⁴⁵ R. B. Haldane, *The Times*, October 11, 1899, p. 8.

⁴⁶ 'Mr Haldane on South Africa: A Strategic Exposition', *Edinburgh Evening News*, 13 January, 1902.

⁴⁷ H. C. G. Matthew, *The Liberal Imperialists: The ideas and politics of a post-Gladstonian élite* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1973).

⁴⁸ Cited by Sandra den Otter, *British Idealism and Social Explanation: A Study in Late Victorian Thought* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 112.

⁴⁹ Robert Latta, 'Memoir' in David Ritchie, *Philosophical Studies* (London, Macmillan, 1905), p. 6. Lord Milner, *Arnold Toynbee, A Reminiscence*, second impression (London, Edward Arnold, 1901), p. 10.

Haldane has been described as ‘something of a Milner clone’.⁵⁰ Milner told Haldane in 1901 that he had ‘always striven to avoid anything which could shock Liberal feeling in the true sense of the word. I claim to be myself, at bottom a Liberal, my Imperialism is too Liberal, too advanced, to be understood to-day’.⁵¹ In fact, Haldane was so close to Milner, that Milner requested of Chamberlain that he appoint Haldane to the position of British Commissioner in South Africa to organise an interim government and to resolve the issues that would arise out of the settlement with the Boers. Milner thought Haldane uniquely qualified for the work because he was both delicate and decisive. Haldane because he thought to become beholden to the Unionists would damage his political career.⁵²

Alluding to the principle of the struggle for existence, Milner believed that competition between nations in maximising their development was an expression of the ‘the Divine Order of the World, the law of Life and Progress’.⁵³ Milner described himself as a British (primarily English) nationalist, whose patriotism was released from considerations of geography, yet constrained only by the limits of race. The British race remains one race wherever it is transplanted. He was a ‘British race patriot’, a citizen of the Empire whose country was Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa, just as much as the English counties of Surrey and Yorkshire.⁵⁴

Haldane, a member of the seriously divided Liberal opposition Party led by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, sided with Lord Rosebery its former leader, Asquith and Grey in supporting Milner, and indirectly the Unionist Government as far as the war was concerned. At the end of 1901 Haldane publicly endorsed Rosebery’s views that the affairs of the nation, including the war, could not be conducted on an

⁵⁰ Robin Brown, *The Secret Society: Cecil John Rhodes’s Plan for a New World Order* (London, Penguin, 2015), 292.

⁵¹ Cited in John Marlowe, *Milner: Apostle of Empire* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1976), p. 114.

⁵² Dudley Sommer, *Haldane of Cloan: His Life and Times 1856-1928* (London, Allen and Unwin, 1960), p. 108.

⁵³ Lord Alfred Milner, ‘“Credo” Lord Milner’s Faith’, a pamphlet reprinted from *The Times*, July 27, 1925. p. 2.

⁵⁴ Milner, “Credo”, 2-3. Julius Vogel had previously argued for the unity of the ‘British race’ wherever it may find itself. Vogel, ‘The British Empire – Mr Lowe and Lord Blachford’, *Nineteenth Century*, vol. 3 (April 1878), pp. 617-636. Reprinted in Peter Cain, *Empire and Imperialism: The Debates of the 1870s* (South Bend, Indiana, St. Augustine, 1999), pp. 134-157. E. Edmund Garret, ‘Rhodes and Milner: The Struggle for the South African Union’, in Various Writers, *The Empire and the Century: A Series of Essays on Imperial Problems and Possibilities by Various Writers, with an introduction by Charles Sydney* (London: John Murray, 1905), p. 509.

anti-national basis, and the Liberal Party should never lose sight of the friends of the Empire. And, furthermore, the Liberalism of the Liberal Party must be the Liberalism of 1901, and not 1895. This did not mean relinquishing old principles, but instead an acknowledgement of the fact it had become a creed of ‘ultra-progressivism’.⁵⁵ Haldane was in regular correspondence with Milner, and through him came to distrust Kruger. When Kruger published his ultimatum to the British Government on 9th October 1899, to halt its build-up of imperial troops on the borders of the Afrikaner republics and to return them home, Haldane publicly supported the government on 11th October.

Haldane was also critical of Sir Edward Clarke, who was Solicitor-General in the Conservative administration of 1886–1892, who criticised his government’s handling of the Transvaal Crisis which precipitated the war. Haldane contended that the deep causes of the war lay in the issue of race. To be precise, ‘in the fact that one race had got ascendancy over the other and had used its powers to augment the grievances under which the other race lay’. It was not, he protested, Chamberlain’s war, but Milner’s. Milner’s most perceptive judgement, to which Haldane gave great store, would prevent the greater evil of war between ‘British and Dutch races throughout the whole of South Africa’. Speaking before the outbreak of war, Haldane maintained that if war came to the Transvaal it would be the Dutch who were responsible for it: ‘No impartial Dutchman’, Haldane argued, ‘could doubt that the blame lay with the Transvaal and not with this country’.⁵⁶ After the outbreak of war Haldane conceded that the war could have been avoided had Britain showed strong statesmanship during the previous twenty years. He admitted that Britain had treated the Transvaal Republic badly. The Jameson Raid was ‘a disgraceful proceeding’, for which future historians would apportion considerable culpability to the Unionist Government of 1895.⁵⁷ The Jameson Raid was ‘wicked and silly’, and it was understandable that Kruger

⁵⁵ ‘Mr Haldane, M.P. Follows Lord Rosebery’, *Edinburgh Evening News*, 20 December, 1901.

⁵⁶ Reported in *The Times*, 11 October, 1899, p. 8. *Dundee Advertiser*, 20 October, 1899.

⁵⁷ ‘Mr. Haldane, K.C., M.P., At Stoke’, *Stafford Advertiser*, 16 November, 1901.

was suspicious and fearful of Britain's intentions regarding the independence of the Transvaal.⁵⁸ Almost two years later he was arguing that war was inevitable,⁵⁹ and could only have been averted by Kruger if he had changed his direction. Haldane remained at odds with the leader of the Liberal Party, Campbell-Bannerman, throughout the war.⁶⁰

Although there were many contributing factors to the outbreak of war, including subterfuge and disingenuousness on both sides, for many the issues eventually boiled down to the problem of British suzerainty in South Africa, and the equality of the races. There were differences of emphasis. The Liberal Imperialist Henry Hartley Fowler, for example, denied that the war was primarily about obtaining the franchise and equal rights for the Uitlanders. Instead, he argued, it was for asserting British supremacy in South Africa demonstrating that it [Great Britain] was still one of the Great Powers in the world.⁶¹

The immediate cause of the war for many was the claim of the Transvaal to be an independent sovereign state, and Great Britain's claim to have paramount power in South Africa.⁶² The question of suzerainty was widely debated and revolved around the wording relating to independence and suzerainty and the conditions of the treatment of the natives attached to it in 'The Pretoria Convention' ending the First Boer War (signed in August 1881 between the Transvaal and Great Britain), and superseded in 1884 by the London Convention, which added new conditions.

For others the issue was not so much suzerainty, but the subterfuge of President Kruger in attempting to assert exclusive political power in order to discriminate against and subject the 'whole Uitlander portion of the population'.⁶³ This as far as Milner was concerned was the real issue. In a letter to Chamberlain, dated 30th November 1899, he maintained that he believed the Afrikaans were

⁵⁸ 'Mr Haldane, M.P., 'ON The Origins of the War', *Evening News*, 26 January, 1900.

⁵⁹ 'Mr Haldane at Shrewsbury', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 24 October, 1901.

⁶⁰ Frederick Maurice, *Haldane 1856-1915: The Life of Viscount Haldane of Cloan* (London, Faber and Faber, 1937), pp. 94-100.

⁶¹ Fowler, speech in Wolverhampton, *The Times*, 20th April, 1900.

⁶² J. A. Spender, *The Life of Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman* (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1924), p. 229.

⁶³ T. Thistle, Letter to *The Times*. 11 October, 1899.

determined to predominate over the English race throughout South Africa. 'I personally', he said, 'had been represented as the enemy of the Dutch population, because I was averse to the attempt to maintain the predominance of one white race over another, irrespective of their relative numbers'.⁶⁴ He was emphatic that if the white races were to enjoy equal rights in the Transvaal and South Africa as a whole there was no point in keeping up the pretence that Britain was paramount and the queen suzerain, 'abstract and unintelligible as that might be'.⁶⁵ The issue for Haldane was that Kruger had broken the terms of the Sand River Agreement after the First Boer War (1880-81). In return for the independence of the Transvaal, except in foreign matters, Kruger was to have extended rights and privileges to British subjects equal to those of the Boers. Kruger, Haldane believed, to have been disingenuous and the war, for Haldane, was about obtaining equal rights for the Uitlanders. Haldane was under no illusions. He believed, as Milner did, that many of the Uitlanders constituted the scum and dregs of society driven to the Transvaal because of a 'lust for gold'.⁶⁶ Nevertheless Liberal Imperialists believed that it was the duty of Liberals to protect the rights of oppressed minorities, by which they meant both the Uitlanders and native South Africans. Bernard Bosanquet, in this instance, agreed that under article 14 of the London Convention (1884), the rights specified did not extend to the Uitlanders: 'I only beg for perfect clearness in understanding that the black and white of the Convention is quite definitely and unambiguously against us about the franchise for the bulk of Uitlanders'.⁶⁷

For Liberal Imperialists there were two war aims that had to be achieved in any settlement. These were articulated by Sir Edward Grey in February 1900. The first was equality of the white

⁶⁴ Printed in Wrench, *Alfred Lord Milner*, p. 208.

⁶⁵ Peter Gibbs, *Death of the Last Republic* (London, Muller, 1957), p. 79.

⁶⁶ 'Haldane in East Lothian', *The Scotsman*, 30 August and 11 October, 1899.

⁶⁷ Bernard Bosanquet letter to the editor, *The Daily News*, 14 February, 1900, p. 10. Article 14 of the London Convention of 1884 reads: 'All persons, other than natives, conforming themselves to the laws of the South African Republic ("a") will have full liberty, with their families, to enter, travel, or reside in any part of the South African Republic; ("b"), they will be entitled to hire or possess houses, manufactories, warehouses, shops, and premises; ("c") they may carry on their commerce either in person or by any agents whom they may think fit to employ; ("d"), they will not be subject, in respect of their persons or property, or in respect of their commerce or industry, to any taxes, whether general or local, other than those which are or may be imposed upon citizens of the said Republic.'

races in South Africa, and the second that no arsenal could be formed except under the control of the British.⁶⁸ The implication that this might entail the annexation of the Boer republics was less generally accepted, and although Milner believed that the Boer had to be crushed, he did not openly confess to this policy⁶⁹, but Haldane nevertheless explicitly opposed him on this. If the two aims could be accomplished, he thought, it would be unnecessary to subjugate the Boers for the sake of conquest. The hoisting of the Queen's flag was not something he desired, and on the contrary considered it an evil if it turned out to be required. He insisted on an assurance from Milner, which he did not get, that he was not seeking to establish an alternative 'Uitlander or Rhodes ascendancy' in South Africa'.⁷⁰

Ritchie, the most pro-imperialist of the British Idealists is reported by his biographer as having 'looked upon the South Africa war, not as a war of aggression, but as an endeavour on the part of the suzerain state to free the people of one of its dependencies from the tyranny of a narrow and stubborn oligarchy'.⁷¹ Ritchie himself argued 'What the British Government demands is that equality of civilised races shall exist in the Transvaal'.⁷² He contended that the limited independence granted the Transvaal on the condition of equal treatment was not to 'persons of the Dutch race but to all the white inhabitants. . .'.⁷³ In this context, the race question refers to the white races of the British and Dutch, and not to the equality of non-white peoples, which was referred to as the 'native' question. In this respect, Rhodes's attitude expressed on the floor of the Cape Colony Parliament in the mid 1880s was not atypical: 'The native is to be treated as a child and denied the franchise. We must adopt a system of despotism, such as

⁶⁸ Matthew, *Liberal Imperialists*, p. 179.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁷⁰ Cited in Matthew, *Liberal Imperialists*, 184. Also see 179.

⁷¹ David G. Ritchie, *Philosophical Studies*, edited with a Memoir by Robert Latta (London, Macmillan, 1905), p. 49.

⁷² David G. Ritchie, 'The South African War', *The Ethical World*, February 3, 1900, p. 70. On 12 October, 1899 Lord Rosebery made one of his characteristic interventions, arguing that the South African War had a perfectly reasonable objective 'of rescuing our fellow-countrymen in the Transvaal from intolerable conditions of subjection and injustice, and of securing equal rights for white races in South Africa.' *The Times*, p. 10.

⁷³ D. G. Ritchie, 'The Moral Problems of War – In Reply to Mr. J. M. Robertson' *International Journal of Ethics*, vol. 11 (1900/1901), p. 496. Facsimile reprint in *Collected Works of D. G. Ritchie*, ed., Peter Nicholson (Bristol: Thoemmes, 1998).

works in India, in our relations with the barbarism of South Africa.’⁷⁴ Indeed, J. C. Smuts was in sympathy with this view. At the conclusion of the Second Boer War Milner had imposed a condition that the natives would gain the franchise upon the attainment of representative government. Smuts amended this, to read that ‘consideration’ would be given to the native franchise.⁷⁵

Muirhead took the opposite view to the Liberal Imperialists, and was among many who believed the policy of the British Government in risking a South African war was injudicious, and possibly precipitous of a European conflict. From all angles, Muirhead argued, a South African war appeared designed to destroy the independence of a people who belonged to the same race as the British.⁷⁶ Edward Caird, who was most explicit in his condemnation of the War, wrote to the *Times* to express his dismay at Chamberlain’s Milner’s South African policy. Caird contended it would be an act of ‘courage and generosity’ to withdraw the British claim on the grounds of a misapprehension about ‘suzerainty – whatever that means – over the Transvaal’.⁷⁷

Liberals were, of course, constrained in speaking out against the Boer War by the activities of Rosebery and his followers on the imperialist side of the Party, and because to speak out against it might appear unpatriotic.⁷⁸ Campbell-Bannerman, nevertheless, privately placed the blame for the war firmly at the door of Rhodes, Chamberlain and Milner.⁷⁹ The Liberal Imperialists, among them Asquith, Grey, Fowler and Haldane, and somewhat more equivocally Rosebery, gave qualified support to the government. In both conversation and correspondence Milner was anxious to maintain Asquith’s and Haldane’s support.⁸⁰ Milner had strong ties of friendship with Asquith, whom he knew at Baliol, and

⁷⁴ Rhodes cited in Baxter, *Gandhi, Smuts and Race*, p. 111.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 140-1.

⁷⁶ J. H. Muirhead, *Reflections by a Journeyman in Philosophy: On the Movement of Thought and Practice in his Time* (London, Allen and Unwin, 1942), pp. 112-14.

⁷⁷ Edward Caird, Letter to the Times, written 28 September, *The Times*, 30th September, 1899, p. 6.

⁷⁸ Porter, *Critics of Empire*, p. 75.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁸⁰ John Marlowe, *Milner, Apostle of Empire* (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1976), p. 91.

Haldane, who was a rising star in the Liberal Party, neither of whom particularly approved of Chamberlain.

Those British idealists who supported the subsequent policies of Milner, and both implicitly and explicitly endorsed Chamberlain's stance, knew Milner personally. Milner polarised his supporters and detractors, to the extent that Campbell-Bannerman described the attitude of Haldane and other Liberal Imperialists as 'Milner worship'.⁸¹ On the other side, however, Milner was subject to 'cruel and rancorous vilification'.⁸²

The British Idealists were predominantly pro-Boer, but there were exceptions besides Haldane, such as David G. Ritchie, whose personal acquaintance with Milner, the highest official in South Africa and devoted follower and executor of the Rhodes estate,⁸³ turned Ritchie and Haldane into unrepentant apologists. Haldane, for example, made Campbell-Banner's pro-Boer position, as leader of the divided Liberal Party, extremely difficult. Whenever Campbell-Bannerman attacked Milner, Haldane and Sir Edward Grey immediately defended the High Commissioner.⁸⁴ Both Haldane and Ritchie gave their support to the war because they believed Milner a decent man,⁸⁵ not fully deserving of the criticism levelled against him, and they were convinced that the Boers were an oligarchic autocracy with no intention of supporting equality of the white races.⁸⁶

Ritchie's defence of Milner was based upon his personal acquaintance and complete loyalty to his judgment. Ritchie took exception to the personal vilification of Milner. J. A. Hobson, for example, accused Milner of duplicity when mutilating the conciliatory despatch of President Steyn

⁸¹ Spender, *Life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman*, p. 302.

⁸² Wrench, *Alfred Lord Milner*, p. 168.

⁸³ Milner had been a journalist and civil servant in Britain and Egypt, and in 1897 became High Commissioner in South Africa and Governor of Cape Colony. He became a Viscount in 1902, but before returning to Britain to take his place in The House of Lords he was Governor of the Transvaal and Orange River Colony, 1902-6.

⁸⁴ Spender, *Life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman*, 259.

⁸⁵ Haldane, *An Autobiography*, p. 135-6; David G. Ritchie, 'Another View of the South African War', *The Ethical World*, January 13, p. 1900;

⁸⁶ Ritchie, 'The Moral Problems of War – In Reply to Mr. J. M. Robertson', p. 501. Haldane, *An Autobiography*, p. 136.

of the Orange Free State, prior to the outbreak of war. Hobson attributes Milner's actions to the motive of precipitating war in order to achieve his ambition of incorporating the Boer republics into a united South Africa. Hobson contended that 'a number of important passages laying stress upon the feasibility of a pacific settlement, even at this critical juncture, are omitted from the despatch without the slightest indication of such omission.'⁸⁷ Ritchie defended Milner by arguing that he did not intend to transmit the despatch in its entirety because it was far too long and full of 'superfluous verbiage'. Ritchie dismissed Steyn's proposed methods of making peace as 'curious'.⁸⁸ Ritchie maintained, 'I know of no man whose accuracy in dealing with everything he touches, whose calmness of judgment, impartiality and absolute personal disinterestedness can be more implicitly trusted'.⁸⁹ He put his faith in the trained meticulousness of experienced civil servants rather than to the irresponsible and random assertions of Milner's critics.⁹⁰

Ritchie likened the South African war to the American civil war. It was, he believed, an inevitable war between two incompatible societies, with Great Britain having the 'just and righteous cause' in that it was a war of 'true democracy, civilization, and of progress'.⁹¹ The Dutch Race in South Africa, Ritchie believed, represented a lower civilization than the British, and in the Transvaal 'the least enlightened part of the population tyrannized over the more enlightened and more industrial'.⁹² Ritchie was affronted by the implication that any ethically minded person could be nothing other than pro-Boer. Left to their own devices in the Transvaal, he contended, the Boers would have been a slave owning oligarchy, drifting deeper into barbarism, and ultimately likely to be massacred by the natives they subjected to a cruel

⁸⁷ J. A. Hobson, *The South African War* (London, James Nisbet, 1900), p. 183.

⁸⁸ David G. Ritchie, 'Mr Hobson's Book and the Coming Settlement', *The Ethical World*, March 10, 1900, p. 145. Facsimile reprint in *Collected Works of D. G. Ritchie*. vol. VI.

⁸⁹ David Ritchie, 'Another view of the South African War', *The Ethical World*, January 13, 1900, p. 19. Facsimile reprint in *Collected Works of D. G. Ritchie*, ed., Peter Nicholson. Vol. VI.

⁹⁰ David Ritchie, 'The South African War', *The Ethical World*, February 3, 1900, p. 70. Facsimile reprint in *Collected Works of D. G. Ritchie*, vol. VI..

⁹¹ Ritchie, 'Another view of the South African War', p. 20. Facsimile reprinted in *Collected Works of D G Ritchie*.

⁹² Ritchie, 'Moral Problems of the war', p. 503.

regime.⁹³ For all its faults the British Administration represented ‘order, progress and fair treatment of the native races’, as opposed to the severe and cruel dealings of the Boer Republics.⁹⁴ British administration would ‘raise the Afrikander from a narrow and lower to a wider and higher citizenship’.⁹⁵ Liberal Imperialists, including the Idealists Haldane, Ritchie and Jones, always talked of just treatment for the natives but never really indicated how that could be achieved and what it might look like. Indeed, Asquith confessed in a speech delivered at Hull, 1903 that one would have to be a charlatan to pretend that he had a solution to the native problem in South Africa.⁹⁶

Approvingly referring to the constitutional lawyer James Bryce, Ritchie maintains that while the English have also done many things to be deplored, the imperial officials and clergy have been the true friends of the ‘Hottentot and Kaffir’.⁹⁷ It is the imperial government to which both Ritchie and Henry Jones gives the credit. They were by no means apologists for rule by Chartered Companies, but they did, nevertheless, suggest that Rhodes’ intentions were honourable in sanctioning the Jameson Raid.⁹⁸ Ritchie believed that future generations in South Africa, both English and Dutch alike, would venerate Milner as Americans do Abraham Lincoln for the insight and resolve to secure unity, peace and equal justice in a country long distracted and divided.⁹⁹

Haldane, while vehemently supportive of Milner, did try to take a balanced view, as we saw in his belief that annexation of the two Boer Republics was not necessary. He was at pains to point out that the British were not entirely in the right and the Boers entirely in the wrong,¹⁰⁰ a view that most of his pro Boer philosophical Idealist friends, who initially opposed the war came to share. In an address at East Linton, this is the aspect of the South African crisis that Haldane chose to highlight.

⁹³ Ritchie, ‘Another View of the South African War’, p. 20.

⁹⁴ Ritchie, ‘The South African War’, p. 71.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁹⁶ *The Times*, 29 January, 1903.

⁹⁷ Ritchie, ‘The South African War’, p. 71.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁹⁹ Ritchie, ‘The Moral Problems of War’, p. 499.

¹⁰⁰ Matthew, *The Liberal Imperialists*, p. 174.

When Milner was under severe criticism for his policies in South Africa Haldane wrote to him contending that: ‘If things continue as they are, you need not be afraid of an adverse majority in the Opposition Our confidence in you is unabated by a hair’s breadth’.¹⁰¹ Haldane frequently publicly supported Milner, announcing to his Haddington constituents, for example, in order to counter demands for Milner’s recall, that Milner was not the captive of any sectional interest, including Rhodes or any capitalist group. He argued that more money should be at Milner’s disposal, and that ‘Lord Milner was the one who was cut out most for working out those difficult problems of settlement’.¹⁰²

To be a pro-Boer and reject British domination in the Transvaal and Orange Free State, did not, to reiterate, equate with anti-imperialism. Bernard Bosanquet, Edward Caird, J. S. Mackenzie, and J. H. Muirhead, were strongly, but not unequivocally pro-Boer, and all would describe themselves as ‘sane’ or ‘true’ imperialists. J. S. Mackenzie made a thoughtful intervention in which he suggested that defenders of the South African War, such as Ritchie and Haldane, appear to base their opinions on their personal acquaintance with and devotion to Milner. It is possible, Mackenzie argued, that we may reconcile personal admiration with the possibility that he may have committed serious blunders. Even his staunch admirers admit that he is not infallible, and some of his actions, such as describing the Uitlanders as helots, and destroying the despatch of President Steyn, rather ill advised.¹⁰³

After the War Henry Jones lamented that some of the circumstances that surrounded it, the ‘blatant imperialism and reckless greed’ had left an indelible stain on the nation’s honour.¹⁰⁴ Britain had been as ready and as ruthless as any country in pleading natural right of a higher civilisation to

¹⁰¹ Cited in Marlowe, *Milner: Apostle of Empire*, p. 104.

¹⁰² Cited in ‘Haldane, M.P. on the Settlement’; ‘Mr Haldane at Haddington’, *Morning Post*, 5 October, 1901; ‘Mr Haldane at Haddington’, *London Evening Standard*, 5 October, 1901.

¹⁰³ J. S. Mackenzie, ‘The Milner Cult’, *The Ethical World*, March 10, 1900, p. 149.

¹⁰⁴ Henry Jones, ‘Idealism and Politics’, Jones, *The Working Faith of a Social Reformer* (London, Macmillan, 1910), p. 184.

rule over the lower.¹⁰⁵ Speaking of colonialism in general, the pro Boer Caird admitted that ‘our dealings with these races have too often been initiated in greed and violence’.¹⁰⁶

Anti-Rhodes sentiment and British Concentration Camps

In 1895, the year of the disastrous Jameson Raid into the Transvaal, Cecil Rhodes warned of the necessity for a strong commitment to imperialism, which echoed that of one of his teachers at Oxford, John Ruskin. Ruskin proposed that colonisation was the answer to the problem of unemployment and the sustainability of artistic excellence in Britain. Ruskin argued that with the almost incomprehensible advances in science and the exponential transformation in travel and communication the habitable globe has become one kingdom. Which, for him, posed the question who is to be its monarch? England must, he exhorted, ‘found colonies as fast and as far as she is able, formed of her most energetic and worthiest men; -- seizing every piece of fruitful waste ground she can set her foot on and there teaching these her colonists that their chief virtue is to be [sic] fidelity to their country, and that their first aim is to advance the power of England by land and sea’.¹⁰⁷ Rhodes similarly warned that social discontent and the possibility of class war could be averted by a commitment to imperialist expansionism which could be used to fund expensive welfare reforms at home.¹⁰⁸ Joseph Chamberlain and his supporters came closest to endorsing this social imperialism by advocating Tariff Reform and a system of imperial preferences.

After the Jameson Raid of 1895 opinions of Rhodes became even more divided when the second report of the Select Committee on British South Africa, 17 July, 1897, heavily implicated him.¹⁰⁹ Rhodes had been offered the degree of Doctor of Civil Laws in 1892 by Oxford University. Unable to receive the

¹⁰⁵ Henry Jones, ‘Why Are We Fighting’, *The Hibbert Journal*, xiii (1913-14), p. 56.

¹⁰⁶ Edward Caird, *Lay Sermons and Addresses* (Glasgow, Maclehose, 1907), p. 114.

¹⁰⁷ John Ruskin, *Lectures on Art*, delivered at Oxford, Hilary Term, 1870 (London: George Allen, 1891), pp. 34-39; citation, p. 37. Cf. Masterman, *The Forerunner*, p. 154.

¹⁰⁸ E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire 1875-1914* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1987), p. 69.

¹⁰⁹ ‘Mr Rhodes and the University of Oxford’, *The Times*, Tuesday, June 20th, 1899, p. 10; Henry Jones and J. H. Muirhead, *The Life and Philosophy of Edward Caird* (Glasgow, Maclehose, 1921), pp. 153-4. Also see, W. J. Mander, *British Idealism: A History* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011), p.524.

degree at that date the invitation from the Vice-Chancellor extended to any subsequent year that might be convenient. Intimating their intention to attend the Encaenia of 1899, the presence of the King and Queen inspired Rhodes to indicate that he would be present to receive his degree.¹¹⁰ Edward Caird was the only head of college, and one of 88 members of the Oxford Congregation to sign the petition to prevent Rhodes taking the honour. Among the Idealists who protested, in addition to Caird, were J. A. Smith, H. H. Joachim, and Hastings Rashdall. They were vehement opponents of Rhodes. In June, 1899 the protesters signed a letter to the Vice Chancellor expressing their regret that Rhodes was included in the list of those to receive an Honorary Doctorate of Civil Laws. The signatories requested the Vice-Chancellor to publish their protest, which he declined to do on the grounds that the *Oxford Gazette* had never previously been used for the publicity of a manifesto of any kind. The signatories instead turned to *The Times*.

What, however, was the issue? The signatories did not wish to embarrass the Hebdomadal Council of the University, and accepted that the offer of the honorary degree could not be withdrawn, and despite designating Junior Proctor W. M. Lindsay to veto the degree, it was regarded not the done thing to create a 'scene' in front of the Royals. They called instead on Oxford University to make known the full facts surrounding the Doctorate of Civil Laws that Rhodes was to receive, namely that it was awarded in 1892 before the Jameson raid.¹¹¹ 'It was not as though', F. J. Wylie, a Trustee of the Rhodes Foundation, remarked, 'the honour was being offered to Rhodes afresh after the Raid'.¹¹² Kitchener was also to receive his honorary degree in 1899, and he threatened to withdraw if Rhodes was prevented from taking his degree.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ 'The Rhodes Degree 1899', Glasgow University Library, shelf mark Ms Gen. 1475, Jones and Muirhead, materials for the *Life* of Edward Caird.

¹¹¹ 'Mr Rhodes and University of Oxford', *The Times*, 20 June, 1899, p. 10.

¹¹² F. J. Wylie, Letter to J. H. Muirhead, 14 February, 1921. Glasgow University Library, Ms Gen. 1475.

¹¹³ W. J. Mander, *British Idealism A History*, p. 524, fn 283.

The British stance in relation to South Africa, for many of the Idealists was an example of insane or aggressive imperialism. Muirhead, although privately vociferous in opposition to the War, was constrained in his public pronouncements because Joseph Chamberlain was the founder of Birmingham University where Muirhead was a professor. His view was that many people of Dutch ancestry in the Cape, Orange Free State and the Transvaal favoured significant reforms, and that these would be able to be implemented once Kruger left the scene, and with him the remnants of resistance.

It is a mistake to think that the British Idealist pro Boers were consistent in their views. By late December, 1899 and early January, 1900 and in fuller possession of the 'facts', both Caird and Bosanquet began to have doubts about the true intentions of the Boers and their resolve to avoid the war. It was no longer sensible to use the metaphor of Britain beating a small boy in the light of figures that indicated that the Boers were increasing their armaments significantly from 1895, the year of the Jameson Raid. Caird maintained, in an allusion to Milner, that British diplomacy was mismanaged, but also conceded that the Boers also poorly handled the discussions. He was under no illusion that the Boers represented many retrograde, corrupt and 'unprogressive influences', which to some extent mitigated possible British success. Caird concluded: 'I should have said before the war that we were in the wrong, but the great preparations of the Boers make one think that war was really inevitable, as it was less reckless on their side than it seemed'.¹¹⁴ Bosanquet, however, thought the Boers were justified in rearming, and had in fact redeemed themselves quite well with military glory', and should without rancour be able to accept the terms of any reasonable settlement.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Edward Caird, letter to Mary Talbot, January 18, 1900. Printed in *The Life and Philosophy of Edward Caird*, Henry Jones and J. H. Muirhead (Glasgow, Maclehose Jackson, 1921), p. 231.

¹¹⁵ Bernard Bosanquet, letter to Frank S Peters, 24 December, 1899 printed in *Bernard Bosanquet and his Friends*, ed. J. H. Muirhead (London, Allen and Unwin, 1935), 95. Helen Bosanquet, *Bernard Bosanquet: A Short Account of His Life* (London: Macmillan, 1924), p. 99.

Suspicious about the integrity of the Boer's intentions and the mismanagement of diplomacy, relating to matters of *jus ad bellum*, moved on to issues of *jus in bello* as the brutality of the British in the conduct of the war became more evident. In early 1901, when it was apparent that the war was far from over, efforts to curtail the guerrilla warfare which stretched from the frontier of Portuguese East Africa into the Cape Colony were escalated by burning Boer farms. Kitchener's scorched earth policy, impounding women and children in concentration camps with little regard for sanitation or adequate medical provision, resulted in a high mortality rate. The Boer refugees escaping the carnage were sent to the island of St Helena and Colombo in Ceylon. Milner took a personal interest in censoring news from South Africa, and articles that he deemed sensitive in local newspapers, were prevented from being reprinted in Britain. On 21st November 1900 he instructed Major Walter Lewis Bagot, Administrator of the Postal Services in the Transvaal, that references to the burning of farm houses should be kept out of telegrams to deprive 'agitators and mad men at home' of incendiary material.¹¹⁶ Although he was unsuccessful in suppressing such details, through his friend Iwan Muller of the *Daily Telegraph*, he succeeded in modifying the hostile tone of the Press.¹¹⁷

J. M. Robertson, with whom David G. Ritchie crossed swords, was one of the first journalists to expose the indiscriminate burning of farm houses, under the *nom de plume* of SCRUTATOR for the British newspaper *The Morning Leader*. He was condemned by *The Times* for his lack of patriotism.¹¹⁸ He nevertheless continued, on his return in 1900, to complain of the suppression of news which had turned the more jingoistic elements of the press into electioneers for the Conservatives. He maintained that the Boers were no threat to the English in the Cape Colony, and that the independence of the Transvaal and Orange River County should allay such fears. He was

¹¹⁶ Bagot papers, Levens Hall, Westmoreland.

¹¹⁷ Jacqueline Beaumont, 'The British Press and Censorship During the South African War 1899-1902', *South African Historical Journal*, 41 (1999), pp. 267-289.

¹¹⁸ Arthur Davey, *The British Pro-Boers 1877-1902* (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1978), p. 57.

emphatic that stories of Boer attacks on British soldiers from enemy farms were systematically exaggerated in order to justify and extend the scorched earth policy.¹¹⁹

Exposure of such military methods to the British public, despite controlled censorship precipitated the notorious attack in June 1901 by Campbell-Bannerman on the Government's 'methods of barbarism', for which he was vilified by the press for insulting the British army and defaming the British public.¹²⁰ Milner, rather than Chamberlain, became the principal target of criticism relating to the conduct of war. Lloyd George followed Campbell-Bannerman with a scathing attack on Haldane's friend Milner. Haldane dismissed the accusation of barbarism and the criticism of Milner. War was of necessity a brutal business, requiring methods that were militarily necessary to bring about a successful conclusion to the war. He rejected calls from the Left wing of his party for the recall of Milner, and instead advocated Milner's policy of a South African federation as the policy to be pursued.¹²¹ On Milner's visit to England in May 1901, during the Boer War, Haldane told him that he could rely on the continuing support of Asquith, Grey and himself.¹²² Campbell-Bannerman who had a particular antipathy for Milner complained of the '*religio Milneriana*' among the Liberal Imperialists. In November, 1900 he wrote: 'We cannot shut our ears or our eyes to the fact that Milner has close friends very near to us. I have heard them spoken of as the Balliol set; they include Asquith, Grey and Haldane, and it is my conviction that one of the main influences causing the determined support given by them to the Government's South African policy is Milner worship'.¹²³

Although both Caird and Bosanquet had come to waver on the question of the justness of the British cause for war against the Boers, they were outraged by the British prosecution of the war,

¹¹⁹ Robertson's reports for the *Morning Leader* were collected and published in 1900 under the title *Wrecking the Empire* (London, Grant Richards, 1901). The book was boycotted by many bookshops.

¹²⁰ Spender, *Life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman*, p. 336.

¹²¹ Maurice, *Haldane*, pp. 110-11.

¹²² Marlowe, *Milner: Apostle of Empire*, p. 114.

¹²³ Cited in Marlowe, *Milner: Apostle of Empire*, p. 104.

even to the extent, as far as Caird was concerned, of compromising the neutrality of his position as Master of Balliol. Caird's wife Caroline Frances Caird, nee Wylie, was equally appalled by the conduct of the war and in particular the treatment of Boer women and children in the British concentration camps in South Africa. Mrs Caird invited Emily Hobhouse, who was constrained by government censure to address audiences in private houses, to speak in the dining room at the Master's Lodge in Balliol College. Miss Hobhouse had visited South Africa personally and witnessed the appalling conditions in the concentration camps in the Orange River Colony where women and children had been driven from their farms and were dying of starvation and insanitary conditions. She believed the situation was worse in the Transvaal. Lord Kitchener, who was responsible for the military tactics employed in South Africa, fulminated against her publicly, famously describing her as 'that bloody woman', an epithet she adorned with pride.¹²⁴ According to J. E. Carpenter, who was present at the event, Caird spoke with 'suppressed passion' in proposing the vote of thanks. Caird maintained that whatever one thought about the War, everyone made aware of the facts would agree that such conduct could not go on: 'This *must* be stopped'.¹²⁵ In a veiled criticism of the government, he expressed the hope that Miss Hobhouse would be able to put her case 'clearly before the whole nation'.¹²⁶

Haldane contended that no one felt more acutely than he did the deaths of children in the concentration camps, but defended them on the grounds that the mortality rate amongst women and children housed in them would have been far higher had they been left to starve.¹²⁷ Haldane is here echoing the often voiced justification that was given for both white and black concentration camps,

¹²⁴ Baxter, *Ghandi, Smuts and Race*, p. 134.

¹²⁵ J.E. Carpenter, letter to Henry Jones, 12 August, 1909. Glasgow University Library Ms General, 1475.

¹²⁶ 'Address by Miss Hobhouse', *The Times*, 26 June, 1901. Colin Tyler, *Idealist Political Philosophy: Pluralism and Conflict in the Absolute Idealist Tradition* (London: Continuum, 2006), pp. 126-7.

¹²⁷ 'Mr Haldane at Stoke' *The Times*, Wednesday, 13 November 1901, p. 10; 'Liberal (Imperialist) Criticism: Speech by Mr. Haldane', *London Daily News*, 13 November, 1901. Richard Burden Haldane, *An Autobiography* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1929), pp. 35-9. Spender, *Life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman*, p. 338.

that is, they had a humanitarian purpose to care for the dispossessed. However, their purpose was unequivocally set out by Lord Herbert Kitchener in Army circular No. 29. It was the removal of all children, elderly persons and women, with their black servants, from the districts that guerrillas occupied in order to limit the endurance of the combatants.¹²⁸ The aim was completely to clear the veld of people, animals and plants capable of giving sustenance. Haldane did concede late in the war that there were many matters that needed to be scrutinised after the war, including the organization and conditions in the concentration camps.¹²⁹

Conclusion

I have tried to show that despite differences over the justness and conduct of the second Boer War, particularly with regard to the equality of the white races and the issue of British suzerainty, and the integrity of character of both Cecil Rhodes and Sir Alfred Milner, all of the British Idealists were imperialists in differing degrees. They all believed in the Empire and the desirability of the relative autonomy of the white settler communities, including South Africa, within a federated system, and for many that entailed an Imperial Parliament in which representatives from all over the Empire, including Wales, Ireland and Scotland, would regulate its affairs. The Idealists all acknowledged that the Empire had been acquired by nefarious means, and that capitalist adventurers and trading companies had exploited the natives and caused untold misery, but that the intervention and governance of the British Imperial officials would inject higher moral values, and inspire elevated ideals through their role as custodians and trustees of civilisation.

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¹²⁸ TAB, CD 453, AG Circular Memorandum No. 29 dated December 21, 1900.

¹²⁹ 'Mr Haldane on the War', *Edinburgh Evening News*, 5 December, 1901.