



Misrepresenting Mises: Quotation Editing and a Rejection of Peer Review at Cambridge University Press

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A properly functioning peer-review process flags potential problems before they appear in print. During the process, an anonymous referee might notice complications to a thesis that an author failed to account for, prompting a round of revisions to improve the piece. If an author misrepresents evidence for a claim, an anonymous referee might alert the journal editor to the problem. Usually the author will be asked to address the issue in a revision. If the problem is severe or intentional, the piece might be rejected outright.

But what if an anonymous referee flags serious problems in an article, such as misrepresented evidence or basic errors of fact, yet the journal's editor chooses to let the errors stand and run the piece anyway? What happens when the same problems are then noticed by other scholars after the article appears in print? Surely, a formal correction would be in order.

Factual corrections used to be a regular practice of most scholarly journals, whether in the form of a short comment or an exchange over the contested claim.

1. American Institute for Economic Research, Great Barrington, MA 01230. The present article proceeds with a first-person singular authorial voice, representing Phillip Magness. Amelia Janaskie worked to recast, integrate, and revise preceding materials by Magness, which are included in the references list below (especially Magness 2021). We thank Fiona Harrigan, Dietmar Georg, and Kevin Hill for their assistance with translations of Mises's works from German to English.

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But a growing number of academic venues no longer see a need to attend to basic standards. Factual errors, even egregious ones, are allowed to stand unchallenged, provided that the errors align with a political view. This was my own experience after a frustrating year and a half long effort to seek basic factual corrections to an unambiguous error about the relationship between the Austrian school of economics and the racial dimensions of imperialism.

In 2019, Wellesley College historian Quinn Slobodian published in scholarly journals a pair of articles containing a charge against Ludwig von Mises. Writing for the journal *Cultural Politics*, Slobodian (2019a, 379) alleged that “race theory has an ambiguous place in Mises’s work,” an allegation that encourages modern-day racists to claim inspiration from the free-market economist. Slobodian repeated and elaborated upon the charge in an article for *Contemporary European History* (*CEH*), stating that “libertarians who scour [Mises’s] writings to validate their divergent positions on migration can claim fairly to find confirmation of both sides of the argument.” One side of the story, he continued, derived from Mises “the realist, who saw race as a quasi-permanent category of global social organisation. Despite his liberal principles the Habsburg polyglot never became the radical anti-racist” (2019b, 155).

While Slobodian acknowledged in both articles that Mises adhered to a broad liberal philosophy that clashed with the racist and imperialist ideologies of his day, his argument held that Mises’s works contained a “parenthetical opening to the possibility of race theory,” which is a reference to pseudoscientific concepts that purport to link race and intelligence (Slobodian 2019a, 380). In turn, the posited “parenthetical opening” allegedly establishes Mises as a historical progenitor of later defenses of race theory and imperialism. Elsewhere, Slobodian (2018b) extends the argument into modern politics by blaming Mises and so-called neoliberals for inspiring anti-immigration and race theory arguments which, he says, attained popularity among Alt-Right and Trumpian political movements in the 2010s.

Slobodian builds his interpretation on textual misrepresentation

Careful textual analysis reveals that Slobodian’s representation of Mises is often in direct contradiction to Mises’s actual position. Mises devoted substantial energy in his 1927 book *Liberalism* to attacking the then-popular field of eugenics. His later works, such as 1944’s *Omnipotent Government*, contained a philosophical broadside against Nazism, singling out the errors and evils of Nazi racial theory

in particular. This reality contradicts Slobodian’s findings that Mises’s works give nourishment to racism.

By omitting pertinent context, Slobodian’s use of excerpts from Mises’s work results in an interpretation of Mises’s position that is factually incorrect and often opposite of Mises’s actual position. Many of these issues arise from Mises’s practice of offering a detailed explication of the position he is attacking or rebutting before stating his own opposing view. As a result Mises’s texts contain detailed descriptive accounts of beliefs that are not his own. Compounding this confusion, Slobodian makes extensive use of snippet quotations of Mises’s descriptions to depict him as sympathetic, or at least open, to a variety of racist and imperialist beliefs, when in fact he was condemning them. In the months that followed their publication, other scholars began to notice the same patterns in Slobodian’s depictions of Mises as well as his use of quotations (Ebeling 2018; Gordon 2021).

In his *CEH* article, Slobodian claims that Mises saw violence as potentially necessary means to grow a global trade network. However, a comparison of the *CEH* passage to Mises’s original text from his 1919 book *Nation, State, and Economy* reveals that Slobodian’s account omits the entire second half of the pertinent sentence. The omitted text not only alters Mises’s position from Slobodian’s attribution, but it also directly undermines Slobodian’s interpretation of Mises’s views in the article.

Slobodian, <i>CEH</i>	Mises, <i>Nation, State, and Economy</i>
When necessary, the opening of world markets had to be achieved through violence. Though ‘one can think only with shudders and anger of the fearful mass murders that prepared the basis for many of the colonial settlements flourishing today’, [Mises] wrote in a book published the year after the First World War, the net gain made it worthwhile; in the end, ‘ <u>all other pages of world history were also written in blood.</u> ’ Violence in the project of expanding the space of foreign investment, wage labour and commercial exchange was not only acceptable, it was necessary. (Slobodian 2019b, 148, underlining added)	It is true that those colonies were not taken with smooth talk, and one can think only with shudders and anger of the fearful mass murders that prepared the basis for many of the colonial settlements flourishing today. But <u>all other pages of world history were also written in blood, and nothing is more stupid than efforts to justify today’s imperialism, with all of its brutalities, by reference to atrocities of generations long since gone.</u> (Mises 2006/1919, 63, underlining added)

Textual edits of this type, usually inverting Mises’s meaning in a light that erroneously casts him as sympathetic to racism or colonialism, are unfortunately common in Slobodian’s writings on the subject.

In the *CEH* article, Slobodian turns next to Mises’s 1944 book *Omnipotent Government* for evidence of him condoning racism. Although Slobodian allows that in this work Mises “distanced himself from people who opposed non-white immigration,” he then notes how Mises “conceded” that

we must not close our eyes to the fact that such views meet with the consent of

the vast majority. It would be useless to deny that there exists a repugnance to abandoning the geographical segregation of various races. Even men who are fair in their appraisal of the qualities and cultural achievements of the colored races and severely object to any discrimination against those members of these races who are already living in the midst of white populations, are opposed to a mass immigration of colored people. There are few white men who would not shudder at the picture of many millions of black or yellow people living in their own countries. (Mises 1944, 107; quoted in Slobodian 2019b, 152)

From this supposed concession Slobodian concludes: “By the 1940s Mises partially legitimised closed borders for non-white migrants as a near-permanent feature of the world order” (Slobodian 2019b, 152).

Slobodian repeats this charge in the second article, for *Cultural Politics*, citing both Mises and his own article in *CEH*:

And yet, in his 1944 work, Mises conceded the difficulties of racial integration, writing in a phrase, often cited by latter-day Mises Institute Austrians, about immigration barriers that “there are few white men who would not shudder at the picture of many millions of black or yellow people living in their own countries (1944: 107; Slobodian 2019). (Slobodian 2019a, 380)

Additionally, Slobodian claims that the passage was “often cited by latter-day Mises Institute Austrians” (2019a, 380), but without evidence. I know of no such evidence—indeed, a Google search for the passage in question revealed no specific references to this passage on the Mises Institute’s website. By contrast, an exhaustive search for it using Google Scholar produced only two references to it outside of Mises’s original text. Both were written by Slobodian.

A turn to Mises’s original passage demonstrates that Slobodian has again omitted surrounding context that points to an opposite position. Rather than leaving an ambiguous opening for racism, Mises described the racist position and condemned it in clear terms:

We must not close our eyes to the fact that such views meet with the consent of the vast majority. It would be useless to deny that there exists a repugnance to abandoning the geographical segregation of various races. Even men who are fair in their appraisal of the qualities and cultural achievements of the colored races and severely object to any discrimination against those members of these races who are already living in the midst of white populations are opposed to a mass immigration of colored people. There are few white men who would not shudder at the picture of many millions of black or yellow people living in their own countries. **The elaboration of a system making for harmonious coexistence and peaceful economic and political coöperation among the various races is a task to be accomplished by coming generations.**

But mankind will certainly fail to solve this problem if it does not entirely discard etatism. Let us not forget that the actual menace to our civilization does not originate from a conflict between the white and colored races but from conflicts among the various peoples of Europe and of European ancestry. (Mises 2011/1944, 121, underlining and boldface added)

The sentences in boldface, coming right after what Slobodian used, directly undermine Slobodian’s claim that “Mises partially legitimised closed borders for non-white migrants as a near-permanent feature of the world order.” Far from extending near-permanent legitimacy to the racist positions he described, *Mises explicitly called on coming generations to solve the problem of racism*, and he pointed out that—contrary to the race theorists’ recurring predictions of a civilizational war between people of different skin colors—the then-present World War II originated from a white European state invading other white European states.

Another example of a truncated quotation appears in Slobodian’s *Cultural Politics* article, though it is more difficult to detect since it involves his own translations of excerpts from a German-language book by Mises published in 1940. Slobodian’s text is presented next to our translation of the original passage.

Slobodian, <i>Cultural Politics</i>	Mises, <i>Nationalökonomie</i>
In the original German-language version of the book that would later become <i>Human Action</i> , written during his time at the Graduate Institute for International Studies in Geneva, Mises (1940: 157) granted even more ground to race science, writing that “ <u>we may take as given that the racial element plays a role among the factors that form the personality and, with it, our values and understanding.</u> ” What he objected to was not the possible truth content of race theory but its misuse. “In the doctrine of National Socialism and its derivative teachings in Italian fascism,” he wrote, “there is an unbridgeable gap between the statements of the founders of racial biology and their application to propaganda and use for practical policies.” Yet the fascist politicization of race theory should not discredit it permanently. “Because the keywords of race theory are used to justify measures with which it has nothing to do,” he wrote, “does not free scientific thought from the responsibility to think through to the end the problem of human races (<i>Menschenrassen</i>) in its praxeological significance” (158). (Slobodian 2019a, 380, underlining added)	<u>We may take as given that the racial element plays a role among the factors that form the personality and, with it, our values and understanding</u> , i.e., everything with which a man is born, his physical endowment, the hereditary qualities derived from his ancestors. But in the present state of our knowledge, we know nothing about the connection between the physical and the mind, and therefore cannot make any statement as to whether and in what way the physical is capable of influencing <i>Verstehen</i> . Some have attempted to assign certain value judgments (types of <i>Verstehen</i> , <i>Verstehen</i> types) to specific peoples; these attempts failed because it is easy to prove that every attempt to group people according to types of <i>Verstehen</i> thwarts the classification according to ethnicity. (Mises 1940, 157, our translation, underlining added)

Slobodian there portrays Mises as making only a narrowly qualified objection to eugenic theory based on its “misuse” by the Nazis. Such “misuse,” Slobodian claims, did “not discredit it permanently” in Mises’s eyes. To reach this conclusion,

however, Slobodian had to ignore the context of the passages he quotes. The omissions disconfirm his depiction, including the passage where Mises states that attempts to validate eugenic theory had failed on account of inherent impediments that the concept of *Verstehen* creates for grouping people according to their physical or ethnic characteristics.³

The severity of Slobodian's error is compounded by additional liberties that he takes with Mises's text. Slobodian's assertion that "fascist politicization of race theory should not discredit it permanently [in Mises's eyes]" is premised upon a rearrangement of Mises's original sentence structure and presentation. In *National-ökonomie*, Mises concludes his statement about the praxeological implications of race theory with the quoted passage: "Because the keywords of race theory are used to justify measures with which it has nothing to do, does not free scientific thought from the responsibility to think through to the end the problem of human races (*Menschenrassen*) in its praxeological significance." Slobodian depicts this conclusion as following from the passage about Fascist and Nazi deployments of racial eugenics. In reality, Mises's discussion of Nazism is lifted from a subsequent paragraph that specifically attacks Hitler's attempts to classify Jewish people by physical characteristics.

Mises's passage was in fact written to make a very different point—one that likened Marxist ideological theory to its "its racial-biological counterpart" in their shared polylogism and oppositional stance to his own concept of praxeology. Per Mises, race theory falsely asserted "that there are instead just as many disciplines of logic, mathematics, economics, and natural sciences as there are human races" (Mises 1940, 157, our translation). Thus when he calls upon scientists to "think through to the end the problem of human races," it is not intended as an "opening" to revive the race theorists' ideas in the wake of the Nazis, but rather as a plea for a robust and oppositional challenge to those ideas.

Similar quotation practices recur time and again in Slobodian's argument. In another example from the *CEH* article, Slobodian suggests that Mises opposed racial discrimination against groups of white people, as in Nazi anti-Semitism, but drew a line of distinction between anti-white and anti-black discrimination. Slobodian's depiction is presented here along with Mises's original text for comparison.

3. Slobodian shows unawareness of Mises's use of *Verstehen*, employed here in reference to the Weberian sociological concept, and instead translates it literally as the German word for "understanding." The word is more complex in meaning. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines it as "an intuitive doctrine or method of interpreting human culture especially in its subjective motivational and valuational aspects through the understanding of symbolic relationships."

Slobodian, <i>CEH</i>	Mises, <i>Omnipotent Government</i>
<p>Yet Mises proved incapable of extending a similar cosmopolitan attitude to populations of colour. Even as he argued emphatically that <u>‘there are today no pure stocks within the class or race of white-skinned people,’</u> he did so by pointing out the difference with black populations. <u>‘Negroes and whites differ in racial—i.e., bodily—features’</u>, he wrote, <u>‘but it is impossible to tell a Jewish German from a non-Jewish one by any racial characteristic.’</u> Mises’s rejection of anti-Semitism was premised on an affirmation of white–black race difference. (Slobodian 2019b, 155, underlining added)</p>	<p>For more than a hundred years anthropologists have studied the bodily features of various races. The undisputed outcome of these scientific investigations is that the peoples of white skin, Europeans and non-European descendants of emigrated European ancestors, represent a mixture of various bodily characteristics. Men have tried to explain this fact as the result of intermarriage between the members of pure primitive stocks. Whatever the truth of this, it is certain that <u>there are today no pure stocks within the class or race of white-skinned people.</u></p> <p>Further efforts have been made to coordinate certain bodily features—racial characteristics—with certain mental and moral characteristics. All these endeavors have also failed.</p> <p>Finally people have tried, especially in Germany, to discover the physical characteristics of an alleged Jewish or Semitic race as distinguished from the characteristics of European non-Jews. These quests, too, have failed completely. (Mises 2011/1944, 192, underlining added)</p>

Note how Slobodian omits text from the immediate surrounding of the excerpted passage, thereby altering its meaning. He then pairs the first excerpted passage with a second passage contrasting Nazi persecution of Jewish persons with African-Americans in the United States. One would not know it from Slobodian’s presentation, but that second passage comes several paragraphs after the first—and the intervening paragraphs are key.

In those intervening paragraphs Mises takes up the question of how Nazi racial ideology differed from other forms of discrimination. One distinguishing factor of the Nazis was their attempt to impose discrimination on the grounds of establishing a genealogical link to Judaism. Within the paragraphs Slobodian excludes are the following sentences, which reveal Mises’s true position:

The Nazis have chosen a different way. They say, it is true, that they want to discriminate not against people professing the Jewish religion but against people belonging to the Jewish race. Yet they define the members of the Jewish race as people professing the Jewish religion or descended from people professing the Jewish religion. The characteristic legal feature of the Jewish race is, in the so-called racial legislation of Nuremberg, the membership of the individual concerned or of his ancestors in the religious community of

Judaism. (Mises 2011/1944, 193)

Mises then offers a point of contrast for how discriminatory institutions operate. He uses the example of Jim Crow in the United States, where discrimination was based primarily on appearances and skin color. It is from the midst of this example that Slobodian extracts his second passage:

If Americans want to discriminate against Negroes, they do not go to the archives in order to study the racial affiliation of the people concerned; they search the individual's body for traces of Negro descent. Negroes and whites differ in racial—i.e., bodily—features; but it is impossible to tell a Jewish German from a non-Jewish one by any racial characteristic. (Mises 2011/1944, 194, underlining added)

Contra Slobodian, there is no evidence that Mises condones discrimination against African-Americans. The evidence shows quite the opposite: he condemns discrimination itself. Neither does his objection to anti-Semitism depend upon “an affirmation of white–black race difference,” as Slobodian claims. Rather, he is simply analyzing how the Nazi racial laws turned to characteristics other than skin color as a means of effecting their persecution of Jewish people. Since skin color was not an available means for differentiation, Nazis instead traced the genealogies of their victims. As Mises pointed out in the very next paragraph, “The Nazis have claimed that they were fighting the decisive war between the Nordic master race and the human underdogs,” yet the very existence of such a “master race” was itself a myth that the Nazis selectively invoked to rationalize their persecution of Jewish people and other disliked groups (Mises 2011/1944, 194).

The quotation practices illustrated here do not appear to be unique to Slobodian's two articles on Mises. In related works on the history of “neo-liberalism,” Slobodian's arguments frequently rely for support on fragmentary quotations that lead the trusting reader into serious misconceptions about original texts. In 2015, Slobodian delivered a lecture about his then-forthcoming book *Globalists* (Slobodian 2018a) in which he misrepresents the meaning of a sentence grabbed from Mises's *Liberalism*.

Slobodian, 2015 lecture	Mises, <i>Liberalism</i>
<p>For Mises, the demands of the world economy trumped all other political claims. In discussing colonialism, for example, he remarked that “<u>no chapter of history is steeped further in blood than the history of colonialism</u>” but still insisted that keeping the colonies was the first priority once Europe became dependent on the empire for raw materials. Self-determination might be thinkable but only under the control of a muscular super-state that could ensure the continuation of free trade. (Slobodian 2015, 9, underlining added)</p>	<p><u>No chapter of history is steeped further in blood than the history of colonialism.</u> Blood was shed uselessly and senselessly. Flourishing lands were laid waste; whole peoples destroyed and exterminated. All this can in no way be extenuated or justified. The dominion of Europeans in Africa and in important parts of Asia is absolute. It stands in the sharpest contrast to all the principles of liberalism and democracy, and there can be no doubt that we must strive for its abolition. The only question is how the elimination of this intolerable condition can be accomplished in the least harmful way possible. (Mises 2005/1927, 93–94, underlining added)</p>

Note how Slobodian argues that Mises believed that “keeping the colonies” was a necessary condition for the survival of the European economy. Yet, while the snippet seems to fit into Slobodian’s narrative, in Mises’s original text it is part of a denunciation of colonialism—within three sentences of the one extracted by Slobodian we find Mises saying that European dominion in Africa and Asia is “intolerable” and that his readers “must strive for its abolition.” Reading on, we see that to Mises self-determination for the colonies was not merely “thinkable” and not “only” if limited by a larger authority as Slobodian (2015, 9) has it, but imperative and ultimately unconditional:

The application of these principles would mean, in effect, that all the overseas territories of the European countries would at first be turned into mandates of the League [of Nations]. But even this would have to be viewed only as a transitional stage. The final goal must continue to be the complete liberation of the colonies from the despotic rule under which they live today. (Mises 2005/1927, 97)

In another section of the same talk, Slobodian (2015) gleans certain quotations from Mises’s *Liberalism* to indict Mises for being in support of state coercion. He again uses selectively curated excerpts of Mises’s original text to make this point. As a comparison of the passages reveals, Slobodian’s excerpts omit surrounding passages that undermine his interpretation, and they are presented as if Mises intended them to be connected points.

Slobodian, 2015 lecture	Mises, <i>Liberalism</i>
<p>After 1918, Mises returned to the Chamber of Commerce. The building remained adorned with the double-headed eagle of the Dual Monarchy holding the bundled rods of the Roman fasces (slide). Mises may have been thinking of this seal when he wrote admiringly of the Roman symbol in 1927, that it did not obscure “<u>the truth of the matter</u>” that “<u>the state is the apparatus of compulsion and coercion.</u>” Contrary to his embrace by latter-day libertarians, Mises did not mean this in a negative sense. The application of state power was often necessary. (Slobodian 2015, 5, underlining added)</p>	<p><u>The state is the apparatus of compulsion and coercion.</u> This holds not only for the “night-watchman” state, but just as much for every other, and most of all for the socialist state. Everything that the state is capable of doing it does by compulsion and the application of force. To suppress conduct dangerous to the existence of the social order is the sum and substance of state activity; to this is added, in a socialist community, control over the means of production.</p> <p>The sober logic of the Romans expressed this fact symbolically by adopting the axe and the bundle of rods as the emblem of the state. Abstruse mysticism, calling itself philosophy, has done as much as possible in modern times to obscure <u>the truth of the matter</u>. For Schelling, the state is the direct and visible image of absolute life, a phase in the revelation of the Absolute or World Soul. It exists only for its own sake, and its activity is directed exclusively to the maintenance of both the substance and the form of its existence. For Hegel, Absolute Reason reveals itself in the state, and Objective Spirit realizes itself in it. It is ethical mind developed into an organic reality—reality and the ethical idea as the revealed substantial will intelligible to itself. The epigones of idealist philosophy outdid even their masters in their deification of the state. To be sure, one comes no closer to the truth if, in reaction to these and similar doctrines, one calls the state, with Nietzsche, the coldest of all cold monsters. The state is neither cold nor warm, for it is an abstract concept in whose name living men—the organs of the state, the government—act. All state activity is human action, an evil inflicted by men on men. The goal—the preservation of society—justifies the action of the organs of the state, but the evils inflicted are not felt as any less evil by those who suffer under them.</p> <p>The evil that a man inflicts on his fellow man injures both—not only the one to whom it is done, but also the one who does it. Nothing corrupts a man so much as being an arm of the law and making men suffer. The lot of the subject is anxiety, a spirit of servility and fawning adulation; but the pharisaical self-righteousness, conceit, and arrogance of the master are no better. (Mises 2005/1927, 34–35, underlining added)</p>

By reading the passage in full, we find that once again Slobodian is unjust to Mises. The passage reveals that Mises’s opinion of the state was indeed negative: “All state activity is human action, an evil inflicted by men on men.” Mises dislikes the state for the very reason that Slobodian depicts as something affirmed by Mises: for its use of “compulsion and coercion.”

Mises is not the only free-market economist whose arguments on race and colonialism have been misinterpreted by Slobodian in this fashion. In *Globalists*, Slobodian criticizes William H. Hutt’s alleged position on race in *The Economics of the Colour Bar*. He presents Hutt’s words to suggest that he disapproved of the idea that black Africans, who comprised the majority of the South African population, would have majority rule in a fully representative parliament. Hutt’s original text,

however, shows that he was taking issue with the abuses of black Africans by the white parliamentary majorities that existed in 1964, even as whites constituted a minority of the overall South African population.

Slobodian, <i>Globalists</i>	Hutt, <i>Economics of the Colour Bar</i>
<p>The problem of democracy was the central theme of Hutt's writings. What he described as "<u>the most vital point of my whole thesis</u>" in <i>The Economics of the Colour Bar</i> was not an economic but a political argument: a warning about the "tyranny of parliamentary majorities" under systems of universal suffrage. The fact that blacks were the majority population in South Africa made the situation exceptionally perilous, in his view. The apparent solution of the universal suffrage would only "mean the transfer of power to a new political majority, with no constitutional limitations to prevent retaliatory abuse." Hutt mentioned that he sympathized with those who feared "black supremacy (a mere turning of the tables)." Hutt explained on these ideas in a piece solicited for the <i>National Review</i>, likely by Buckley himself on his state-funded trip to South Africa in the winter of 1962–1963. (Slobodian 2018a, 173–174, underlining added)</p>	<p>It may be thought that residential segregation and separate facilities in respect of universities, libraries, learned societies, beaches, public gardens, the Post Office, theatres, sport, transport, etc., are hardly examples of injustices of <i>economic</i> origin; for in these cases any discriminatory treatment appears to originate in political or socio-psychological factors rather than economic causes. But it is an important part of my case that all forms of what are felt to be injustices—economic or otherwise—can be seen to have their ultimate source in an abuse of parliamentary majorities. For majorities, even if based on 'one man, one vote', may withdraw from minorities or from classes not represented the opportunity to win equal dignity and respect as well as the right to economic opportunities.</p> <p>This is, I feel, <u>the most vital point of my whole thesis</u>. Unless parliaments are restrained by iron-clad constitutional entrenchments, political majorities, as defined and distorted by electoral laws and voting procedures, will almost always be tempted to exploit their power tyrannically, that is, without true regard for the rights or feelings of political minorities or for those who lack effective political representation. The majorities in the white constituencies, to which the authors of the Group Areas programme have successfully appealed, have <i>wanted</i> to humiliate the non-Whites. Let us be under no illusion on that point. This is partly because one of the parties found it profitable deliberately to foster racial pride, racial prejudices, racial fears and racial hatreds. (Hutt 2014/1964, 115–116)</p>

Hutt was making a subtler point about the need for "constitutional entrenchments" that would establish and secure a system of rights that a simple majoritarian vote within a parliament could not overturn or violate. The necessity of such a system, in Hutt's mind, was demonstrated by the example of Apartheid, where a white *parliamentary* majority imposed humiliating and discriminatory restrictions on

a black *population* majority.

These examples show a recurring pattern of textual representations that omit important accompanying wordings and passages, and that frequently alter the ordering of the original text’s presentation of its argument. In each case, the omissions and reorderings alter the reader’s understanding of the point being made in the original passage by the free-market economist. It is not insignificant that these quotation practices build toward a particular thesis about the relationship between “neoliberalism” and racial colonialism. In each case, the questionable quotation practices are used to imply that the excerpted author harbored sympathies for racism, imperialism, eugenics, and similar discredited concepts. Slobodian then uses the excerpts to question their reputations as philosophical liberals on matters of race, even though the unedited original texts display clear condemnations of the positions that he assigns to them.

An attempted correction

After seeing these numerous questionable quotation practices in Slobodian’s *CEH* and *Cultural Politics* articles, I attempted to bring them to his attention and ask for a clarification or correction. This occurred in late 2018 after Slobodian, on Twitter, identified Mises as a source for anti-immigration positions as advanced by Hans-Hermann Hoppe.⁴ I suggested that, contrary to Slobodian’s insinuations, Hoppe did not appear to draw any of his immigration claims out of Mises’s texts and certainly not the passages that Slobodian misquoted. Hoppe, in fact, identifies Mises as an expositor of the “classical” economic argument for open immigration—and rejects the same as an antiquated view from an earlier time. As Hoppe writes in a 2001 text, “The problem with the above argument is that it suffers from two interrelated shortcomings which invalidate its unconditional pro-immigration conclusion and/or which render the argument applicable only to a highly unrealistic—long bygone—situation in human history” (Hoppe 2009/2001, 138).

My alternative thesis, which I outlined to Slobodian in December 2018, called attention to Hoppe’s use of discursive philosophical reasoning to build up a theory which he then used in turn to justify state action to exclude immigrants from a country (Brennan 2013). As I noted at the time, the intellectual genesis of Hoppe’s approach came not from Mises but from Hoppe’s own academic training under the German philosophers Juergen Habermas and Karl-Otto Apel. Hoppe wrote his dissertation directly under Habermas, and at least in the earliest iterations

4. Alluding to Hoppe, Slobodian wrote on December 28, 2018 ([link](#)), that his article (later published as Slobodian 2019b) was “framed by ongoing fights between right- and left-libertarians for [Mises’s] legacy.”

of his arguments, specifically claimed to be adapting their discursive analysis in a rightward direction. Murray Rothbard (1990) wrote that “Hoppe is a libertarian extension” of “the Habermas-Apel doctrine.”

Slobodian was skeptical of my counter-thesis and maintained at the time that he had correctly represented Mises’s texts. Slobodian wrote in a 29 December 2018 Twitter message to me: “Far from convinced based on this summary that Habermas is more important for him than Rothbard but would be interested to see this written up with references. You should do it” ([link](#)).⁵ Shortly thereafter, I began drafting a paper that traced the influence of Habermas and Apel on the Austrian economic debates of the 1980s, identifying their influence on Hoppe’s later work. In doing so, I engaged Slobodian’s pair of articles where he proposed Mises as the alternative origin. This afforded an opportunity to explore Slobodian’s abuse of Mises’s text, calling attention to several examples of altered and out-of-context quotations in both articles. I completed a working draft of that paper by the fall of 2019, and I presented an early version of it at an economics conference (Magness 2019a).

After incorporating feedback, on January 8, 2020, I submitted the paper to *Contemporary European History* for consideration. I submitted it to *CEH* because Slobodian’s *CEH* article had appeared in print a few months earlier, and my piece corrected several unambiguous errors in Slobodian’s depiction of Mises’s texts while also presenting an alternative thesis for the events that Slobodian described. Although no journal is obliged to accept every submission it receives, debates of this sort are the essence of scholarly exchange, particularly when they involve substantive corrections to recent material in the same journal.

Instead of considering my piece or responding to the problems it raised with Slobodian’s quotation practices, an unsigned “editor” of *CEH* sent a prejudicial desk rejection in a matter of days. My article, the journal claimed, had “barely any primary source base or methodology” even though it brought several previously unknown sources to light, such as the aforementioned Rothbard material. This was an odd position for them to take seeing as Slobodian’s article had no clear methodology and relied almost entirely on heavily truncated quotations from secondary sources, such as Mises’s published books. Furthermore, the editor objected that I had uploaded an earlier working draft of the paper for the aforementioned conference presentation—an entirely common and accepted academic practice—and claimed that this draft meant that my article had already been “pub-

5. On August 5, 2019, Slobodian derisively referenced the December 2018 conversation in a subsequent tweet ([link](#)), stating “I once suggested to a long-muted troll on here that he write about this as he loved to claim Hoppe was a secret member of the Frankfurt School. He demurred when it became clear he’d actually have to read some critical theory.”

lished” in another journal. I sent the editors of *CEH* the following inquiry on January 25, 2020:

Dear Editors,

Thank you for your response below. While I am disappointed by your decision, I understand that differences of focus and method carry limitations for a venue such as yours.

Since my argument does contain specific factual corrections to claims made in a recently published article in *Contemporary European History*, I am writing out of curiosity to ask what an appropriate corrective for the readers of your venue (e.g. letter, comment, or note) might entail.

Sincerely,

Phil Magness

Even if they declined to run a lengthy response to Slobodian’s argument, the journal should recognize the errors arising from misrepresenting Mises and permit a short note or correction. On January 31, 2020, I received a short reply from one of *CEH*’s editors, Victoria Harris: “Thanks for this. I sent your first email on to the editor responsible for your piece.” I never received another response, despite sending follow-up inquiries.⁶

Meanwhile, scholars relying on Slobodian’s account began to repeat and amplify his characterization of Mises as a racist. Building upon the altered and out-of-context quotations, Lars Cornelissen (2021; 2020) accused Mises of mounting a “racialized attack” on democracy. Robin De Bruin claimed that Slobodian had shown that “many right-wing European founding fathers,” the author’s categorization of Mises and the Austrian school—“basically had the same core beliefs as the Alt-Right supporters” (2021, 9).

At the same time, other scholars began to address the problems with Slobodian’s textual misrepresentations, including the passages I documented above. David Gordon (2021) posted one such list, comparing Slobodian’s article with Mises’s texts and finding clear evidence of edits that altered the meaning of the original passages. With this list of examples in hand and having never received a response from *CEH*, I wrote the journal again on March 15, 2021, to inquire about an appropriate correction to Slobodian’s article. I received the following answer from the journal on March 24:

Dear Dr Magness,

Our publication process involves a rigorous peer-review system of multiple reviewers for each piece, a process which ensures the high-quality

6. After over a year of deflection, *CEH*’s editors eventually claimed that their unresponsiveness to email was caused by Covid-19.

of our research articles. Scholarship, of course, evolves, and interpretations differ. This is why we host roundtables to discuss different viewpoints on broad topics (the Spanish Civil War, most recently).

However, in this specific case, we are confident about the academic rigour of Slobodian's piece.

We hope you and yours are keeping well in these difficult times.

All Best,

Contemporary European History

The response not only failed to address any of the factual problems with Slobodian's quotation practices, it also unintentionally related to an unforeseen twist to our now year-long exchange.

As I learned shortly thereafter, the problems I pointed out about the Mises quotation edits were not unknown to the editors of *CEH* when I brought the problems to their attention. These issues had in fact been flagged over a year prior during the blinded peer review of Slobodian's submission to *CEH*. The editors of *CEH* nevertheless accepted Slobodian's article and published it without addressing their referee's concerns about the quotations. Seeing as those concerns raised a direct challenge to Slobodian's thesis, the decision to ignore the referee carried substantial implications for the acceptance and publication of the article.

Approving misrepresented quotations

When Slobodian first submitted his article "Perfect Capitalism, Imperfect Humans" to *CEH*, it contained a very different thesis than the final published version. Echoing his 2018 book *Globalists*, Slobodian's approach in the original draft exhibited a generally adversarial stance toward Mises's economics, but it did not charge Mises with harboring a qualified tolerance for racism and imperialism (Magness 2019b). Instead it argued that Mises's writings in the interwar era revealed his attempts to navigate the tumultuous political realities of a post-Habsburg central Europe, as those realities challenged his commitments to a free-market, free-immigration liberal philosophy. Slobodian argued that Mises looked back to the prewar Austro-Hungarian Empire as an institutional framework for a liberal political order in matters of immigration. He also originally argued that Mises's interwar writings maintained that normative liberal preference but found it increasingly intruded upon by post-World War I restrictions on movement and, eventually, the rise of illiberal totalitarian regimes on the European continent in the prelude to World War II.

During the first round of peer review—as I learned from an inquiry with *CEH*'s publisher Cambridge University Press—Slobodian's original article was

sent to four referees.⁷ Two referees recommended minor revisions to the piece, a third recommended major revisions, and a fourth recommended rejection (albeit on the grounds that the article was a repetition of Slobodian's book *Globalists*, not realizing it was the same author due to blind review). The journal's editors invited Slobodian to revise and resubmit his article, attending to the three referees who suggested revisions.

By all appearances, Slobodian then made substantial changes to his article and thesis. Most of the problematic Mises quotations were added to the article in preparing the revision for resubmission. The argument was reworked to include the new contention that Mises shifted to an ambiguous position on racism, imperialism, and related matters during and after World War II. He worked this new thesis into the article's conclusion, even charging that Mises's rejection of Nazi anti-Semitism "was premised on an affirmation of white–black race difference," as if to imply that the economist would not extend similar objections to anti-black racism (Slobodian 2019b, 155).

The editors of *CEH* then sent Slobodian's substantially revised article to two of the original four referees. At some point during this second round, the basic mechanisms of peer review collapsed. One of the referees recommended accepting the revised paper as-is. But the other referee noticed the substantial additions to the article, including its new and altered thesis. When investigating those additions, the referee observed the aforementioned pattern of altered and misrepresented quotations.

I first learned directly of this chain of events in early 2021 after expressing my displeasure with *CEH*'s handling and rejection of my own manuscript challenging Slobodian's thesis and calling attention to the quotation issues. My comments were shared by chance with another scholar who works on the history of economic thought and, who I soon learned, happened to be one of the referees on Slobodian's original piece. I learned from this scholar that similar concerns about the misquotation of Mises were brought to the attention of *CEH*'s editors during peer review, only to be ignored.

I quote here with permission directly from the second-round referee report that flagged Slobodian's changes and alerted the editors of *CEH* to a substantial problem with the revised and ultimately published version of the article:

Having read the revised article and then reread the original version, I am not sure what happened here. It seems that the author has changed his mind on the fundamental meaning of Mises' work, which he now expresses in the

7. The details of the referee process were confirmed by the author in correspondence with Helen Hardy of Cambridge University Press on August 23, 2021.

introduction and conclusion, while much of the body of the article is left intact. This leads to an underdeveloped, but very serious accusation that Mises is a racist, as well as a stretched attempt to make a link with contemporary political developments. This makes the article substantially weaker than it originally was, and makes one unsure about the central claim of the article.⁸

The referee further noted that Slobodian’s revisions took an initially impartial and scholarly argument and turned it “openly political.” The referee warned the editors that “the article is now weaker than in the original version, and based on dubious historical scholarship: quoting out of context, partial reading of the relevant material, and ascribing views to others that they did not hold.”

The referee specifically called attention to the “out-of-context quote from Mises’ *Omnipotent Government*” and alerted the editors to the surrounding passages, which stated Mises’s objections to the racial dimensions of fascism. Anticipating my own later criticisms of the published article, the referee pointed out that Slobodian was conflating Mises’s descriptions of his adversaries’ positions (i.e., the Nazis) with Mises’s own position, omitting adjacent paragraphs where Mises clearly laid out his own position. The report continues:

In the book ‘Omnipotent Government’ this passage comes after a paragraph that presents the views of his opponents, with which he clearly disagrees, for he sees political-economy causes where others see racial causes. But even from this passage itself it is perfectly clear that he is making an argument about political feasibility at that time (1944!), not a principled argument. And Mises goes on to conclude that the wars of the past years were not at all between races, but instead were conflicts within Europe and Asia, caused by ‘etatism’. Yet the author feels confident enough to conclude that Mises: “By the 1940s, Mises partially legitimized closed borders for non-white migrants as a near permanent feature of the world order.” No, that is what others sought to do, and what Mises sought to overcome, given the political reality of his time.

In the concluding remarks, the referee writes: “I strongly suggest that the article is not published in its revised form.”

A failure of editorial integrity

The editors of *CEH* declined to take any action to address the second-round referee’s warnings. They do not appear to have even asked Slobodian to respond to the issues raised about altered and out-of-context passages from Mises’s works.

8. The original referee report is quoted with permission from its author.

Then, oddly enough, Slobodian himself was named as a new co-editor of *CEH* in the spring of 2020—shortly after the start of my own exchanges with the journal. Spanning the course of a year, each of my attempts to bring specific instances of erroneous quotations to their attention were either brushed aside with a generic form letter or ignored entirely.

After the March 2021 exchange, I contacted Cambridge University Press’s publishing ethics committee about the irregularities and the outcome. Despite initial assurances that they would investigate the matter, I received little more than a formulaic response. The committee declined to act, or even to receive the evidence that I offered to provide them. After unspecified consultation with the editors of *CEH*, they simply stated that they “view these allegations as rooted in scholarly disagreement rather than in problems of research integrity.” After I registered my concerns about the lack of transparency in the process, they simply responded that the editors of *CEH* “reached an informed decision that the article had met the standards and criteria of *CEH* and there was no need for further revision.” When pressed on the specific matter of quotation editing, the committee and/or editors responded that the “quotations chosen do not seem to have been distorted in the article, and the reading of Mises remains a matter of interpretation.”

When reading that conclusion, it helps to revisit an example that was brought to their attention. Here is what Mises wrote in 1919:

But all other pages of world history were also written in blood, and nothing is more stupid than efforts to justify today’s imperialism, with all of its brutalities, by reference to atrocities of generations long since gone. (Mises 2006/1919, 63)

Here is how Slobodian depicted that same passage:

[Mises] wrote in a book published the year after the First World War, the net gain made it worthwhile; in the end, ‘all other pages of world history were also written in blood’. Violence in the project of expanding the space of foreign investment, wage labour and commercial exchange was not only acceptable, it was necessary. (Slobodian 2019b, 148)

The changes may be called “a matter of interpretation,” but Slobodian’s interpretation is obviously irresponsible. It also services his revised thesis, which seeks to impart a tolerance or even sympathy for racial colonialism into Mises’s philosophical worldview. The other documented textual issues perform a similar function.

Given that these issues were flagged by an anonymous referee during peer review, independently raised in my own attempts to submit a rebuttal to *CEH*, and

subsequently presented to *CEP's* editors as well as Cambridge University Press, it is not possible for those involved in the journal to claim ignorance of the problems that they present for Slobodian's thesis. The journal's violation of basic standards of truthfulness appears to be willful.

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