

# **Was the British Empire Bad?**

**and if so, so what?**

# Areas of Concern

- Factual basis (what happened then)
- Knowledge of Consequences (for today)
- Moral relativity (in evaluating what happened)
- Compensate or Eliminate Disadvantage?
- Moral and pragmatic grounds for compensation
- Pragmatic basis for “elimination”

# Factual basis and Knowledge of consequences

- Can we have an objective interpretation of a historical period?
- Will historical accounts be dominated by partisan players?
- Anti-racist activists construct their own “narrative” to taste
- Counter-narrative considered racist and shunned by mainstream media.
- We all know that economic predictions are pants, even over short timescales
- Establishing economic consequences over centuries is highly speculative.

# Moral relativity

- Are moral claims absolute or relative?
- If absolute:
  - Given that moral beliefs have changed since the days of empire, how do we know that our beliefs are true and their's were false?
  - Even considering only today's standards, we lack a common view
  - How can we be moral if acting according to our (and contemporary) moral convictions does not suffice to avoid condemnation by posterity (and God?).
- If relative:
  - How should we judge the empire, by "our" standards, or those of the time?
  - Similar considerations in respect of cultural variations at any given time.

# So what? - can we put things right?

- Compensate?
  - Violates multiple fundamental moral principles (group punishment, sins of father)
  - Probably fails to correct disadvantage
  - How many dimensions of disadvantage should be addressed?
- Eliminate disadvantage?
  - Which does this best?
    - socialism
    - capitalism
    - mixed economy & welfare state
    - anarchy?

# A Counter Narrative

- Critique of empire, identity politics and grievance activism have some common ancestry which is evolved from Marxism through postmodernism and critical theory.
- This an aspect of the “culture wars” and can only be understood in that context.
- See Helen Pluckrose on “The Evolution of Postmodern Thought”.