

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”.