

# Actively Critical of Civilisation

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We are actively critical of civilisation in our homeschool. Here's part of a comment I posted in this group a few months back:

We do a lot of reading and a lot of talking. When we talk about Indigenous issues here in our homeschool, I want Liam to know the culture and philosophy behind the glorification of empire. We're not studying the classics for their goodness, truth, or beauty. We're studying them because we are white people living on stolen land, and I want my child to understand that thousands of years of scholarship have been devoted to enculturating millions of people into believing that Western civilisation is a gift to the world, made possible by the achievements of the ancient Greeks and Romans, and the revival of their practices by renaissance Europe.

Here are just a few examples of the conversations we've shared as we've read from a book published by an unabashedly Christian, conservative, Western supremacist publishing company. \*cough\* MP \*cough\* (I just opened up to the beginning of the Peloponnesian war and started skim reading, jotting down my recollection of our conversations from this section as examples.)

- Athens formed the Delian League in order to liberate kin from their oppressors, then misused her power and became a tyrant. Athenian values of democracy were not sufficient to prevent this corruption. How do modern values of democracy compare? Are we, too, oppressors in spite of the values we profess?
- Athens prided herself on democracy and sought to free others from oppression, but could not have achieved the feats of art and scholarship we still celebrate today were it not for her reliance on the underclass of slaves. (Also, for the men whose words we still study for their wisdom, their reliance on an underclass of women.) Who benefits now from the existence of lower classes of people? Will those in power ever voluntarily yield to justice?
- Athens the city greatly exceeded the carrying capacity of the surrounding countryside in the small state of Attica and so depended on shipments of grain from elsewhere. The trade routes were maintained by whatever means necessary, including violence. Is it sustainable for a dense population of humans to seek basic sustenance from beyond the immediate ecosystem, and to rely on the maintenance of socio-political relations for the delivery of food? What are the possible risks of such an arrangement? How are we living now? What have we learned?
- When the Spartans burned and plundered Attica near the beginning of the Peloponnesian war, people living and farming in the country were forced

into the city of Athens. The overcrowded city was overcome with the Plague, and the population was reduced greatly as a result. This is an example of collapse following population overshoot, which is where a population (of any species) of a place exceeds the carrying capacity of that place.

We'll be coming to the end of our ancient Greek studies shortly. In preparation for our reading on Rome, which I expect to be in large part, if not exclusively, in the words of the Romans, we are reading (fiction) of the story of Boudica and the Britons' opposition of Roman occupation of their tribal lands.

Talking points

- We know little of these people, as their traditional cultural practices were outlawed, their oral traditions have been lost, and existing accounts of their beliefs and practices were written by their oppressors. Many of these accounts are now believed to have been exaggerated or even entirely fabricated in order to justify to other Romans the process of subduing the tribes and bringing to them the gift of civilisation. How does this compare to our knowledge of the people who cared for the land we now inhabit? Who is the best source of knowledge on the lives of Indigenous Australians? Do you think the words of the colonisers are a reliable source? Why or why not?
- What tactics did the Romans use against tribal Britons who opposed them? What do you know of the way Indigenous Australians were treated by imperialists seeking to establish colonies here and claim ownership of the land?
- Roman veterans were promised land for their service. What happened to the barbarians who already lived there? Compare this to the way Indigenous Australians were treated by white settlers who wished to use the land for agricultural purposes. Many Australians today speak proudly of "supporting the farmers." Why are we still glorifying white settlers and not acknowledging the traditional custodians and their connection with and care for the land? Contrast this with farmers' unsustainable use of stolen land for commercial purposes. Who does this narrative serve? Many Australians are grateful to farmers as they provide sustenance to the dense population centres we live in, where we are unable to source sufficient food from our local ecosystems, which has been largely destroyed. But whose idea was it for us to live this way? And who destroyed the ecosystems? Can you think of another example of a city unable to feed its people from the surrounding land? What did you think of this idea when you first encountered it? What do you think now?
- Slave trade was common among the Romans, as it was with the Greeks (discussed earlier). Thousands of years later, many Indigenous Australians were made slaves to white settlers. Globally, illegal slave trade continues to this day. Slaves are overwhelmingly people of colour. About a quarter of them are children.

- Rape was a common weapon of war used by imperialists, and also continues to this day, in conflicts of varying causes. The rape of Aboriginal women by white settlers was widespread, and often the children of the resulting pregnancies were removed from their mothers. As recently as last century, Australian law supported the (often violent) removal of Aboriginal and so-called "half-caste" children (very offensive term) from their Aboriginal mothers, to be raised instead by white colonisers. The children were punished with violence for speaking the languages of their people, as one of the primary goals of the policy was to assimilate the children to the culture of the colonisers.