Twitter Thread by Duncan Reyburn



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1/ Four ways to evaluate an idea. A quick thread, on four words: history, consequences, support, criticism.

2/ A. Try to understand something of the origin of the idea or thought since all ideas have a history. Where does it come from? What journey did it take to get here? Even if the answer is approximate, a sense of the idea's past is better than assuming it emerged out of thin air.

3/ B. Look at the implications of the idea. Ideas, as Richard Weaver says, have consequences. All thoughts lead to other thoughts, and may end up with specific concrete expressions in the world, too. What does that idea imply? What could it lead to if taken (too) seriously?

4/ C. Try to understand what sort of support or foundation might sustain the idea. This amounts to trying to see the idea in the best light. What research supports it? What arguments have been made? What wisdom has been tested regarding the idea?

5/ D. Look at objections to the idea. Look for (possible) negatives and missed nuances. Is the foundation flimsy? What does it fail to account for? What criticisms can be or have been made of the idea?

6/ Of course, each of these concerns could possibly require a dissertation, depending on the idea in question, but even having a minimum awareness of these dimensions (history, consequences, support and criticism) can help to deepen understanding. Isn't that nice?