Twitter Thread by ■■Tim Hayward■■



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You should probably mute me now. This is going to be a rambling thread.
I'm not sure if it's possible to blame Thatcher for this, but I think it happened on her watch.... whats worrying me is a kind of cultural/social 'way of seeing' that could actually sit behind....

...a majority of our problems -social and political... even our mental health. It's what we might usefully term the 'Doctrine of Excellence'. The basic idea is that your aim and target in everything you do is to be the best, that striving for the exceptional is the only path.

It appears most egregiously in the language of business... the kind of 'Always Be Closing' 'Lunch is For Losers' 'Greed is good' narrative that Trump articulated in his own 'Mein Kampf' The 'art' of the deal. It finds the intellectual scaffolding it requires in the ...

... entirely bankrupt notion of 'Trickle Down' economics.
But it didn't necessarily start in business. Business 'thinkers' love to co-opt the language of sport... the constant metaphors for winning, losing, competing with passion and the devastation of failure...

But it probably didn't start there either. Sports people use metaphors of battle. Death or glory. Winning no matter what the sacrifice.
Now... and I suppose this is where Thatcher and Regan come in... its the language of politics. There is no diplomacy, only winning.

(There is, of course, never in politics at least, any acknowledgement that winners must create losers).

In business this Manichean shift has put us into a surreal position. For the first time in business history we're in a place where businesses must grow or die.

No acknowledgement, of course, that profit, capacity or human recource might be in any way finite.

Problem is that this shit now permeates every fibre of our lives. Almost all popular public entertainment is couched in terms of competition or some thrusting arc of personal...

... discovery or achievement. Our education system is geared to measurement of success...even amateur sporting pastimes are hedged around with the ‘winner’ narrative.

Slightly predating the Doctrine of Excellence we have a second thread ... no less intellectually tenuous... that’s also become part of our belief system and works in a sort of toxic symbiosis. Starting depending on your POV with Samuel Smiles or possible around UCSC in 1968...

...we have the vast ‘Human Potential’ movement, preaching, fundamentally, that anyone can achieve anything if they believe in themselves sufficiently. This odd cod-assertion started on shrinks’ couches, moved through cults and has now become so much part of the fabric...

...of our education, business and political structures that even to question it is to invite your own immolation.

Oddly the Doctrine of Excellence and the Cult of Personal Effectiveness are totally secular, completely Western notions. In most other cultures or religions, to want to be better than others is wrong, to believe you are in total control of your own destiny is either heretical...

...or just flat out logically impossible.

Leaves me with the rather unnerving feeling that, if this is what rational, modern, enlightened secularism is all about, we’ve managed to build ourselves a doctrinal structure as absurd and damaging as any religion.

This thread has been brought to you by *all* the letters of the alphabet and Arriva Crosscountry.

One small postscript.
We’ve managed to create a generation of teenagers entirely inculcated with these two notions a) you must succeed to the highest level or you are worthless and b) you can do anything if you want to badly enough...

This gives you kids who....
a) want to quit anything they can’t get straight As in
b) fear trying anything they might fail at
c) start their lives believing most work is beneath them
d) put faith in lotteries, ‘talent’ contests and ‘celebrity’
e) are doomed to lives of...

...miserable disatisfaction and bewilderment
f) have epidemic levels of self-harm, mental health and a loss of personal identity that’s the driving characteristic of their politics