Twitter Thread by Noah Smith



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This thread demonstrates that a lot of academic writing that *looks* like utter nonsense is merely scholars dressing up a useful but mundane point with a ton of unnecessary jargon.

> Imagine for a moment the most obscurantist, jargon-filled, po-mo article the politically correct academy might produce. Pure SJW nonsense. Got it? Chances are you're imagining something like the infamous "Feminist Glaciology" article from a few years back.https://t.co/NRaWNREBvR pic.twitter.com/qtSFBYY80S
>
> — Jeffrey Sachs (@JeffreyASachs) October 13, 2018

My theory is that the jargon creates an artificial barrier to entry. https://t.co/MqLyyppdHl

If one must spend years marinating one's brain in jargon to be perceived as an expert on a topic, it protects the status and earning power of people who study relatively easy topics.

In econ, a similar thing is accomplished by what recent Nobel prize winner Paul Romer calls "mathiness": https://t.co/DBCRRc8Mir

But mathiness and jargon are not quite the same...

Jargon usually doesn't force you to change the substance of your central point.

Mathiness often does. By forcing you to write your model in a way that's mathematically tractable (easy to work with), mathiness often impoverishes your understanding of how the world really works.

@Undercoverhist has written about this problem: https://t.co/3YIKZSHkdb

Jargon sounds sillier than mathiness. It looks worse to the public, because most of the public thinks they should be able to understand English but doesn't assume they can understand math.

But mathiness, ultimately, is probably more pernicious.

(end)