Twitter Thread by Yascha Mounk

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Cancel culture is real.

But what distinguishes legitimate criticism from an illegitimate attempt to cancel someone?

@Jon_Rauch offers what is, to my mind, the best explanation anyone has come up with so far.

It should become the

There isn't a single characteristic that all attempts at cancelation share.

So instead of a litmus test, we need a checklist of warning signs. The more signs you see, the more certain you can be that you are looking at a cancel campaign.

Here are the six most important.

1) Punitiveness

Are people denouncing you to your employer or your social connections?

Are you being blacklisted from jobs and social opportunities?

Does what is being said to or about you have the goal—or foreseeable effect—of jeopardizing your livelihood?

A critical culture seeks to correct rather than punish. In science, the only penalty for being wrong is that you lose the argument.

Canceling, by contrast, seeks to punish rather than correct. The point is to make the errant suffer.

2) Deplatforming

Are campaigners attempting to prevent you from publishing your work, giving speeches or attending meetings?

Are they claiming that allowing you to be heard is violence against them or makes them unsafe?

A critical culture understands that it is necessary to tolerate dissent though it can seem obnoxious, harmful, hateful and, yes, unsafe.

Canceling, by contrast, seeks to shut up its targets through shout-downs, disinvitations and demands for retractions.

3) Organization

Does criticism appear to be organized and targeted?

Are the organizers recruiting others to pile on?

Are you being swarmed and brigaded?

Are people hunting through your work and scouring social media to find ammunition to use against you?

In critical culture, organizing pressure campaigns against ideological targets is usually considered out of bounds.

By contrast, it's common to see cancelers organize hundreds of petition-signers or thousands of social media users to dig up and prosecute an indictment.

4) Secondary Boycotts

Is there an explicit or implicit threat that people who support you will also get punished?

Are people putting pressure on employers and colleagues to fire you or stop associating with you?

Do people who defend you have to fear adverse consequences?

5) Moral Grandstanding

Are the attacks on you ad hominem, repetitive, ritualistic, posturing, accusatory, outraged?

Are people flattening distinctions, demonizing you, slinging inflammatory labels and engaging in moral one-upmanship?

Are people ignoring what you actually say?

6) Truthiness

Are the things being said about you inaccurate?

Do the people saying them not even seem to care about their veracity?

Do they feel at liberty to distort your words, ignore corrections and make false accusations?

Some items on this checklist might prove besides the point. Others could merit addition.

But this is a serious definition of cancel culture. Anyone who still claims that its critics just "don't like to be criticized on the internet" is not engaging the actual argument.

Please do share this important article by @jon_rauch!

Please do tell send it to people when they pretend that there is no difference between criticizing and canceling someone!

And please @JoinPersuasion.

https://t.co/FVWwGJpUHK