Twitter Thread by Perry E. Metzger

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There is a distinction between what is something you ought to do and what is legal. It is legal to drink yourself to death. It is probably not a good idea. The distinction is not a small one. Let's apply it to the social norms many people suggest we adopt on silencing others.

I hear quite frequently arguments to the effect that private platforms are legally _allowed_ to silence people. And yes, they are, and yes, they should be. Is this a good idea, though? Let's have a quick look for a moment.

It's possible to imagine a society where every restaurant refuses service to people of the wrong political background, every supermarket checks to see if people arriving match a particular political affiliation before selling them groceries.

We can imagine neighbors only talking to other neighbors of the correct political tribe, jobs refusing to allow people with the wrong political beliefs to apply, etc. This is probably a thing that is legal or at least ought to be legal.

Is it, however, a recipe for a peaceful society? Or would it ultimately lead to something more bloody than the wars of religion during the Protestant Reformation?

(As I recall, by the end of the Thirty Years War, whole sections of Germany were completely depopulated; you could walk tens of miles through burned villages seeing not a single living soul.)

Our society developed norms long ago that said "we try to ignore our neighbors political, social, and religious beliefs, not because we agree with them or wish to promote them, but so that they too will tolerate ours and everyone will get along peacefully."

Right now, we're seeing an unprecedented erosion of this centuries-standing social compact, and it is not doing good things for our society. Yes, we _can_ deplatform our enemies, we _can_ deny the wrong news outlet internet connectivity for its servers.

We _can_ kick people we think go beyond some sort of line off our platforms, we can try to keep them from communicating. I don't think it's a good idea. I think in the end it simply feeds the narrative that our society is biased against certain tribes, and radicalizes people.

Worse, it slowly walks down the path towards a society where people divide ever more sharply by political views, treat members of other tribes who live near them as enemies who must not be interacted with, and leads, I think, to an inevitable social disintegration.

Frankly, I do not want to live in a society where everyone divides up into two economies, two internets, two sets of app stores, all segregated by political tribe. That's the path we're going. That path leads to violence at an unprecedented scale.

Sure, you're legally _allowed_ to stop selling firewood to your neighbors if they have the wrong yard sign up for the wrong presidential candidate, but if you go down that path, you end in a place that isn't very pretty at all.

I would strongly prefer that we de-escalate, not that we give in to the impulse to dig in deeper. Yes, there are some pretty horrible people out there with little to no moral compunction about lying and calling for violence, and they include prominent politicians.

But we do not demonstrate that there is an alternative path towards a tolerant, peaceful, pleasant society by adopting their methods and demonstrating that their claims that people are trying to silence them are correct.

You cannot fuck you way to celibacy, you cannot shoot your way towards non-violence, you cannot censor your way towards tolerance for minority viewpoints. In short, you cannot get where you're going by adopting the tools of the intolerant.

And make no mistake: the people who will immediately seize upon and take advantage of norms that favor silencing others are the people with the most horrible views out there.

If you create a society where segregating "bad" views is the norm and the people who censor are distinguished from the people who are silenced only by who has the most power at the very moment, then when the balance of power shifts, everything will disintegrate.