Twitter Thread by Dr. Johnathan Flowers says "Fuck your Democracy."



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@shengokai

For those of you concerned about the "damage" done to the field and academic freedom by the push to cancel transphobes in philosophy, I have this to say

> "We do want and will have an inclusive field of philosophy. That we will have, and, if it involves the destruction of your departments and institutions, we cannot help it."
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> — Dr. Johnathan Flowers says "Fuck your Democracy." (@shengokai) January 13, 2021

The above is from Gen. Sherman on what is necessary to restore the Union during the Civil War, the sentiment is apt for my position on philosophy: if we are to have an inclusive field and the structure of the field prevents that, then that structure must be destroyed. (2/n)

Now, I understand that this sounds harsh, but consider why it sounds harsh: so much of the pushback against transphobia in philosophy, and the recommendations made to address transphobia in philosophy sounds like "damage" to philosophy by established philosophers. (3/n)

And in response to that perception of damage or destruction, they push back hard to preserve the "integrity" of the field, regardless of the harm being done to the marginalized people who have to survive an inhospitable field that refuses to change. (4/n)

Now, this position was anticipated by Sara Ahmed in the following:

“Indeed so often just talking about sexism as well as racism is heard as damaging the institution. If talking about sexism and racism is heard as damaging institutions, we need to damage institutions.” (5/n)

In the context of the situation of philosophy, we might rephrase this in the following way:

"just talking about transphobia in philosophy is heard as damaging the filed. If talking about transphobia is heard as damaging the field then we need to damage the field." (6/n)

To be clear, given the ways that spaces, including academic fields take the shape of the people who participate in them, and the ways that people participate become what Ahmed calls "somatic norms," or norms about how we move through philosophy, this tracks. (7/n)

Because the norms of philosophy have been structured such that transphobia is defended as legitimate scholarship by those whose activities give shape and definition to the field, we might say that transphobia is, or has become, a "somatic norm" of philosophy. (8/n)

As pointing out and addressing transphobia in philosophy is to problematize the somatic norms of philosophy, anyone who does so is viewed as causing "damage" to the field, either through problematizing the norms that have given the field its shape and definition. (9/n)

And this is where we get the "academic freedom" and "free inquiry" rebuttals. The norms of "just asking questions" in philosophy are taken to be so fundamental that the field actively ignores the effect of how asking some questions poorly actually causes harm. (10/n)

Insofar as the questions at issue with transphobia in philosophy have been asked in productive ways, this is not about asking questions about gender, but asking questions about gender in ways that allow for the flourishing of all members of society. (11/n)

However, because the people who hold power in philosophy view the conflict in terms of merely "asking questions," per the somatic norms of the field, any pushback against asking these questions in a transphobic way is viewed as an attack on philosophy itself. (12/n)

Which gets us back to "damaging" the field. There are some questions, some ways of asking questions, that need to be restrained. Not because inquiry isn't valuable, but because the inquiry is intended specifically to cause harm, to "stop" the movement of people. (13/n)

Again, this experience of being "stopped" by inquiry is familiar to maginalized folks in a variety of ways, but is largely unfamiliar to people with power, specifically those in philosophy who do not understand how inquiry can be weaponized as bigotry. (14/n)

As philosophy is built on inquiry, challenging inquiry when it begins to cause harm is read as a challenge to philosophy. "How can we do philosophy if we can't ask questions," comes the refrain. It's simple: don't ask bigoted questions. Don't do bigotry as inquiry. (15/n)

But this seems to be too much to ask of the field, and so we need to damage the field. Put simply, if challenging bigoted inquiry is seen as damaging philosophy, then we need to damage philosophy and keep damaging it until we root out the bigoted impulse. (16/n)

And if this rooting out of bigotry involves the destruction of your departments and institutions, then we cannot help it. If this involves the cancellation of scores of philosophers, then we should become so hardened as to take up the task. (17/n)

After all, as I have said before:

"I am satisfied, and have been all the time, that the problem of this field consists in the awful fact that the present class of men who rule the discipline must be cancelled outright rather than in the diversifying of philosophy." (fin)