Twitter Thread by David Benfell, Ph.D.



David Benfell, Ph.D.
@n4rky

1/11 A real problem is the notion that there is something called 'objectivity.' This is a myth. There is no theory--not a single one--of truth that withstands scrutiny. We don't know what truth is and can never know.

> Survey Says: Never Tweet https://t.co/DhnPgWPGWh
>
> — Ben Smith (@benyt) February 1, 2021

2/11 Qualitative scholars, including critical theorists, acknowledge their own social locations relative to the subjects at hand, empowering readers to ferret out not so much bias as the perspective from which authors perceive their topics. It's a necessary honesty.

3/11 We should note here further that quantitative scholars do not escape bias. They are merely excused from the requirement to talk or even think about that bias.

Numbers *never* tell a whole story. Statistics are about aggregates.

4/11 Indeed #neoliberalism's failing lies in a presumption that even if a rising tide fails to lift all boats, it lifts *most* of them, and therefore it adopts a prescription on utilitarian grounds.

5/11 But #neoliberalism turns out to sink far too many other boats, in actuality, a majority of boats while mistaking the extreme lifting of a few outlying boats for the lifting of most or all.

Economists are coming to understand this even if politicians choose not to.

6/11 In choosing #neoliberal dogma, politicians choose a narrative that supports their donors. That motivation is a bias that the ideologues, pointing to their quantitative misrepresentations, refuse to acknowledge.

7/11 Media scholars will tell you something similar about journalism and so-called objectivity. Its history lies in appeal to advertisers, that enabled now-mainstream newspapers to offer cheaper subscriptions and outcompete old labor rags, sinking the latter.

8/11 So-called 'objective' journalism is, even when newsrooms insist on their independence, constrained by what advertisers will tolerate, as expressed via publishers, the now-usually corporate owners.

9/11 Those constraints create an atmosphere, a situation in which journalists operate. "Objectivity" is nothing more than the view from that particular, significantly constrained perspective.

10/11 The pretense that objectivity, a "God's eye view," exists is, in fact, a lie meant to avoid unsettling the status quo, indeed with journalism even to keep consumers "in a buying mood" and thus supporting advertisers.

11/11 The controversy that @benyt writes about is in fact about the preservation of that pretense of objectivity, a pretense that does disservice to a truth we can't even properly define.