Twitter Thread by Noah Smith



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1/People I know on the Right tend to be obsessed with the idea of "crimethink", taboos, and the (supposedly) oppressive, omnipresent enforcement of liberal cultural norms.

Why?

My new theory: A lot of it is guilt.

2/It's true that in some circles - the media, universities, many big corporations - liberal norms *are* enforced to some degree, and the enforcement has probably gotten stronger in recent years.

But I don't think this explains all of the Right's obsession.

3/The stereotype is that people on the Right tend to be more threat-sensitive. That would help explain the perception that liberal norm-enforcers are lurking everywhere, ready to pounce and anathematize anyone who makes a misstep.

But I don't think that's all of it either.

4/And of course, it's always fun - whether you're on the Right or the Left, or playing a video game, or whatever - to style yourself as the brave iconoclastic rebel fighting against the oppressive forces of blah blah blah.

But I don't think this is all of it, either.

5/The reason I think it's more than these things is that even *in private*, people on the Right express their "crimethink" ideas very gingerly and hesitantly.

I get the sense that they're not just afraid of external censure, but have also internalized liberal norms.

6/I think many people on the Right aren't just ashamed to *say* some of the things they believe, but ashamed to *believe* them. They're often their own strictest policeman.

In other words, we're not just a "shame society", we're a "guilt society" as well.

7/BUT, I also think that the idea of ubiquitous PC, or liberal thought police, or The Cathedral, etc., allows people on the Right to avoid confronting their feelings of shame over some of their own non-egalitarian beliefs.

It lets them externalize the locus of control.

8/"How dare you not let me say this in public?!" thus functions as a distraction from the more uncomfortable thought of "OMG, do I really believe this??".

9/Anyway, this is just broad-brush amateur psychoanalysis, so don't put too much stock in it, but I just wanted to put this thought out there.

To the extent this is true, it means liberals' power to make the Right feel more comfortable is limited.

10/Weakening the enforcement of liberal norms in public discourse would come at a cost (those norms are there for a reason!), but the benefit might be smaller than the Right would like to imagine.

It will not assuage guilt.

(end)