Twitter Thread by glyph

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The Discourse on the post-coup tech platform rejection of violent fascism is giving me hives so I just have to get my ~hot take~ in here.

Sorry for the massive thread; Pascal's apology applies.

Everybody loves to talk about "precedent" when a decision is made like kicking tr*mp off Twitter or pa*ler off of AWS, usually when making some fallacious slippery slope argument about what this "precedent" will mean for some completely non-comparable follow-up situation.

In some narrow colloquial sense, I admit there's a precedent being set, in that when an analogous situation arises, the decision makers in that situation might do their research and look at this preceding (hence: "precedent") event, and base some reasoning on it.

But this is a rhetorical trick—maybe one that those making the argument are playing on themselves as much as they're playing it on you—because they're trying to get you to consider the word in its legal-jargon sense: that future decision makers *must* consider these events.

This often goes along with the frankly bananas implication that by "setting the precedent" the decision makers (tech platforms or whoever) are arrogating to themselves a power which they did not *already have*, and it is thus dangerous and opens the door for future abuses.

And just as an aside here, if they didn't already have this power legally and practically, how on earth are they granting it to themselves? What legislative authority do the sysadmins at Twitter have exactly?

So: first of all, the platforms already have this power to police speech in their purview as they see fit, they just haven't exercised it on anyone this powerful before (arguably since nobody this powerful exists).

It doesn't make the evening news when a queer teenager gets permabanned for telling a bluecheck TERF to die in a fire because they said something horribly bigoted. That is a worse abuse of this power than deplatforming violent fascists, and it happens *all the time*.

Second, these “precedents” are in no way *binding* on future decision makers. They could do whatever the fuck they wanted before this, they can do whatever the fuck they want after this.

Nothing has changed except that they used their (concerningly broad) power (which maybe they shouldn’t have for *other* reasons) to do something good for once.

When Batman makes everybody’s cell phone a secret surveillance device to catch the Joker, it’s not bad that he caught the Joker! The Joker is a piece of shit, fuck the Joker! The problem is that Batman should not have that power *lest it tempt him to do other, worse stuff later*.

So if you’re worried about what this sequence of events might mean because it highlights the unaccountable power that tech companies have and you don’t want to cheer for it because you’re worried about what they might do “next time”, relax. Cheer.

They already did worse stuff last time. You just didn’t hear about it. The horse isn’t just out of the barn, the horse was born wild and has never seen the inside of a barn.

Maybe we should, in fact, build a barn! It’s pretty messed up that this horse is running our society somehow! Maybe a horse shouldn’t be in charge.

There’s a robust debate to be had about how we might want to treat these big tech platforms as institutions, or how we might break them up, and believe me, I have *lots* of feelings about that discussion. It’s a necessary discussion. Like… existentially, for our civilization.

(For the record, regardless of your other political views, if you think the way to start here is “repeal section 230”... you’re not ready to participate in that discussion yet. Please do some more reading.)

But the answer is not to ask tech platforms not to suppress violent fascism. If anything, the fact that they *can* and sometimes *do* use their current vast and unaccountable power to combat the influence of violent fascists is an argument in favor of letting them keep it.

By all means let’s take it away. But not for this.