

# The Mechanics of Stable Falsehood

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I found this essay which I thought excellent, timely, and which brings a lot of clarity to what we are experiencing currently. I thought it would be worth reprinting in the Iconoclast.



By a writer who uses the name Unbekoming published in the substack [Lies are Unbekoming](#)

*Thesis*

*A falsehood tilted slightly from truth requires constant energy to maintain. A falsehood fully inverted—the complete opposite of truth—finds its own equilibrium. This essay examines how complete inversions stabilize through founding lies, epistemic capture, the cognitive limitations of collective thought, the complicity of comfort, convergent opportunism, and the architectural production of ignorance. The tobacco industry’s fifty-year deception serves as the primary case study; virology, cholesterol, lead, and opioids demonstrate the pattern’s recurrence.*

## **I The Seed**

*The Plaza Hotel, New York City, December 1953. Chief executives of the major American tobacco companies meet with Hill & Knowlton, the country’s most powerful public relations firm. The science linking cigarettes to lung cancer has become too consistent to ignore. Internal research at the companies has confirmed what the independent studies show. They face a choice: pivot the business, or fight the science.*

*They choose to fight. The strategy document that emerges is explicit. “Doubt is our product,” one internal memo states, “since it is the best means of competing with the ‘body of fact’ that exists in the mind of the general public.”*

*Their own words, preserved in documents that surfaced decades later in litigation. They knew cigarettes caused cancer. They chose to construct a world in which the science was “unsettled,” the evidence “inconclusive,” the link “unproven.”*

*What happened next should have been impossible.*

## **X The Lens**

*This essay offers no prescription. It describes a machine.*

*The machine operates on components that are not broken.*

*Heuristic thinking is adaptive; it evolved because it works. Convergent opportunism is rational; actors pursue incentives. Institutions are necessary; collective knowledge requires collective validation. The machine exploits healthy components for pathological ends.*

*Individuals can engage in slow thinking. An individual can hold multiple variables, weigh evidence, tolerate ambiguity, resist the simple formula. But the individual stands against the weight of the herd, captured institutions, convergent interests, the streetlight illuminating only sanctioned questions. The individual who thinks slowly about a stabilized inversion is not rewarded; they are diagnosed. They become the conspiracy theorist, the crank, the one who “doesn’t trust the science”—a phrase revealing the capture, since science is a method, not a catechism.*

*The cardiologist Bernard Lown learned this when he questioned the universal dogma of strict bedrest following heart attacks. Decades ago, Lown and his mentor dared to let patients sit in a chair at the end of the bed rather than lie motionless for six weeks. When he arrived on the ward one morning, interns and residents stood lined up with hands outstretched in Nazi salutes, shouting “Heil Hitler” in unison. A Jewish physician, greeted this way for suggesting patients might sit up. Strict bedrest is now recognized as having been deadly—an inversion that killed tens of millions worldwide. But the man who challenged it was met not with reasoned debate but with ritual humiliation.*

*The tobacco inversion ran for fifty years under the authority of science. The question is not which institutions can be trusted. The question is how to think when the institutions that validate thinking have been captured.*

*You are standing beneath poles that feel stable. You now know stability proves nothing.*

The whole essay, the information and argument in between [I and X is here.](#)