

Gospel of Power-II. Epistemic Liberation

How Power Corrupts the Very Idea of Truth.

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The Gospel of Power: Part II — Epistemic Liberation

I recently stumbled on a phrase that crystallized how power corrupts:
epistemic liberation.

Epistēmē means “knowledge.” Liberation, in this context, is freedom from the normal constraints of evidence.

It describes the moment when someone—or an institution—accumulates so much cultural or political power that their words are accepted as truth even when contradicted by data. **Reality becomes whatever the powerful declare.**

When Truth No Longer Constrains

Political theorist **Steven Lukes** coined the term to capture this state, where truth itself no longer restrains authority. One can invent facts, discard evidence, silence critics—and still be believed.

Lukes points to **Donald Trump** as the clearest modern example.

Through executive action, media dominance, and sheer audacity, Trump showed that debate and evidence can be bypassed entirely. A cortege of enablers granted him freedom to say or do almost anything—an authority unmatched by any modern president.

Power, unrestrained, breeds epistemic liberation.

Medicine's Own Liberation

The pattern isn't confined to politics. **Mid-20th-century medicine lived its own version.**

Ancel Keys advanced the diet–cholesterol–heart hypothesis with similar audacity. The evidence was thin and often contradictory, yet he captured the American Heart Association and the NIH, bulldozed critics like John Yudkin, and offered a public hungry for a simple villain.

Fat became the enemy. Dissent vanished. A fragile hypothesis hardened into one of the most destructive medical dogmas of the modern era. Like a politician immune to evidence, Keys achieved liberation from scientific constraint—and rewrote human health policy for generations.

The Fortress of Narrative

Whether in politics or medicine, the sequence is the same:

- **Power builds a fortress of legitimacy.**
- **Institutions become its gatekeepers.**
- **Culture supplies the moat.**
- **Dissent isn't debated—it's excluded.**

Falsehood ossifies into “fact,” as seen in the enduring fear of dietary saturated fat and cholesterol.

Why It Matters

Epistemic liberation is not rare in science. When leaders—presidents or professors—decide what counts as truth, science collapses into dogma.

Our task, as citizens and physicians, is constant vigilance: **demand open data, welcome inconvenient evidence, and protect genuine debate.**

Once a fiction is enthroned as fact, it resists removal—and its damage can last for generations.