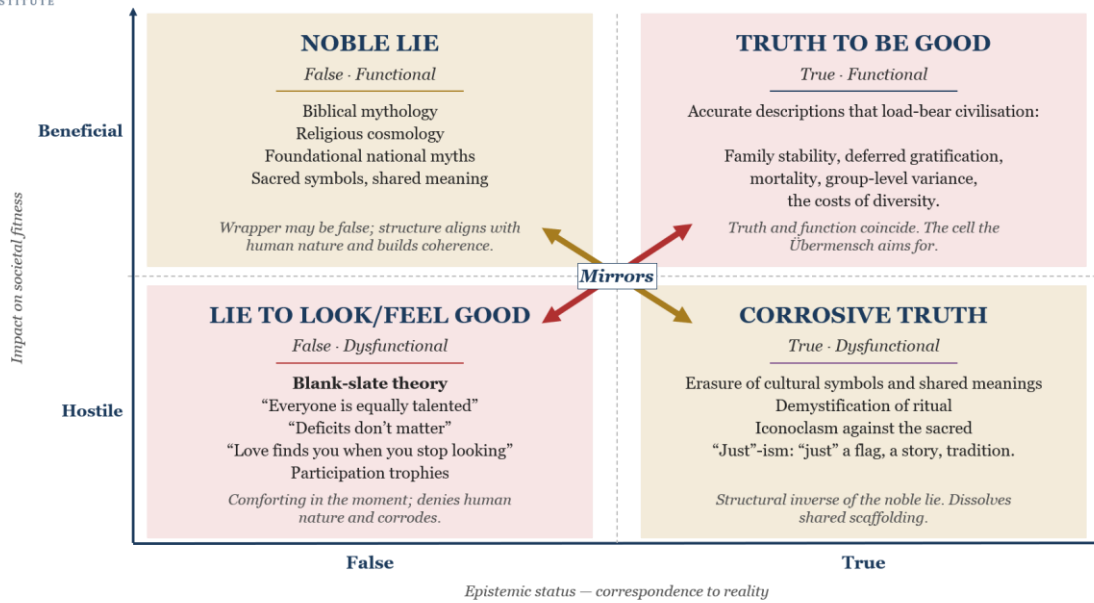


## Epistemic status and civilisational consequence are independent dimensions



## The Meijer Chart Paradox

Why the widely-shared “Lie to Look/Feel Good” vs “Truth to be Good” diagram tells half the truth — and why the half it leaves out is the half that matters most.

A diagram has been spreading on X under the name of William Meijer. It shows two curves. One rises, labelled “Unkind Truth.” One falls, labelled “Kind Lie.” The vertical axis runs from “Functional System” at the top to “Dysfunctional System” at the bottom. The message is simple. Societies that tell themselves hard truths go up. Societies that tell themselves comforting lies go down. Brave truth-telling produces a healthy civilisation. Comforting falsehood produces decline.

The chart has been shared by free-speech advocates, conservative commentators, dissidents, and a wide range of people who think of themselves as serious about facing reality. It is intuitive. It feels right. It flatters the person sharing it.

And wrong, in a way that matters.

It fails to account for the fact that most surviving civilisations have been built on stories that are not literally true, why the project of pulling those stories apart has produced collapse rather than enlightenment, and why a great deal of contemporary brave-truth-telling, particularly from the ‘New Atheists’ progressive left is doing damage the chart cannot show.

This Comment sets out why.

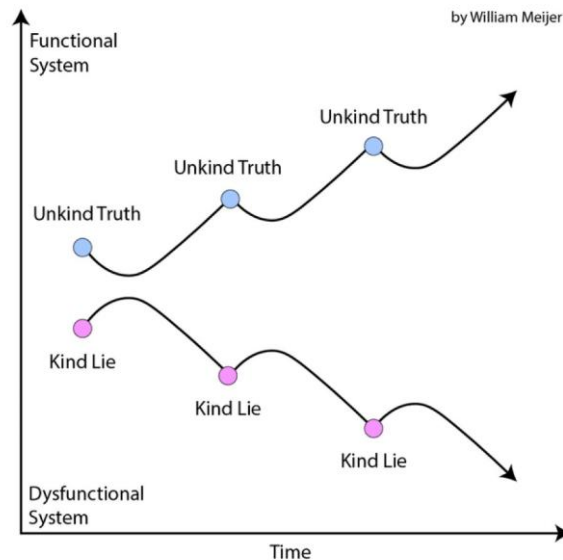


Figure 1. The original Meijer chart, as circulating on X. Two curves on a single axis: unkind truths ascend, kind lies descend.

## 1. What the Meijer Chart Says

The Meijer chart compresses two different ideas onto one axis.

On the horizontal axis, it puts a moral idea: kindness versus unkindness, in the sense of comforting versus uncomfortable. On the vertical axis, it puts a consequence: functional system versus dysfunctional system. It then proposes that the two move together. Tell the unkind truth, even if inconvenient, and the system rises. Tell the kind lie, and the system falls.

The chart works because it captures something real. There are lies that corrode. There are difficult truths that, once spoken, allow honest policy to begin. “Everyone is equally talented” is a kind lie to look good that produces blank-slate education policy, and a generation of children promoted past their abilities and then surprised when life is harder than school said it would be. “Family stability matters” is an unkind truth that most public discussion refuses to centre, because centring it implicates choices that adults have made for selfish reasons to the detriment of their children. So far, Meijer looks great.

## 2. Why It Spread

The Meijer chart is popular for the same reason most viral charts are popular. It flatters the person sharing it.

To share the Meijer chart is to position yourself on the rising curve. You are the brave truth-teller. The people on the falling curve, telling kind lies to look or feel good, are the problem. The chart is not primarily a description of the world. It is an identity badge. It says you are one of the serious ones.

This is not, in itself, an accusation. There are genuinely brave truth-tellers, and the public square would be poorer without them. Saying in public that mass migration has costs is a brave act in 2026, because most institutions will punish the person who says it. Saying in public that the category “woman” picks out something real, and that pretending otherwise has costs for real women, is a brave act. Saying in public that family formation is something a society can do well or badly is a brave act, because saying so implicates the choices of the audience listening. These are the kinds of statements the Meijer chart was built to defend, and most of the people who share the chart are sharing it because they admire the people who say them.

But the chart's popularity is doing work the chart itself cannot examine. It is producing a class of people who imagine themselves to be in the same position as those brave truth-tellers when in fact they are doing something quite different — something the original chart cannot show them. Because the chart compresses two axes into one, it cannot tell apart the truth-teller whose truth builds and the truth-teller whose truth dissolves. It treats all truth-telling as a step upward. Once you believe that, you can do real harm and still feel like one of the brave ones.

### 3. The Hidden Axis

The correction is simple. The truth of a claim and the consequence of broadcasting it are two different things. A statement can be true or false. The same statement, when said often enough and loudly enough, can hold a society together or pull it apart. These are different properties of the same statement, and they do not always move in the same direction.

Pull them apart and the diagram opens up. Four cells, not two curves.

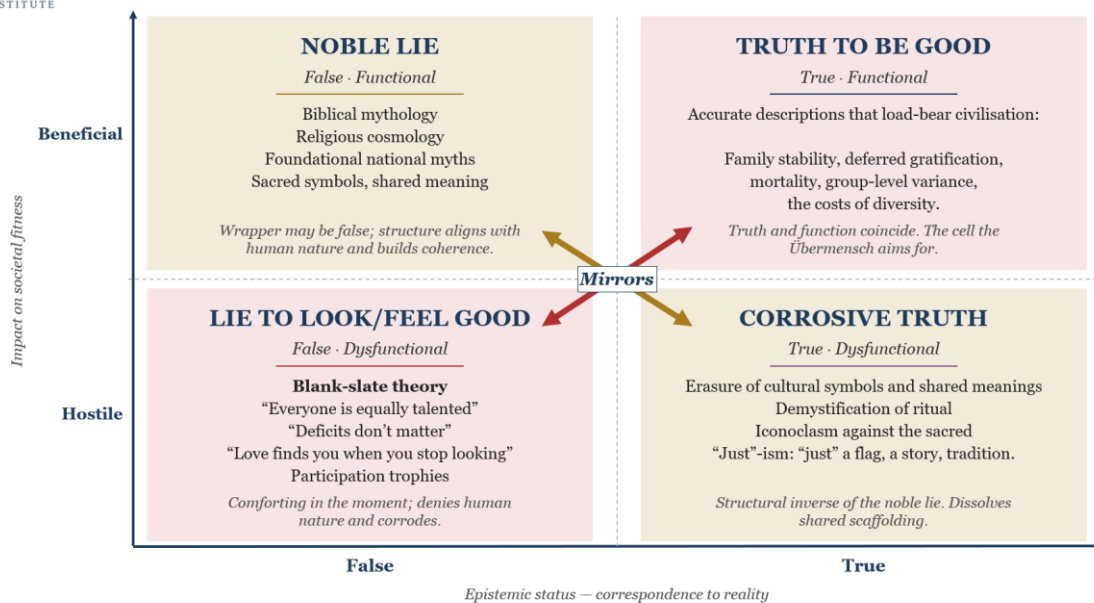
**The Noble Lie** sits in the upper-left. False, and functional. The Biblical, Norse or Egyptian mythology, the national myths, the sacred symbols and shared meanings that hold a population together across generations. These are stories that may not survive a literal-truth audit. They survive a different audit — the one that asks whether they line up with how human beings actually live, and whether they keep a society from coming apart. These are the things that civilisations which lasted have actually been built on, regardless of what their elites privately believed. The argument is set out in detail in the Prothean Institute whitepaper *Thus Spake Ilos*: the religious traditions that survived to civilisational scale all share this property, that their codes line up with human nature well enough to produce cooperation without constant coercion.

**The Truth to Be Good** sits in the upper-right. True, and functional. Honest descriptions of how human beings actually are, which — when faced openly — let policy work. Family stability matters. Deferred gratification produces better long term outcomes. Mortality is real and structures meaning. Some traits vary by group. Diversity has costs. These are the brave truths the Meijer chart was built to honour. The cell where the truth-teller is delivering something that builds.

**The Lie to Look or Feel Good** sits in the lower-left. False, and dysfunctional. Blank-slate theory and its progeny: the participation trophy, the disability-as-superpower reframing, the love-finds-you-when-you-stop-looking, focus on your career first and just-be-yourself advice that has produced two generations of single forty-year-olds. These statements are comforting in the moment and corrosive over time. This is the cell the Meijer chart correctly names as dysfunctional. Building on Meijer 'kind lie' we propose the lie has two layers. At the elite level — politicians, executives, institutional leaders — it is often *lie to look good*: performance of tribal allegiance to avoid the career cost of dissent. Those who tell it frequently know it is false and feel its weight privately. At the mass level it becomes a *lie to feel good*: the cue from the elite is absorbed as moral instruction, and the believer experiences holding the belief as evidence of their own goodness. The first layer enables the second. Strip the elite endorsement and the mass belief decays within a generation.

**The Corrosive Truth** sits in the lower-right. True, and dysfunctional. This is the cell the Meijer chart cannot show.

## Epistemic status and civilisational consequence are independent dimensions



Prothean Institute After W. Meijer. Redrawn and extended to a 2x2.

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Figure 2. The Meijer chart redrawn as a 2x2. Truth-status runs along the horizontal axis; impact on societal fitness runs along the vertical. The two diagonals mark the mirror pairs.

### 4. The Cell the Chart Cannot Show

The Corrosive Truth cell contains statements that may be true, and that — when said often and loudly enough — dissolve the things that hold a society together.

The statement that a national flag is “just” a piece of cloth is true at one level. It is also the move that, repeated enough times by enough people, hollows out the symbol that a population uses to coordinate. The statement that a wedding ring is “just” a metal band is true. It is also the move that, made fashionable, breaks the public ritual away from the private commitment it used to anchor. The statement that a religious relic is not in fact authentic is true. It is also the move that, made universal, empties the cathedral that held the community together for eight hundred years.

The Meijer chart calls this “unkind truth-telling.” It is what the modern intellectual class congratulates itself on. It is what an enormous amount of progressive-coded commentary actually does. And on the Meijer chart, it sits on the rising curve, indistinguishable from the work of the brave truth-tellers the chart was meant to defend. The chart cannot tell the two apart.

The corrected diagram can. The work of saying out loud that family formation matters, that group differences are real, or that mass migration has costs sits in the upper-right cell — true, and structurally functional. The work of saying that the relic is fake, the flag is just cloth, the marriage is just paper sits in the lower-right cell — true, and structurally hostile. The two activities use the same verb. They are not the same activity.

This is what the diagram means by “Mirrors.” The Noble Lie and the Corrosive Truth are the same artefact viewed from opposite stances. One says of the relic: this is sacred, treat it accordingly. The other says: this is fake along with anything built on it. Both can be defended as true within their own frame. Only one of them is what the people who built lasting civilisations actually built on.

### 5. The Mirror Operation

The framework’s diagnostic value is in the diagonals.

Across the rising diagonal — lower-left to upper-right — the same factual claim is viewed from opposite sides of the truth question. “Group differences exist” and “everyone is equally talented” are the same dispute, viewed from opposite ends. Whichever side wins the contest determines whether policy operates from the upper-right cell — clear-eyed and durable — or from the lower-left cell — denial and corrosive. This is the contest at the centre of contemporary education and employment policy. It is also the contest the Meijer chart does describe — but only along this one diagonal.

Across the falling diagonal — upper-left to lower-right — the same cultural artefact is viewed from opposite sides of the function question. The same flag, relic, ritual, or founding myth is either sacred and functional, or “just” a piece of cloth and dysfunctional. This is the contest the Meijer chart cannot describe. It is also, on Prothean’s reading, the contest that has done the most damage to Western coherence over the past century — and the contest that the chart’s enthusiasts are most likely to be participating in on the wrong side, while imagining they are participating in the first diagonal on the right side.

A reader of the Meijer chart who sees a national flag burned and feels confirmed in their bravery has misread the diagram. So has the reader who sees a cathedral demolished and treats the demolition as enlightenment. So has the reader who reads a clever thread explaining that the national anthem is “just” a song and treats the thread as truth-telling. These are not the brave acts the chart was built to defend. They are acts in the cell the chart cannot show.

The serious work of truth-telling to be good — the work that does build civilisations — happens in the upper-right. It is the work of facing facts about human nature, family formation, group variance, mortality, and the costs of the choices a society is making. It is not the work of dissolving the symbols and shared meanings that hold the society together. The two activities can look identical from the outside. They are structural opposites.

The Meijer chart spreads because it makes its sharer feel like a member of the first class.

The chart cannot tell its sharer when they have slipped into the second.

**The corrected diagram can.**

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## About Prothean Institute

The Prothean Institute is an independent research organisation applying behavioural science, civilisational theory, and institutional design to questions of politics, culture, and social order. Its work proceeds from a single premise: that durable institutions must produce good outcomes from self-interested people, not depend on the supply of virtuous ones. The archive of what works — recovered, examined, and set out plainly — is the Institute’s standing project.

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