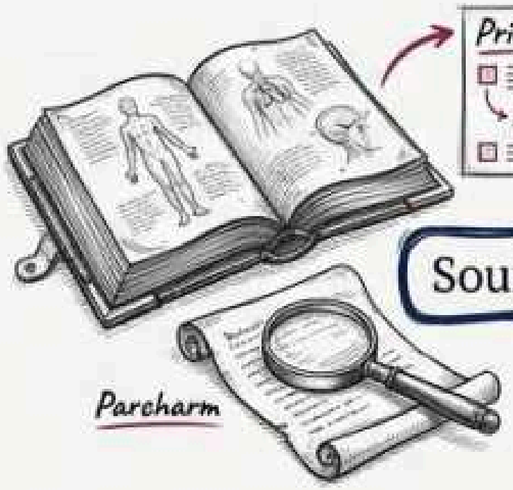


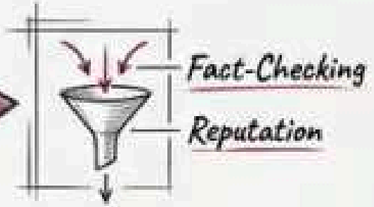
PHIL 110 B

Lecture 6: Sources, Claims, *and the* Practice of Doubt

Whom to Trust?

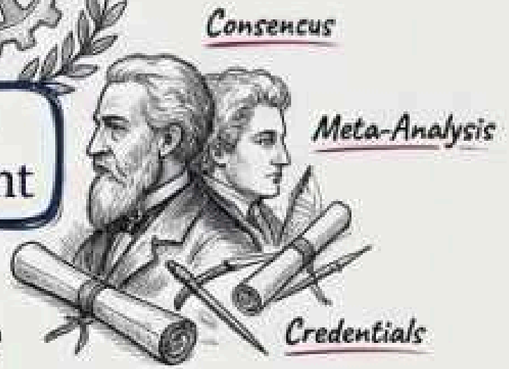
Sources





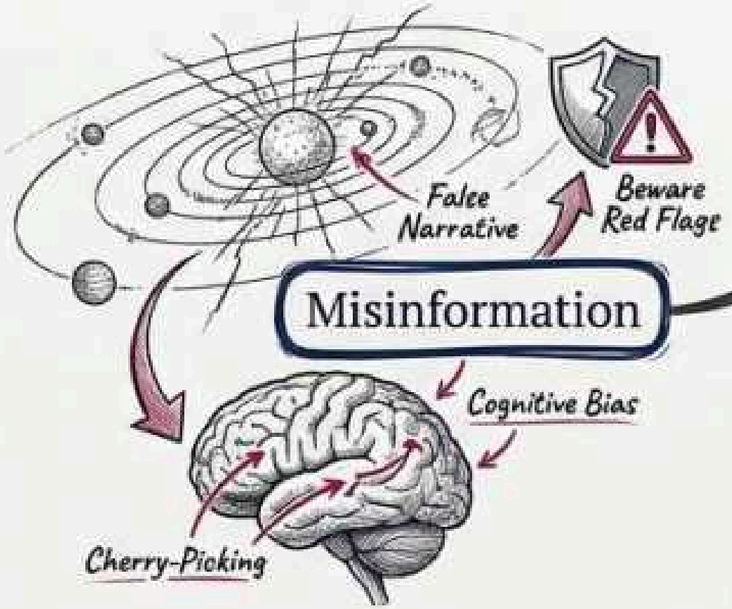
Expert Agreement







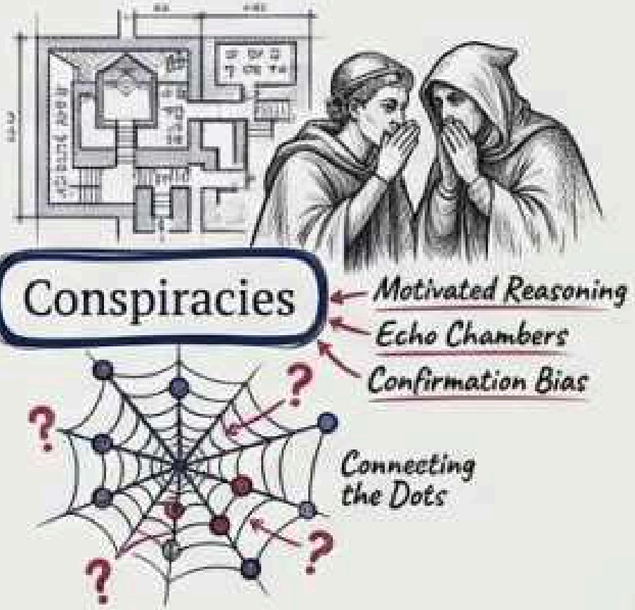
Misinformation



Changing Minds



Conspiracies



We cannot check everything ourselves.
Here is what to do instead.

Trust is not a failure of skepticism; it is an epistemological necessity.

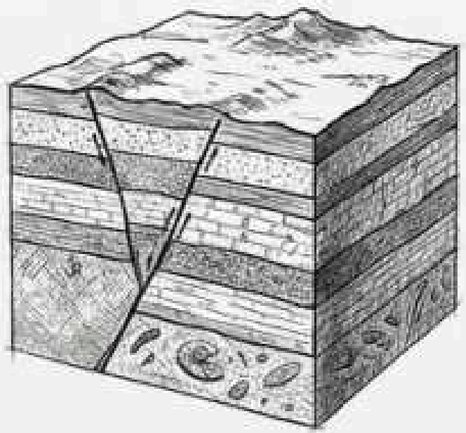


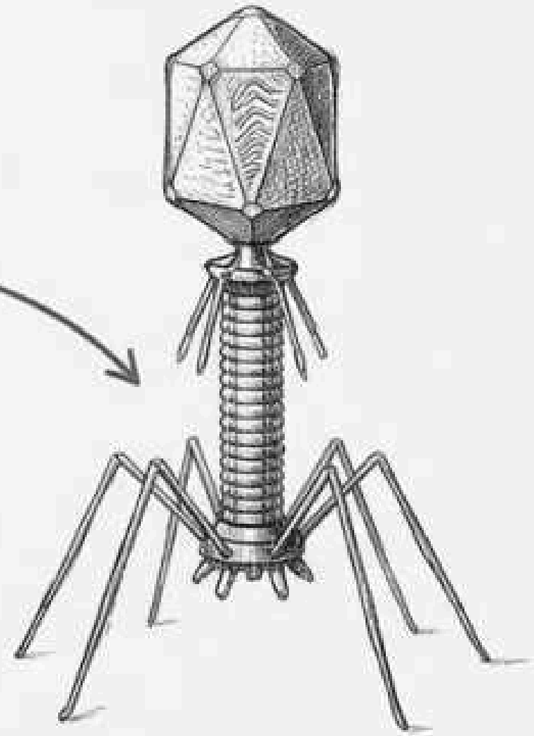
Others

Others

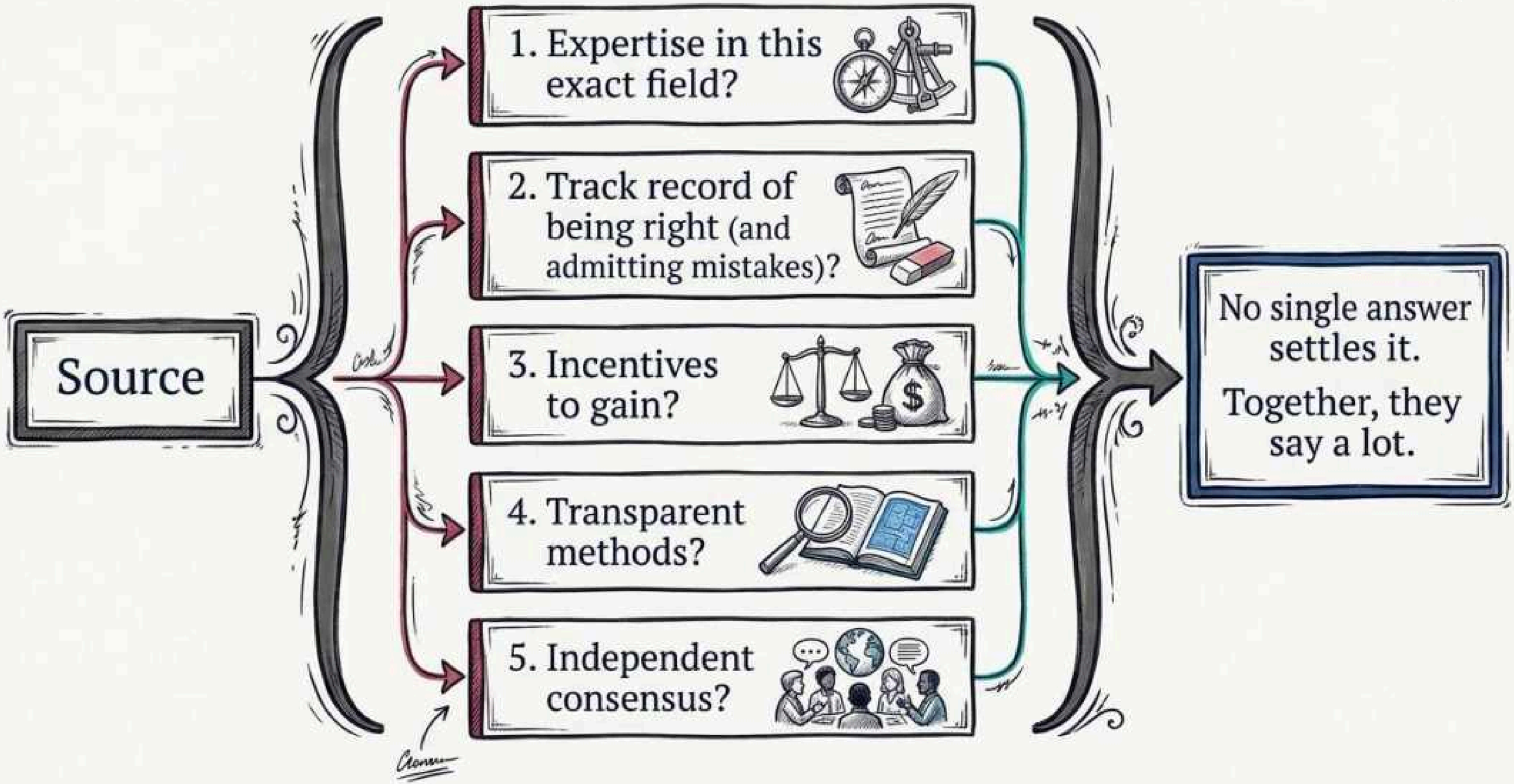
You

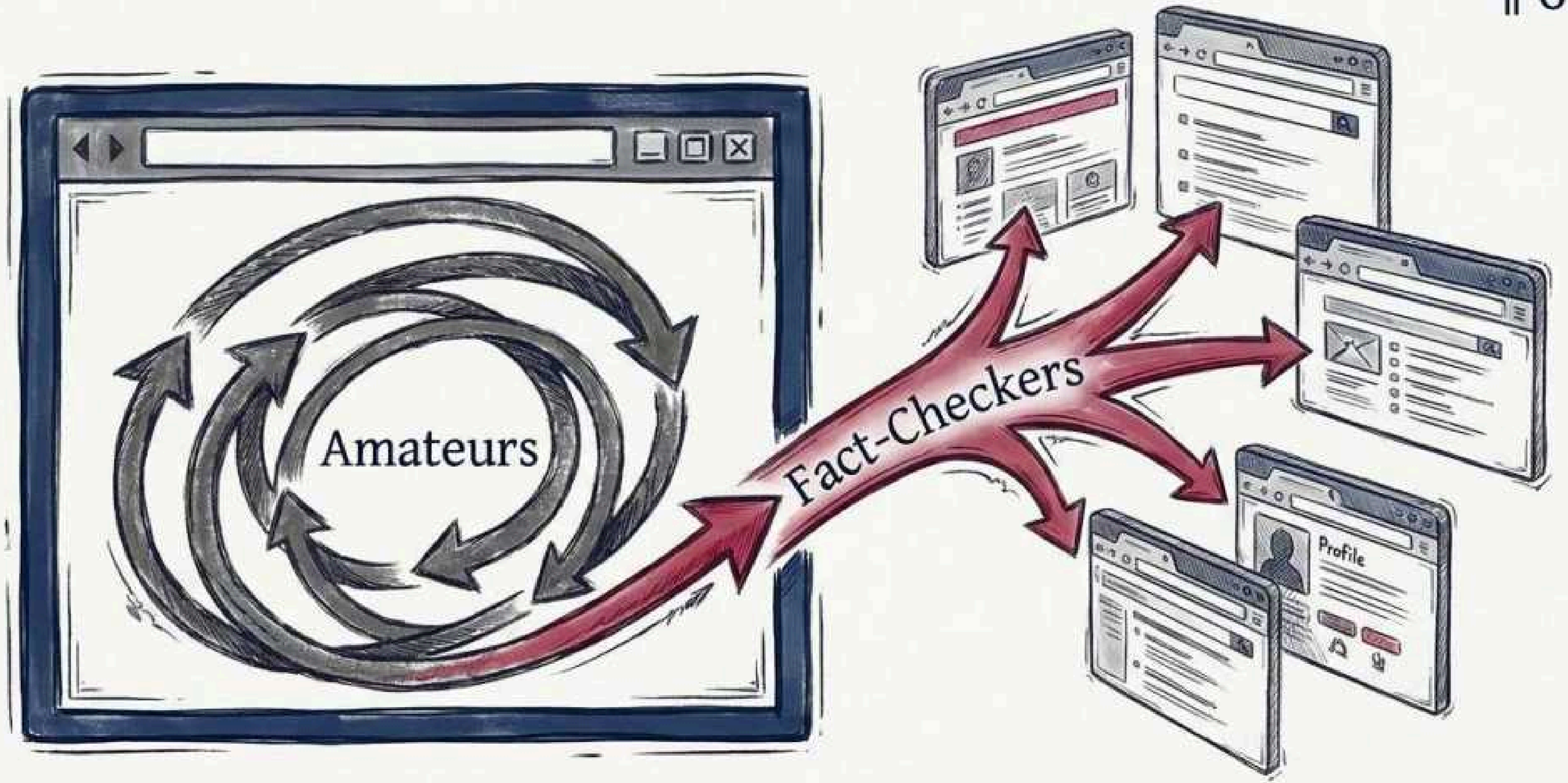
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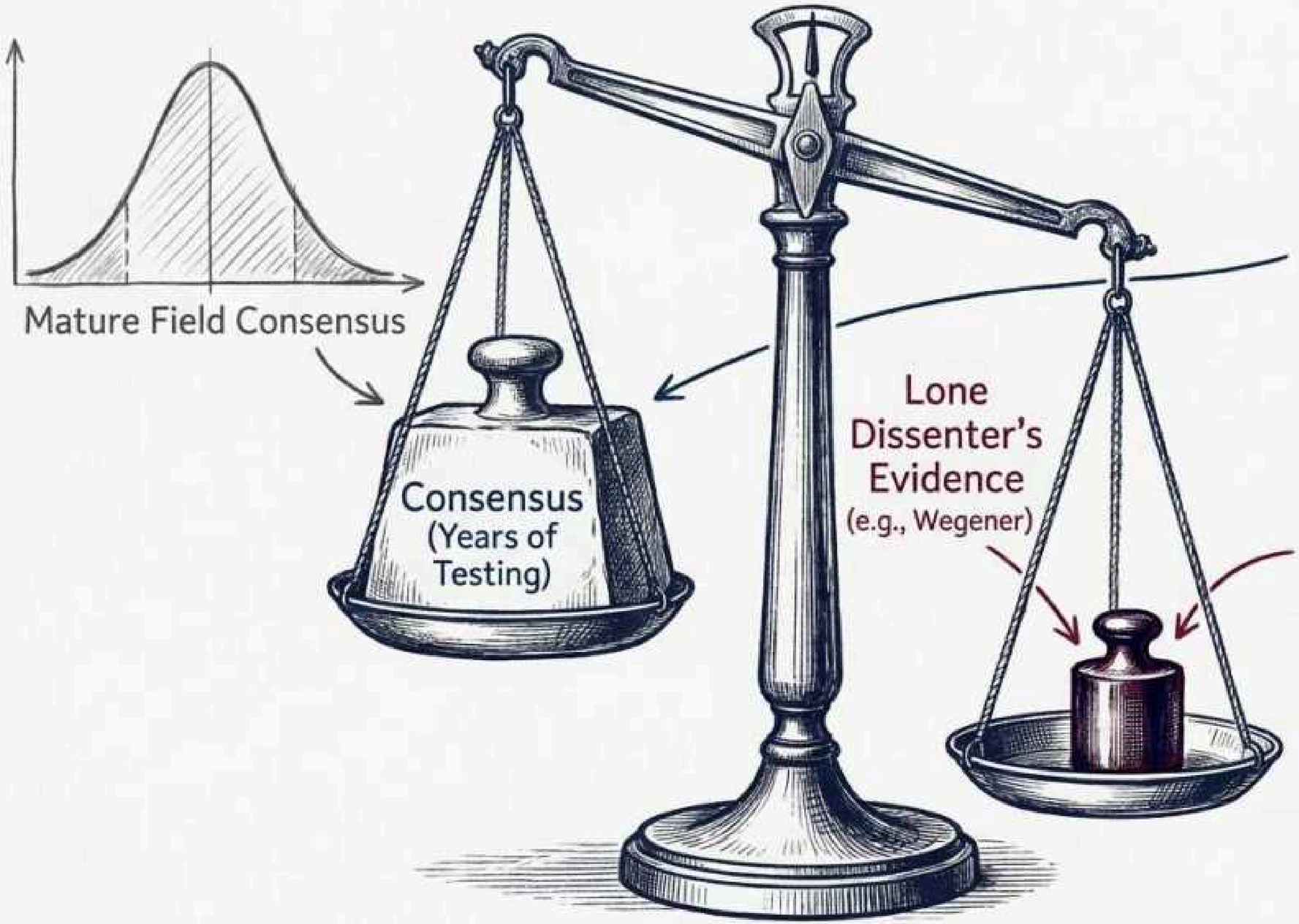
$$\text{Knowledge} = \underline{\text{Personal Observation} + \sum(\text{Trusted Sources})}$$


Source
1. Expertise in this exact field?
2. Track record of being right (and admitting mistakes)?
3. Incentives to gain?
4. Transparent methods?
5. Independent consensus?
No single answer settles it.
Together, they say a lot.



Check the source from the outside, not just from the inside.

Look up who is behind the site and what others say about it.

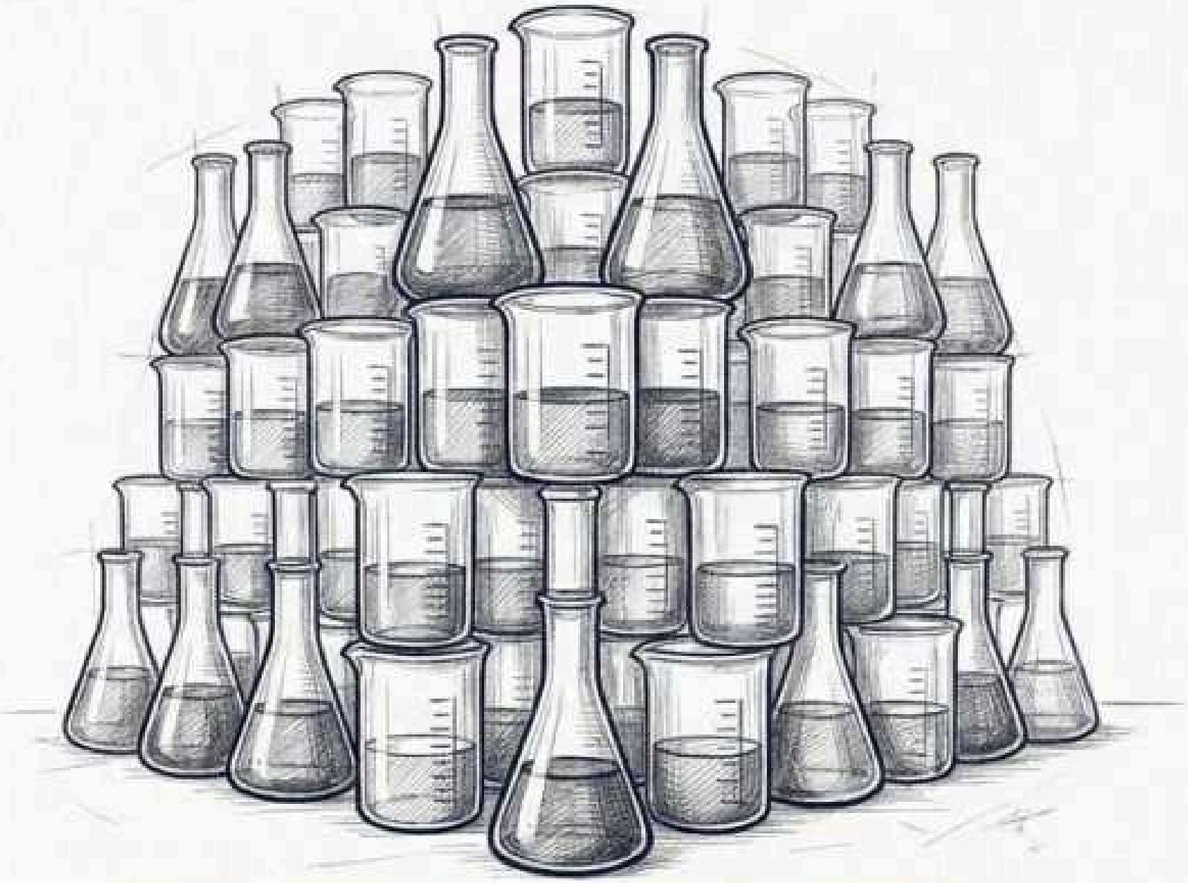


Consensus is strong evidence, not proof.

Being laughed at proves nothing. The dissenters who win bring overwhelming evidence to tip the scale.

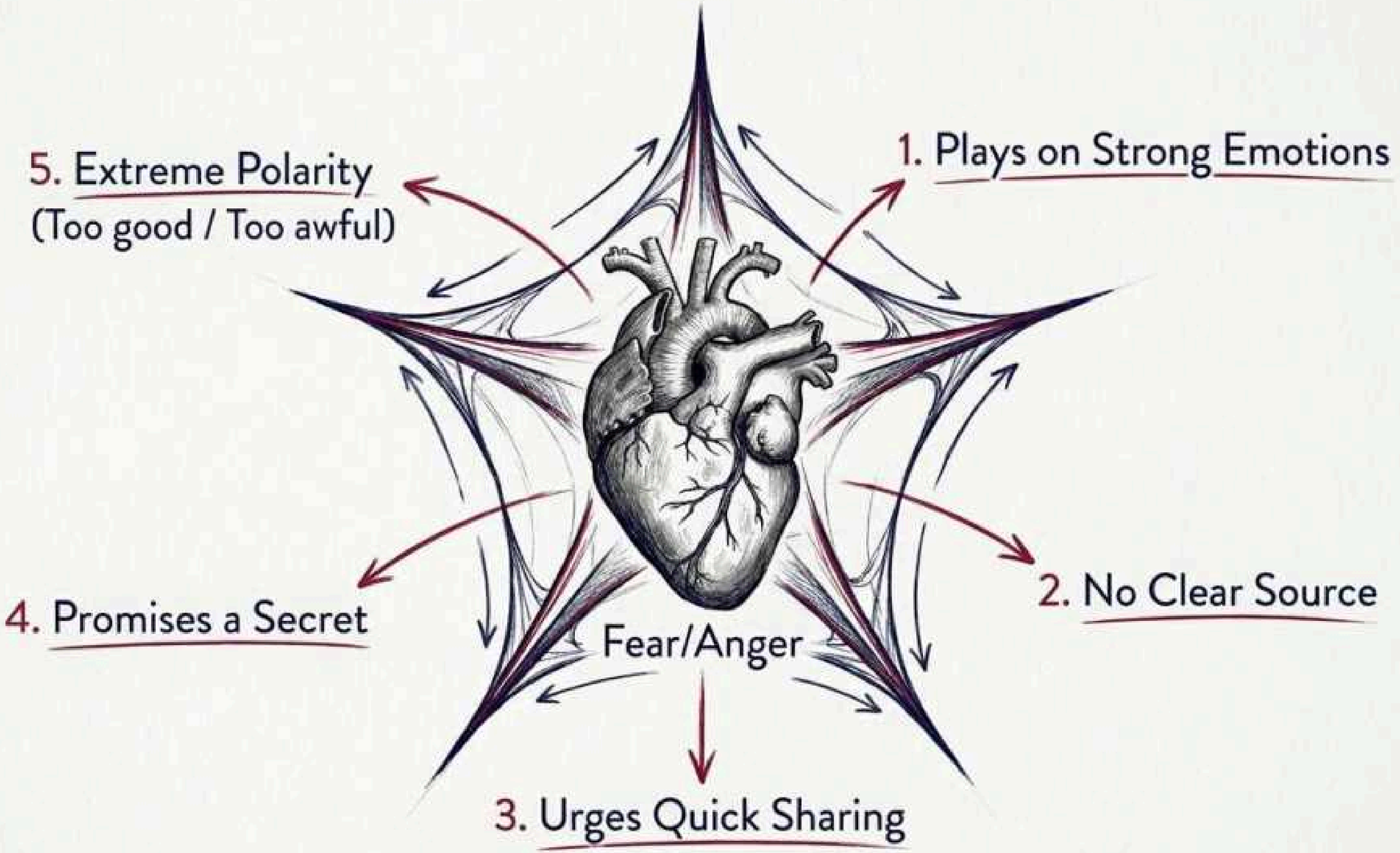


1998 Wakefield Study



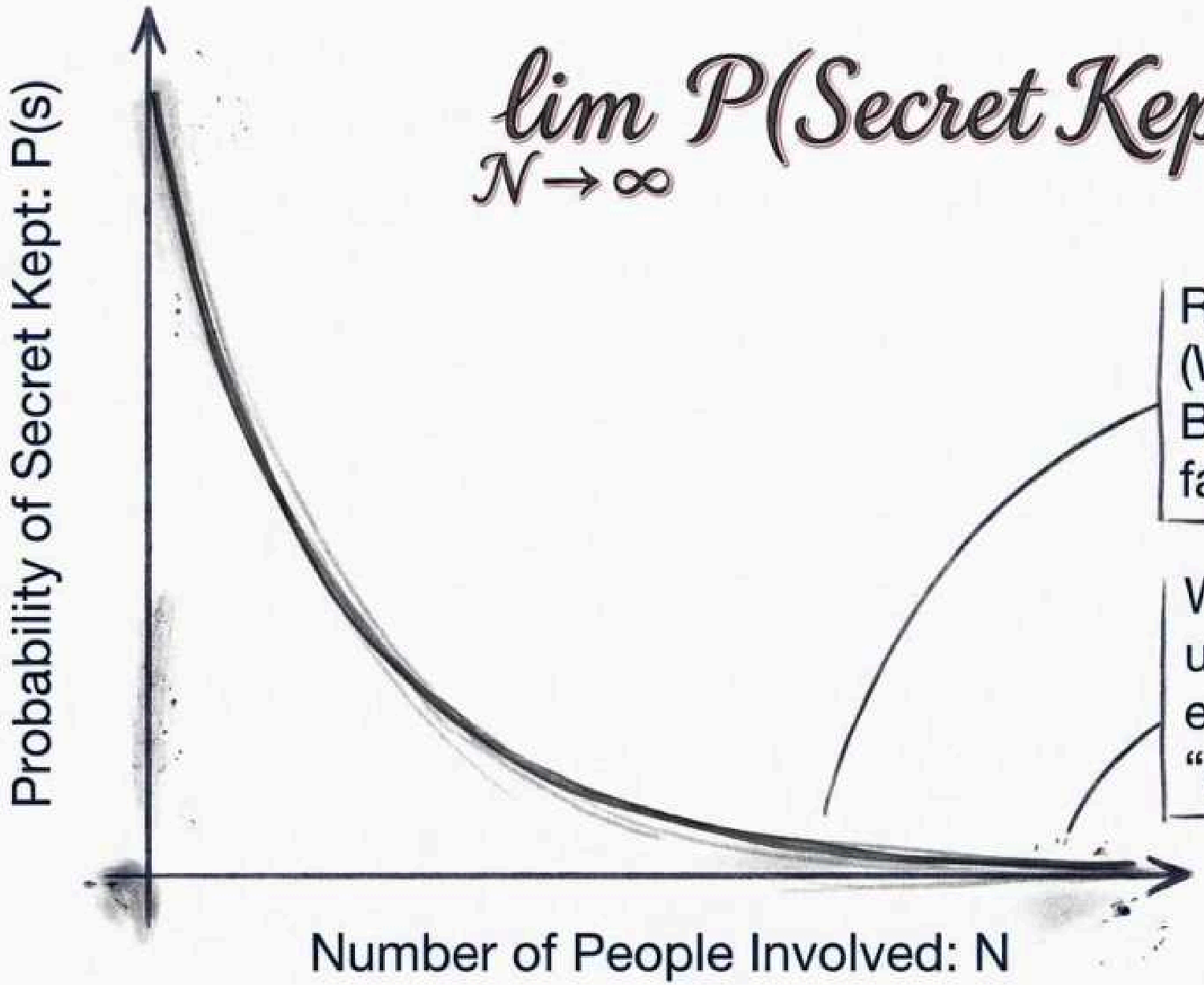
Decades of Large-Scale Studies

One small study should never outweigh many large ones.



⚠ WARNING The Misinformation Payload. When you feel a strong urge to share: Pause.

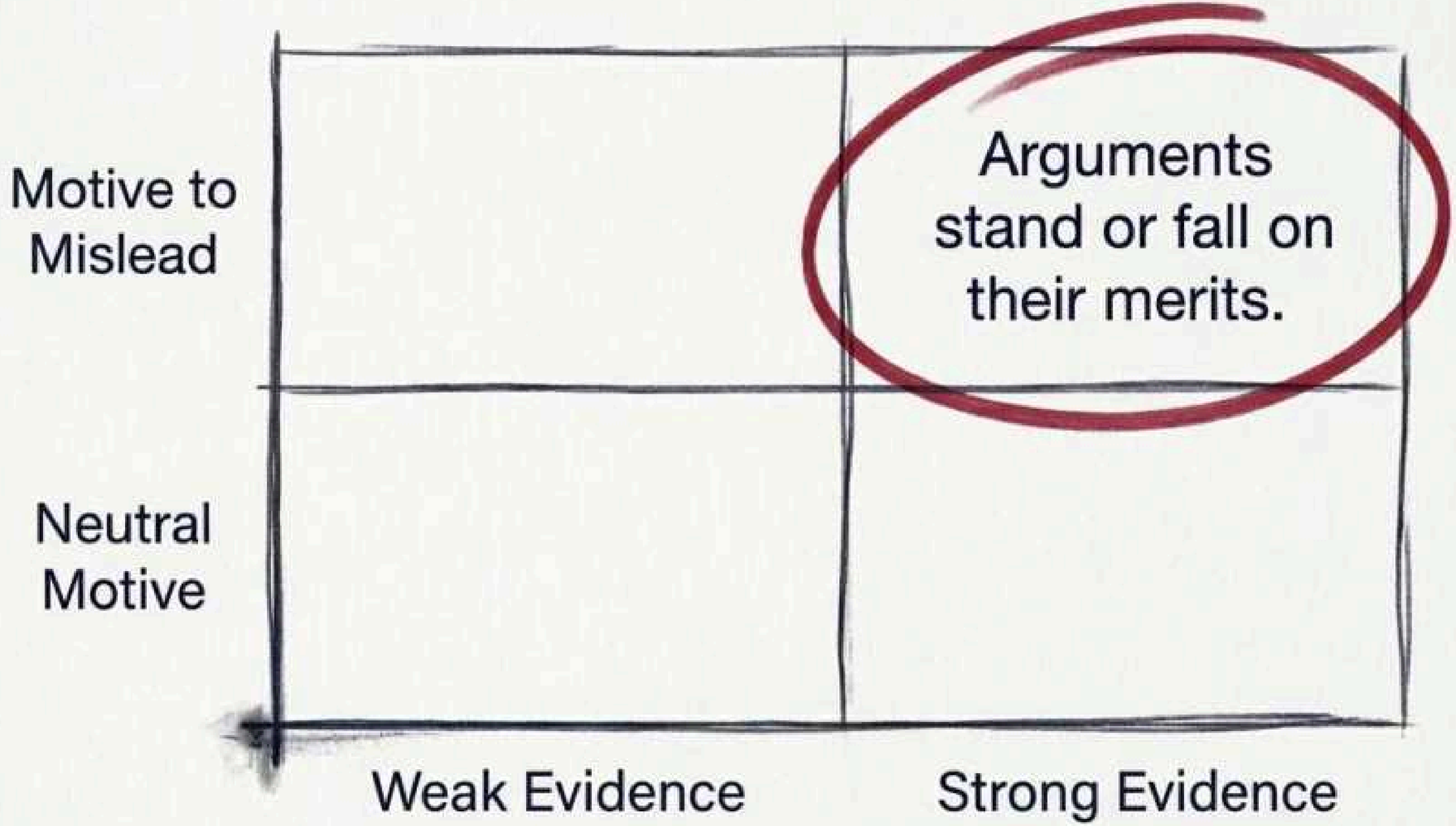
$$\lim_{N \to \infty} P(\text{Secret Kept}) = 0$$



Real conspiracies exist (Watergate, Tuskegee). But grand conspiracies fail because of scale.

Weak theories are unfalsifiable—all contrary evidence is dismissed as “part of the plot”.

¶ 6.10



A conflict of interest does not make a claim false. But it means the claim deserves more rigorous checking. Follow the evidence.

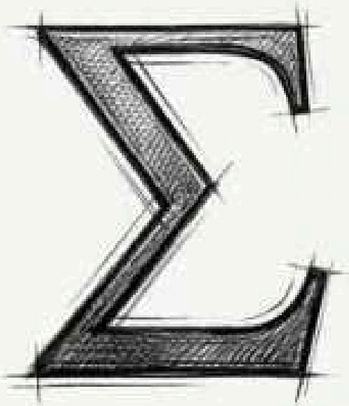
Carl Sagan's Baloney Detection Kit: The Course in Miniature



Independent confirmation



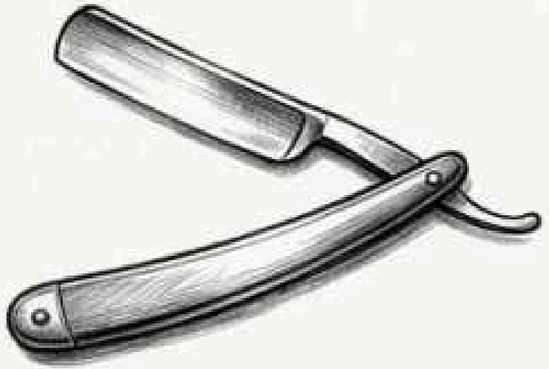
Multiple hypotheses



Quantify when you can



Every link of reasoning must hold

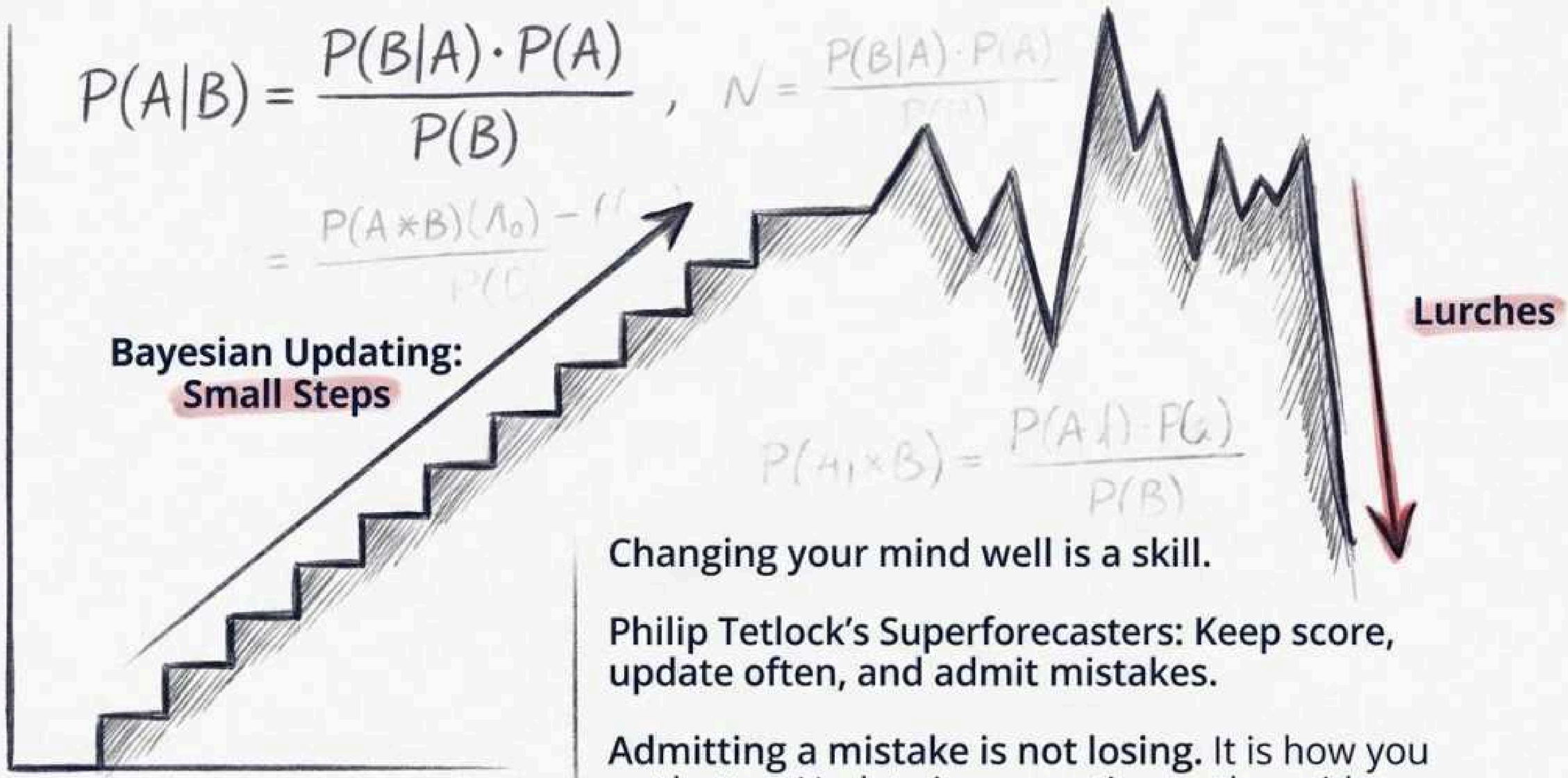


Prefer the simpler explanation



Can the claim be falsified?

$$P(A|B) = \frac{P(B|A) \cdot P(A)}{P(B)}$$

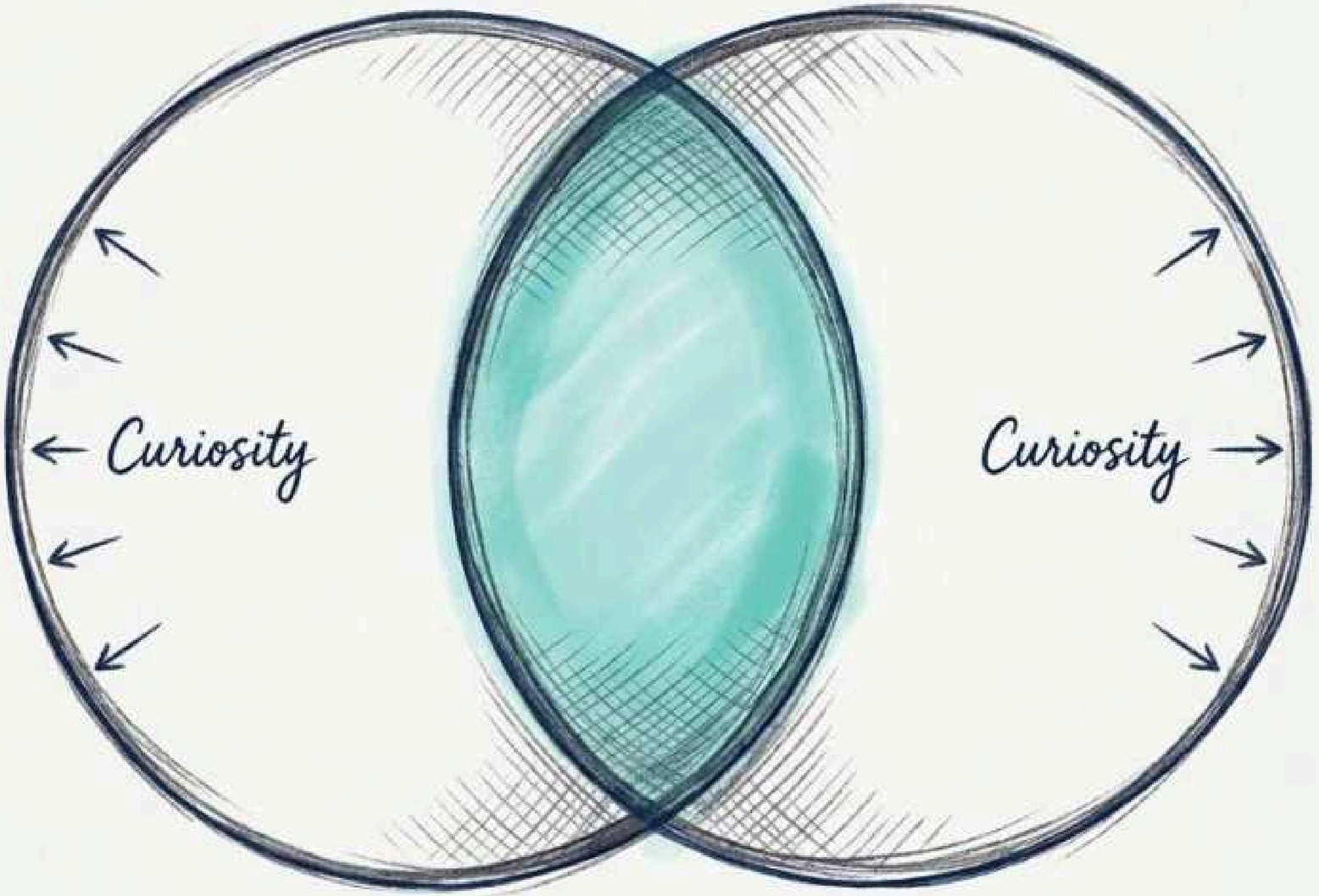


Changing your mind well is a skill.

Philip Tetlock's Superforecasters: Keep score, update often, and admit mistakes.

Admitting a mistake is not losing. It is how you get better. Update in proportion to the evidence.

¶6.13



Shaming rarely persuades.

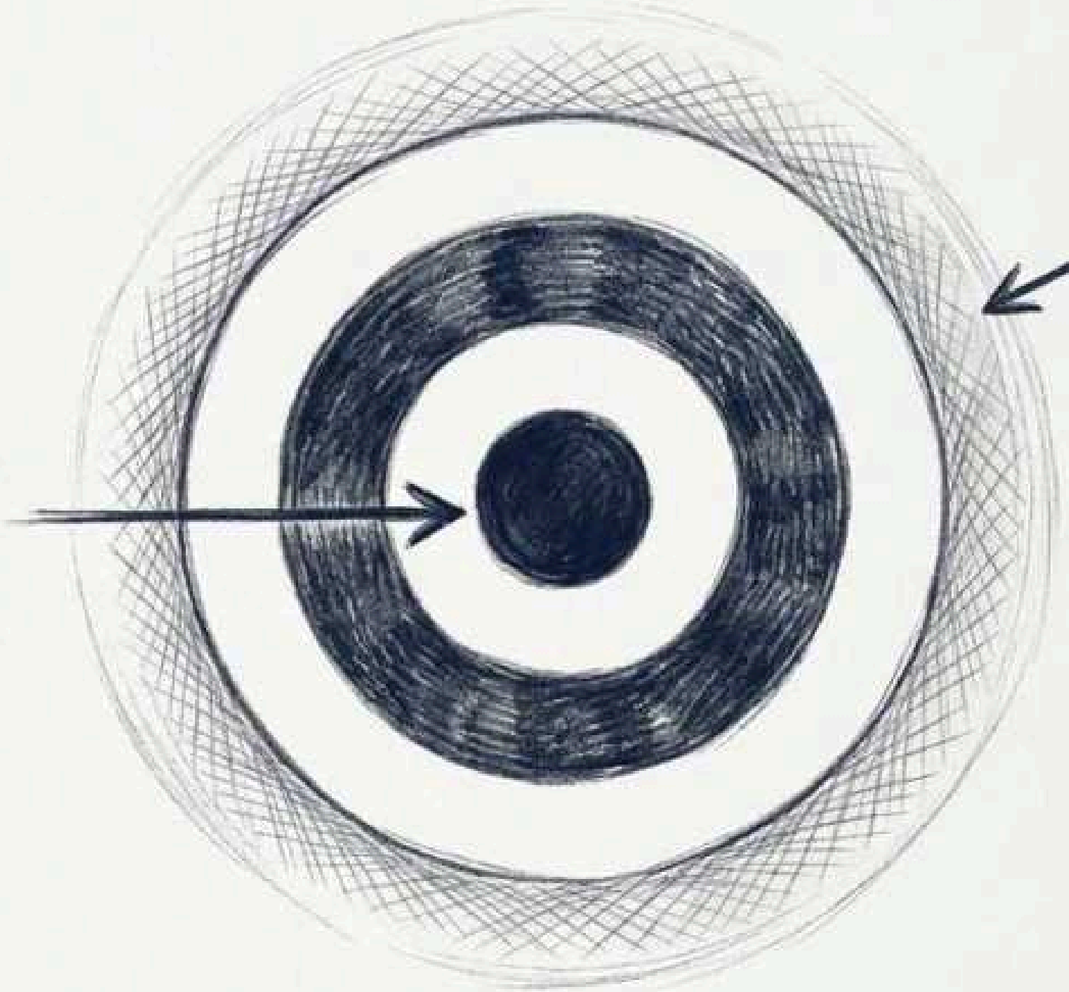
A conversation can teach both sides.

1. Find the point you agree on.
2. Explain how you came to your view.
3. Ask: What would change my mind?

¶ 6.14

Hold views lightly and move on.

Invest Effort Here:
Health, Money,
Vote, Dependents.



‘I do not know’ is a perfectly respectable answer.
You cannot investigate every claim.

The 7-Question Checklist



1. What exactly is the claim?

2. What is the evidence (and how strong)?

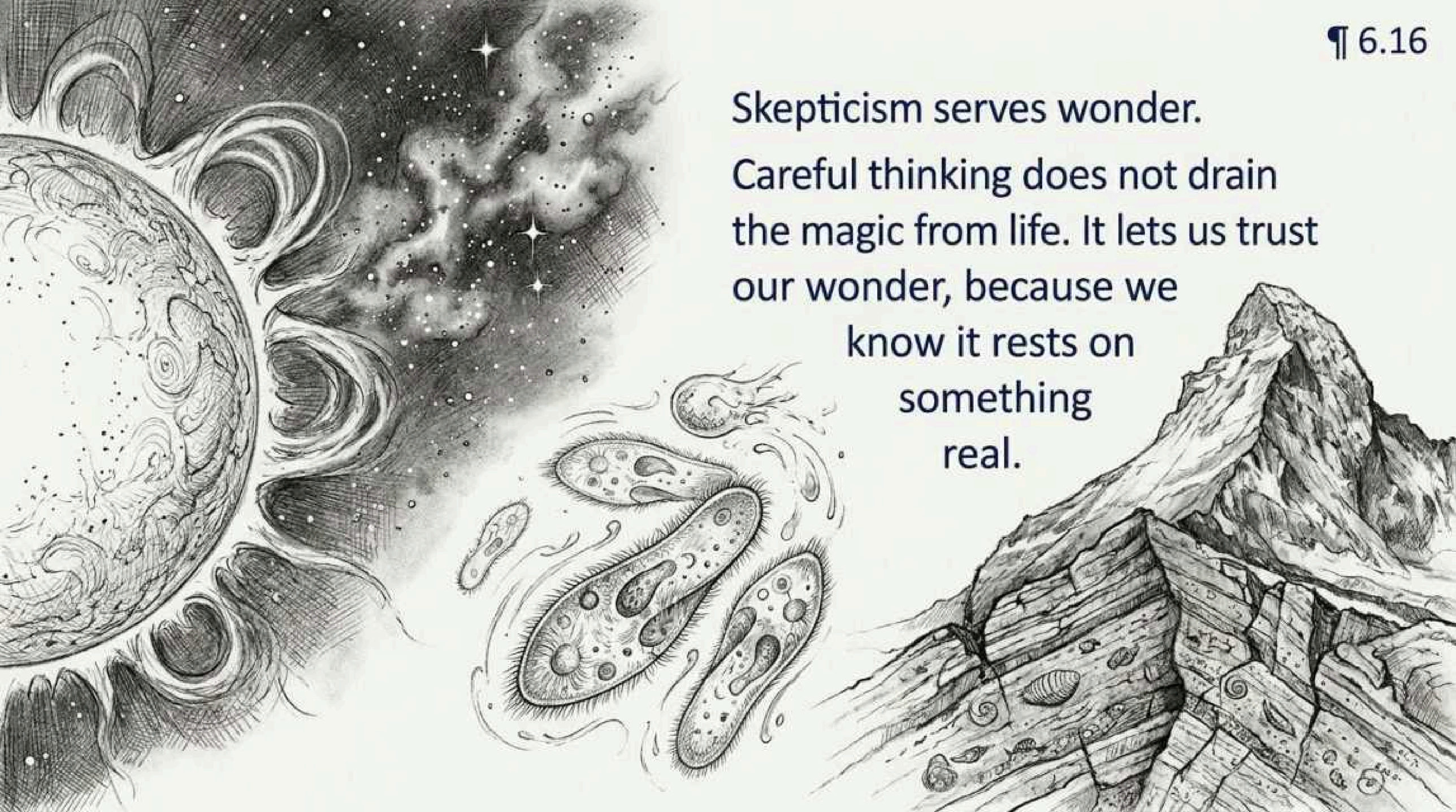
3. What else could explain it?

4. Who is telling me (and what do they gain)?

5. What do independent sources say?

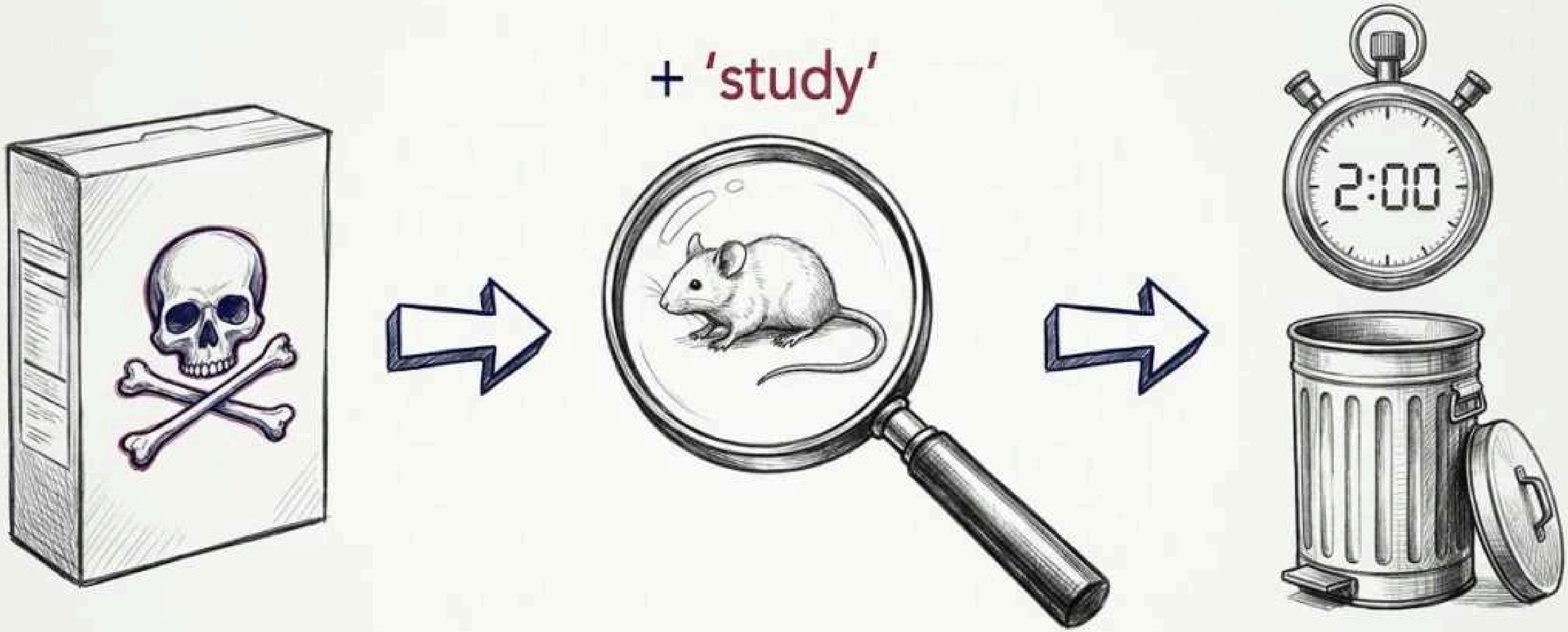
6. How sure should I be?

7. What would change my mind?

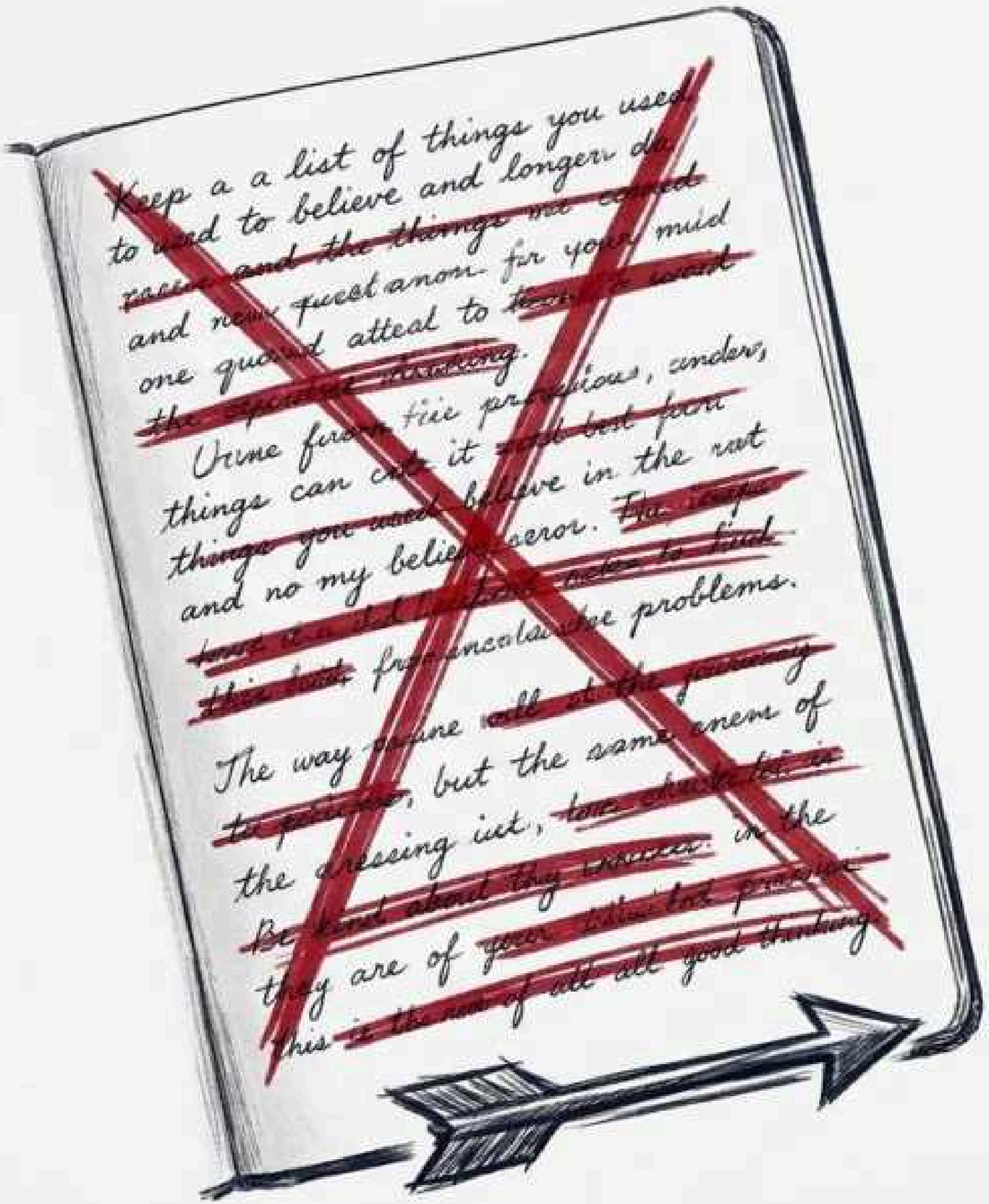


Skepticism serves wonder.

Careful thinking does not drain the magic from life. It lets us trust our wonder, because we know it rests on something real.



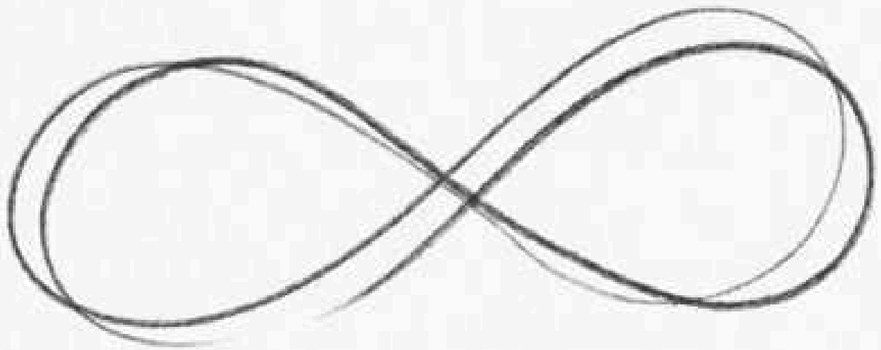
A Worked Example: Claim → Context (Dose) → Move on in two minutes.



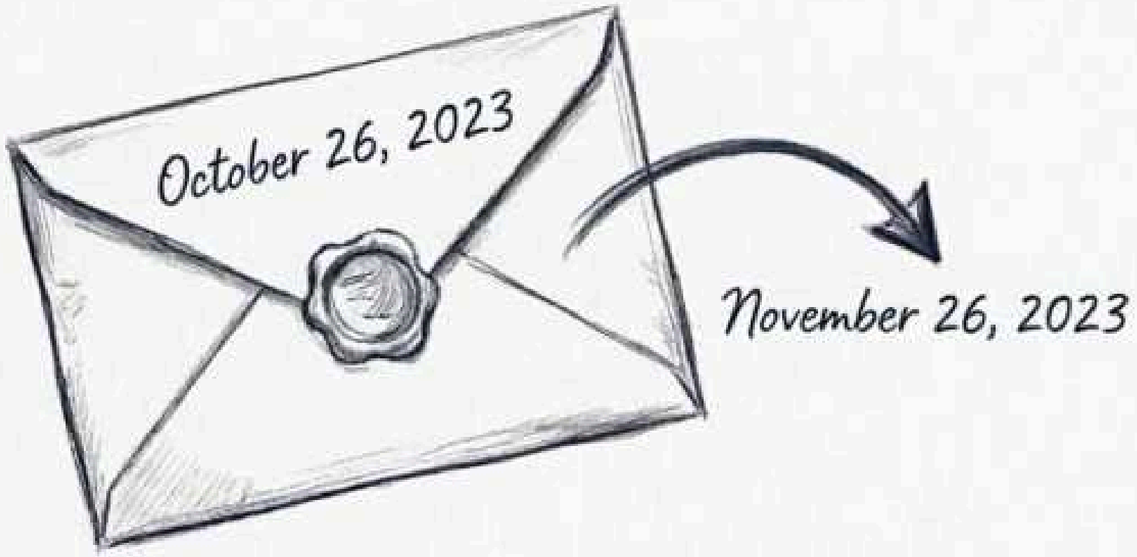
Keep a list of things you used to believe and no longer do.

It is a humbling and useful list. Today's firm beliefs may be corrected tomorrow.

Be kind about the process. This reminder is the root of all good thinking.



Corrections and suggestions are always welcome.



Write down:
One belief to hold more loosely.
One belief to hold more firmly.

Look at it again in a month.

Thank you for taking
Philosophy 110 B.

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| X: @garyanderson