

The Corporate Takeover of Science and the Destruction of Freedom

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Theme: [Science and Medicine](#)

When rich companies with politically-connected lobbyists fund their own research and distort outcomes for their own ends, we are in serious trouble. Due to the corporate takeover of science, our choices, rights and freedoms are currently in the process of being destroyed.

In a genuine 'age of reason,' science would assist in providing clear answers to issues, and the public would be able to engage in open, honest debate over the rights and wrongs of policies. Instead, corporate interests have used their junk science, lobbyists, presence within the heart of governments and PR machines to muddy the waters and sometimes engage in fear-mongering so that public debate has too often become distorted and campaigns of deliberate misinformation have become commonplace.

'Scientific' debate is now often played out in full public glare and acrimony has become the norm, particularly when someone's huge profits are threatened. Corporate greed leads to debate being stifled whereby scientists and various groups who do not support particular corporate stances are made to look like they are the ones who are pushing dogma based on self-interest and not the other way around.

No wonder, therefore, that the public is sometimes left feeling confused. Even when the weight of credible scientific evidence is overwhelming, powerful companies and interest groups are highly skilled in creating ambiguity and controversy through their spin machines. Think back to how the tobacco companies set out to fool the public for decades. Of course, having access to huge funds helps.

ExxonMobil gave \$2.9m to US groups that were set up to misinform the public about climate change, and the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) reportedly offered scientists money to publish articles critical of the International Panel on Climate Change's 2007 climate change study. The AEI had received more than \$1.6m from Exxon. A couple of years ago, the American Petroleum Institute, which includes ExxonMobil, Shell and BP, had encouraged its members to send employees to rallies against a climate change Bill that required large utilities to use greater renewable energy sources.

Whatever the merits concerning the evidence about climate change, the aim of such campaigns is to deceive the public by giving the impression of serious doubt coupled with popular dissent over proposed policies. Money talks. The public listens.

Another well-worn tactic used to sway public opinion involves big companies trying to whip up the belief there is some kind of conspiracy or unscrupulous group that is working against them and, by implication, the population in general. For instance, those who say that genetically modified organisms (GMOs) pose a danger to health or the environment, are

dismissed as having an ideological axe to grind against those corporations that want to rake in massive profits.

'Experts' from well-funded corporate backed think-tanks are often wheeled onto our screens to put forward points of view based on methodologically unsound junk science. Science has become a football to be kicked around and a victim of corporations that have scant regard for the public interest.

If corporate ideology fails, however, it's always nice to know that there is good old fashioned bullying to rely on. For example, a WikiLeaks cable highlighted how GMOs were being forced into European nations by the US ambassador to France who plotted with other US officials to create a 'retaliatory target list' of anyone who tried to regulate GMOs.

Food, crops and cancer

The corporate takeover of science has led to many terrible but highly profitable practices. The issue goes far beyond the advertising industry referring to dodgy science to con the public into buying an anti-aging cream, a fat reducing food supplement or a wonder-beauty product. Think of US-based agribusiness concerns, their aim to control the food supply and the 250,000 plus suicides by indebted Indian farmers who were duped or coerced to buy expensive seeds year after year from one centralised corporate entity.

Backed up by their selective scientific findings, dodgy research, political contacts and spin machines, powerful corporations have placed at their mercy farmers who are no longer able to grow their own crops and harvest their own seeds. Convincing farmers to ditch centuries' old tried and tested methods of crop production might be good for the profit and loss margins on a spreadsheet, but accounts for little when it results in death or fear of the future.

Think also of seasonal flu vaccines, the environmental impact of pesticides and the collapse of the honeybee population and psychiatric pharmaceuticals. Think too of the cancer industry. Despite massive public screening campaigns and decades of scientific research often funded by the very drug companies that profit from managing rather than eradicating cancer and talk of cures, cancer rates continue to soar.

In the 2009 documentary *The Idiot Cycle*, it is claimed that the world's top cancer causing culprits include the companies Bayer, BASF, Dow, Dupont, Monsanto, Syngenta, Novartis, Pfizer, among others. The allegation is that chemical manufacturers are profiting from the production of cancer-causing products and then some of the same companies are investing in profitable cancer treatments.

On top of this, some of these companies are now developing genetically modified foods which have never been adequately tested for long-term health impacts like cancer. The onset of the disease is frequently 15 to 20 years down the road for victims.

Gilles-Eric Seralini, professor of molecular biology at the University of Caen in France, says it is absurd that only three months of testing allowed GM corn to be approved in over a dozen nations. Upon reviewing Monsanto's raw 'research' data, he and his team found, among other problems, liver damage and physiological changes into a pre-diabetic condition among the rats which had eaten Monsanto's GM corn. And that's just from three months of eating such food.

In the US, animal and dairy products are highly contaminated with a wide range of hormones, pesticides and other industrial chemical carcinogens, some of which are very important risk factors for reproductive cancers – testicular cancers in men, breast cancers in women and leukemia in children. The use of the IGF1 growth hormone in milk has been associated with breast, prostate and colon cancer.

With the amount of hormones, antibiotics, food additives, preservatives and colourings, artificial sweeteners, aluminium, sulphur, flavour enhancers and heavy metals being put into what we eat, is it any wonder that we are becoming sick?

Severe anemia, permanent brain damage, Alzheimer's, dementia, neurological disorders, reproductive problems, diminished intelligence, impaired immune system, behavioural disorders, cancers, hyperactivity and learning disability are just some of the diseases linked to our food. Of course, just like cigarettes and the tobacco industry before, trying to 'prove' the glaringly obvious link will take decades as deceit and lies are passed off as 'science' by the corporations involved in food production.

In the meantime, enter the pharmaceuticals racket... yes, the very industry in the US that's spends more on lobbying politicians than any other industry and more on marketing its bogus miracle drugs than researching them. The very industry that is involved in the manufacture of all those poisonous chemicals and additives that find their way into our food. In his book 'Corrupt to the Core', scientist Dr Shiv Chopra tells of his many battles against the Canadian government, which knowingly allowed dangerous drugs, agricultural practices and carcinogenic pesticides to enter the food supply. Chopra asserts there is a concerted effort by companies to sicken and then treat humanity, with the compliance of corrupt government officials, while raking in massive profits.

Big Pharma has the US Food and Drugs Agency in its pocket and regards chemical industrial food production, the consequent diseases produced and chemical industrial 'healthcare' as a huge money making opportunity. Why prevent illness when you can produce it, then cash in on it? Government sanctioned drug pushing in the name of pharmaceutical-led 'healthcare' begs the question, what price human life?

Despite this, the usual tactic by officialdom is to individualise health issues by advising people to change their behaviour. By adopting a 'blame the victim' strategy, attention is diverted away from the practices of large corporations that cause cancer and ill health in the first place.

Science matters, so do priorities

The biggest challenge for ordinary folk is to attain genuine democratic control over science. The biggest challenge science faces is trying to retain some kind of independence from powerful vested interests. Of course, the well-known philosopher of science Paul Feyerabend discussed such issues at length many years ago. Given the increasing power of today's corporations, the issue is now more urgent than ever.

This control of science by unaccountable state-corporate concerns also ultimately leads us to pose a couple of pertinent questions about priorities and how we choose to use technology. What does it say about 'democracy' or even humanity when people can sit and watch a probe from India going to the moon but turn a blind eye to millions a hundred kilometres away, living in the direst situations imaginable? Where is the 'progress' and 'age

of reason' in a world where people use sophisticated weaponry to kill in the name of peace or destroy the planet's ecology for the sake of profit?

It was Herbert Marcuse who suggested that society's technological capabilities are immeasurably greater than ever before, which means that powerholders' capacity for dominating the rest of society is greater than ever before. He also described science as constituting 'instrumental reason', whereby reason would ideally be used as an instrument for harnessing the potential of nature (and people). Strange then, as Marcuse noted at length, how this discipline of science, the great project of "The Enlightenment", has now become even more powerful and unenlightening than religion ever was in stifling freedom of thought and action and entwining reality with myth.

US sociologist Robert Merton once suggested that the underlying norms of science involved research that is not warped by vested interests, the common ownership of scientific discoveries and subjecting findings to organised, rigorous scrutiny within the scientific community. Central to such a positive notion is that science should be used as an instrument for the public good, not as an ideology to justify elite interests or to confuse, exploit and control us. In advanced capitalism, this is patently not the case.

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