




# MILK AND THE MILKING INDUSTRY

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I hate milk. I find many of the recipes in this book frankly loathsome, were I to try them, which I won't. On the other hand, I like science and history (and ice cream). So despite my stomach churning at some of the recipes and descriptions, I actually enjoyed reading this book. 

Milk begins with history—the history of milk and milk animals around the globe. Americans, of course, focus nearly exclusively on cows and cows' milk, but Mendelson points out that on a global scale cows are a relatively recent and relatively uncommon source of milk and milk products.

She mixes this history with science—the very different composition of different types of milk, along with the difference in products that result both from different types of milk and from how that milk is treated, both with by culturing with microorganisms and by mechanical alteration. The result, of course, is a huge range of milk products, ranging from the simple (naturally cultured yogurt; simple cheeses) to the complex (modern milk as sold in the supermarket; aged cheeses; butter).

Milk then moves to recipes, grouped into those based on fresh milk (and cream); yogurt; cultured milk (and cream); butter and true buttermilk; and fresh cheeses (aged cheeses are beyond the scope of the book).

Mendelson offers various recipes in each grouping, interspersed with more history and science, typically woven around the recipe immediately at hand. This is a successful approach for engaging and educating the reader (even if, as I say, I find the most of these somewhere between not-appealing and nasty, with the exception of some sweetened items).

All of this is well written. Milk is an excellent book and I will be sure to use my additional knowledge to be even more of a bore and chore at cocktail parties. But for me Milk was primarily a thought-provoking book, and not really about milk, or food. Initially, my thought was sparked by Mendelson's measured and even-handed approach to controversies such as "raw" (i.e., unpasteurized) milk, which is largely forbidden by regulation in the United States.

Mendelson notes that raw milk probably isn't the wonder food that some think, but neither is it impossible to safely produce and sell raw milk, despite what government functionaries and their allies in the food and health establishment, the "experts," are always telling us.

Mendelson also covers the analogous controversy over fat in milk and butter—that is, "experts" told us that milkfat was to be avoided on peril of our health and our lives, and now we are told that is false.

We are told, instead, that those "experts" wholly misunderstood and grossly simplified the actual chemistry of milk and that they knew nothing at all, despite their claims to the contrary, about how it actually affects the human body. We are now told that milkfat is good for cardiovascular health and

keeps us thin, after literally decades of being told the opposite, and anyone who disagreed being considered some combination of demon and fool. Again, the “experts” keep cropping up.

What drives their wholly incorrect conclusions, and the demand for universal submission to them?

We all have personal familiarity with the costs of these wrongheaded directives. Some costs are merely reductions in personal utility, which seem unimportant, but are not nothing, even if they are not easily captured in statistics. For example, my grandfather spent decades being forbidden by his wife, for his own good, to eat both butter and eggs, which he loved, and instead being required to eat “healthy” margarine, which he hated.

As Mendelson points out (and as has become even more clear since this book was published in 2008), it turns out that all this, also, is entirely false. But my grandfather died before the supposedly certain science of experts was discredited, so his utility remained lowered.

These examples, taken from the relatively narrow area of milk products, are just one set of many examples in all areas of life of how we are constantly told that we must do something because “experts” say to do it.

But as [\*Milk\*](#) shows, “experts” have a miserable track record in their attempts to direct the lives of Americans, whenever they go beyond common sense (e.g., don't drink clearly contaminated milk) and presume to tell us what we must do, usually despite basing their Moses-from-the-mountaintop recommendations on contradictory, minimal or zero evidence.

As a result, millions of people have died or suffered—solely because of what “experts” told us, frequently with the cooperation of officious ministers of the state, who adopt these recommendations and penalize or criminalize failure to comply. But why does all this happen, over and over again? Why don't the “experts” learn to advocate public policy with humility and caution?

Examples beyond milk are legion. Sticking with food examples, the “experts” told us all that a low-fat diet was the way to go, for good health and long life. Now that's considered false, and the obesity epidemic largely due to the carbohydrates we were urged to eat while avoiding fat. And last week the “experts” performed a 180-degree about-face on the topic of feeding peanuts to infants.

I've had five children in the past nine years, and we were cautioned with the direst of warnings to never, ever feed them peanuts until the age of three. It was presented as the Gospel truth that we must do this, or we would be terrible parents endangering the lives of our children. During the twenty years of this recommendation, peanut allergies increased by 500%, and peanut allergies are now the leading cause of food-related anaphylaxis and death in the United States.

Now we are told to immediately do the opposite, and feed small infants peanuts, in order to avoid the very thing created by the thing we were told to do earlier.

Why, you may ask, do “experts” continually issue edicts that direct Americans what they must do, or face penalties, and why do they never show any shame, much less face any consequences, when they are proven wrong? It seems to me that to answer that question we have to ask why people, in any walk of life, whether “experts” or not, advocate any particular public policy.

(By “public policy” I mean a course of action that is either strongly recommended, in that failure to follow it is said to be certain to have material deleterious consequences to a specific individual or to some larger segment of society, or a policy that is enforced by state coercion).

Five possible non-exclusive reasons occur to me. I think that every person advocating a public policy is driven by one or more of these reasons, and by nothing else (unless they are insane or using a Magic 8-Ball to choose advocacy positions). Experts are merely people who supposedly have more knowledge; they are subject to the same analysis of their reasons. Those reasons are, in no particular rank:

1) A detached, purely objective analysis of alternatives has led to a conclusion the advocate has concluded is best for society. Let's call this the “philosopher-king” reason for public policy advocacy.

(We can ignore for current purposes whether one can accurately determine what is “best for society,” as well as distortions to and failures of objectivity such as confirmation bias and tribalism, together with logical fallacies such as appeal to authority, to which “experts” are particularly prone, but which don't change that the reason for choosing a position is objective analysis).

2) Money. This can mean direct payments, in the sense of corruption. But it more typically means that the advocate will economically benefit if a particular public policy position is adopted. What I mean here is not public policy effects that lift everyone; that falls under #1. Rather, I mean individualized benefit—for example, job promotions, grant money from the government to the advocate, or even things like luxury travel to conferences relating to a public policy.

This also includes simple economic security, such as job security—ensuring continued employment that might otherwise be at risk. It also includes third-party benefit, such as that resulting from nepotism.

If you asked a random person on the street, this is the only one of the drivers here that would likely be named. But it is probably the least important, despite what economic determinists and Marxists tell us. Sure, everyone wants money, but I think it's rarely the most important driver of why someone desires a particular public policy.

3) The desire to feel superior to other people. This is a mostly overlooked driver of a huge amount of

human action. Human nature being what it is, we all want to feel superior to others, and even better, to be recognized by others as superior, and even better, to be publicly so recognized. (See, for example, C.S. Lewis's famous metaphor of the "[The Inner Ring](#)").

One way to achieve feeling superior is advocate a public policy and attribute a moral component to it, which necessarily implies that the advocate is superior and those who oppose him are morally deficient and therefore inferior. (Fame is part of the feeling of superiority—technically, it's not the exact same thing, but for these purposes I think the desire for fame and the desire to feel superior can be lumped together.)

The desire for superiority can be narrow - Professor X may want to feel superior to Professor Y in his same small department. Or it can be broad—Person X may want to feel superior to vast swathes of the deplorables in society as a whole. The refrain "we're doing this for the children" is perhaps the best indicator that the real reason behind a policy position is the desire to feel superior.

4) The desire to control and have power over other people. Again, this is a mostly overlooked driver of human action. It is highly pleasurable to most people to push others around, whether they admit it or not.

Bullying is the most commonly remarked upon manifestation of this tendency, but it occurs everywhere in human relations, and in political systems—see, e.g., Orwell's depiction of Communism in [Animal Farm](#). Pushing others around is often justified by the pusher as doing something "for their own good," when it is really the psychological good of the advocate that is being advanced.

5) The desire for transcendence—for meaning in one's life. This is often the most important reason anyone does anything, and public policy advocacy is no exception. The advocacy itself may provide the meaning—"I am doing something." But the advocacy itself may be a second-order effect. That is, the advocacy itself does not provide transcendence, but a particular person may find transcendence through a larger frame, of which the advocacy is merely a manifestation.

For example, religious belief may dictate a specific public policy, such that advocating the policy is implementing the framework that gives the advocate's life its meaning. A pro-life activist is not given transcendence simply by fighting against abortion, but because that is part of a larger framework giving his life meaning.

Religious transcendence is easy to understand and identify; the two things necessarily go together. Thus, the innate nature of the human desire for transcendence is best seen not in religion, but in religion substitutes—notably Communism, but that was (and is) only the progenitor of a wide range of mostly left-wing religion substitutes, including environmental extremism and certain brands of

feminism.

As Chesterton did not say, but should have, "When man ceases to believe in God, he does not believe in nothing, he believes in anything."

As can be seen from this, there is very rarely any such thing as purely disinterested advocacy of a public policy. If you listen to those who publicly and loudly advocate public policies, they would have you believe that #1 is the only possible reason they advocate any particular public policy.

In fact, numerous people in this media-centric age have made a living out of casting themselves as impartial philosopher-kings, advocating public policies for supposedly purely rational, disinterested reasons. So, any time a [Neil deGrasse Tyson](#) or [Bill Nye](#) pushes a public policy (usually left-wing, although that's not germane to this discussion, but may be indicative of something, as I discuss below), they claim to be driven by pure objective reason, but they are in fact driven by some combination of these factors.

The trick is finding out which factors are dominant, and using that to determine whether the advocacy has any merit for society at large, since factors #2 through #5 are in essence inapplicable to or antithetical to society at large, such that if any combination of those dominate, the advocacy is necessarily defective and should be ignored (and the advocate held in public contempt and, preferably, punished by society).

Let's take Bill Nye's position on global warming. He likes to call himself the "Science Guy," and he got his start teaching children scientific facts through clever demonstrations of science experiments in educational programs. More recently, though, he's taken aggressive public stands on public policy issues, of which global warming is only one (others include pushing for abortion rights and endorsing Barack Obama for political office). Why has he done this?

One possibility is that he has analyzed these policies and decided they're objectively correct, and the world can benefit from his thoughts, without any benefit to him. Maybe.

He refuses to state his public policy advocacy rationales with any specificity, other than the usual vacuous and false "all the experts say global warming is an existential threat and we must pay any cost, immediately, to address that threat," and he maintains the usual refusal to debate or even acknowledge competing viewpoints. So it's hard to tell if he has done an objective, internally consistent analysis at all, though there is no indication he has.

But even if he has done so and that's a reason for his advocacy of a global warming alarmist position, it's only one reason. With respect to the other four possible reasons,

(a) Nye may or may not get more money as a result of his advocacy, but he definitely risks no financial penalty, since all the platforms on which he appears are controlled by those on the Left, who agree with him, and he gets job security because he can cry "persecution" if he is denied any job;

(b) he most definitely gets to feel superior, and to be repeatedly lauded as such on numerous public platforms, while making and being applauded for denigrating comments about those who disagree with him;

(c) he most definitely gets to control and have power over other people, by the nature of being a recognized Important Person whose advocacy is relevant, and by the declared intent of his preferred policies being massive direct control over billions, including by direct mandate and by limiting their life choices by making energy more expensive;

and (d) he probably achieves meaning in his life by his advocacy, although this is hard to tell without more evidence from Nye himself, being largely internal. But it is common for the successful (especially atheists like Nye) to, in the twilight of their careers, seek for larger meaning and a way to feel like they "made a difference," and so transcendence is likely a reason for advocacy in his case—perhaps the overriding reason.

Therefore, based on this analysis, we can conclude that Bill Nye's advocacy demanding public policy changes in response to global warming is largely or wholly worthless, since it is largely or wholly based on rationales that do not apply to society as a whole, but merely advance Bill Nye's personal interests.

The same analysis applies, actually, to nearly all global warming alarmists, but even more strongly so. One frequently hears global warming alarmists jeer nervously at those who oppose their analysis and prescriptions, with some variation of "why would the experts claim it's a problem if it's not?"

These four reasons are why. Massive amounts of money all around the globe flow only to those pushing global warming alarmism; penury and obloquy are the lot of any scientist who dares to suggest not merely that global warming is a myth, but who makes any suggestion that cost-benefit analysis should apply or that it is possible we don't actually understand climate at all (see, e.g., Roger Pielke).

(This is exacerbated by climate science being the short bus of science; the truly gifted go into areas like physics and have more options for making a living). The superiority that oozes off alarmists is so thick it nearly assumes physical form. All the solutions of global warming alarmists involve massively increasing power over ordinary citizens, by both government and by the advocates of political action based on global warming alarmism (see, the common demand that people who disagree with global warming alarmism be put in prison, or in some cases, the public demand they be killed).

And, most of all, global warming alarmism is very clearly a substitute religion, providing transcendence to its advocates, together with all the indicia of a religion, from sins to redemption to priests to indulgences.

So, while it appears plausible to a neutral observer (say, me) that modifying the atmosphere could have deleterious effects, and an objective analysis with that as a starting point would be nice, we can conclude that the alarmist industry as it exists is not primarily, or even to a significant degree, driven by objective analysis, and almost wholly, or wholly, driven by motives personal to the advocates, who should be held in contempt.

A very few advocates for public policies to address global warming escape this analysis, notably [Bjørn Lomborg](#), but they are few indeed (and the treatment of them by the alarmist industry merely reinforces the above analysis).

Now, not all examples of “experts” pushing public policy are as baldly self-interested as global warming alarmists; they are probably at the extreme range of scientific unreliability due to the accrual of several factors other than rational objectivity. For a less extreme case, let’s take proponents of not feeding children peanuts before the age of three. Probably, the advocates of that public policy were mostly driven by factor #1, objective analysis.

They were just wrong, and most likely fell into various forms of bias and distorted thinking that made their conclusions false. Money was probably not overly important (unlike in the drive for fat-free foods, which was corrupted by money from the sweetener lobby). The other factors may have been important, overall or in certain cases; it is hard to tell.

Certainly, none of the advocates who were so wrong, and killed children with their erroneous advocacy, felt any need to express sorrow or shame, much less face any kind of punishment. This suggests that the desire to feel superior to other and control them is relevant, because a normal person would feel compelled to abase himself for his error and the harm he caused—but that would undercut the feeling of superiority and control, so it is absent in practice, unless compelled, which it never is for “experts.”

Similarly, this is not to deny that it is possible to go too far the other way. Sometimes it is possible to base public policy on objective analysis. Cranks who reject all scientific evidence, from those who link vaccines to autism to those who think crystals have healing power, are just as subject to factors other than objectivity.

For example, someone who won’t vaccinate his children is subject to failures in #1 (in that the costs to children from not getting vaccinated is greater than even the claimed benefit), and is driven largely by #3 (superiority) and #5 (transcendence).



And there are probably quite a few public policy positions that don't attract lots of public attention, and are therefore more likely to be based on objective analysis and less biased by other factors (though one can feel superior to, and desire to control, a small group as well as a large one).

Finally, this overall problem, of defective reasons being the real driver behind public policy advocacy, is less of a problem with the reality-based community, that is, with conservatives.

Liberals are more prone to derive their personal sense of meaning from politics, which is one of the reasons they try to politicize all areas of life. If you don't advocate any public policy, or are neutral on what public policy will be chosen, you do not receive the positive reinforcement yielded by these drivers.

You have to get your personal utility, and your meaning, somewhere else. Conservatives are more likely to not focus on advocating public policies, and when they do are philosophically generally less subject to the temptations of control and transcendence (though, perhaps, not less subject to superiority).

Nonetheless, all people should be subject to the same analysis whenever they advocate for any public policy. And I conclude that trusting "experts," unless a clear-eyed evaluation of their actual reasons for their positions is first made and the result is totally clear, is a fool's errand.

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***The [photo](#) shows, "The Cigar" by Peter Baumgartner, painted in the latter half of the 19th-century.***

