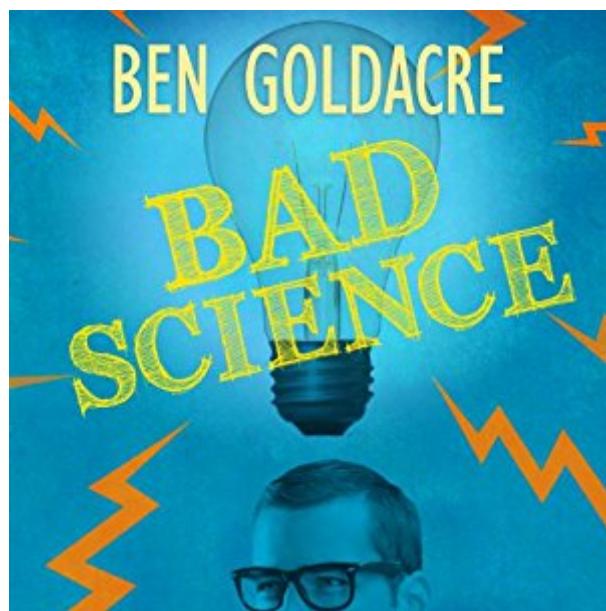


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Bad Science: Quacks, Hacks, And Big Pharma Flacks



Synopsis

Author Ben Goldacre exposes the epidemic of pseudoscience and gives listeners the tools they need to distinguish good science from nonsense.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

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Customer Reviews

In some sense this book is more about the importance of the free press than "bad science". Chapter 10 did not appear in the original version of the book because Goldacre was being sued for libel at the time; while its publication is vindication, one can imagine that others without Goldacre's tenacity and backing would have given up. While media's misrepresentation bears the brunt of Goldacre's wrath throughout the book, that the book ended up on many "best of the year" lists indicates that there are two sides to this story, and there is good and bad media just like good and bad science (but you knew that). Goldacre's book is really aimed at journalists - if those covering science and health issues would read this and take it to heart, we might all be better off. (On the other hand, I think that it's likely that those enlightened journalists would just be replaced, as their publishers are mainly interested in making sales. Goldacre points out that the status quo is not to have true science journalists cover "big" science/health stories, because they tend to drain the sensational and erroneous b.s. out of them.) Aside from all that, for the rest of us it's still a very worthwhile read, because we can never hear too many times that we should use the scientific method and embrace evidence-based medicine, and we rarely hear it in a voice as entertaining as Goldacre's. Like some of the less-favorable reviews point out, the book is a bit repetitive and shrill at times (Goldacre seems to have a particular ax to grind with yuppies with humanities backgrounds), and very

Brit-centric, so some might say five stars is a stretch. If the subject matter were less important I'd probably agree, but taken as a whole package the combination of importance and readability makes it a standout. Strongly recommended.

I just finished reading *Bad Science* by Ben Goldacre, and it's the most important book I've read in a long time. It's not a thriller, it's a nonfiction work of popular science. But that description doesn't do this book justice. *Bad Science* has the power to change the world (for the better), if people would read it carefully and with an open mind. It rails against the anti-science winds sweeping our culture, and more importantly, empowers ordinary people of reasonable intelligence to think like scientists and protect themselves from so much unscientific claptrap dressed up as science that is for sale, is on the Internet, and even in respectable media such as newspapers. In fact, I believe *Bad Science* should be a mandatory part of all high school science curricula, or at the very least, required reading for all medical students (who in my experience are as vulnerable to pseudoscience as other people). Heck, whoever you are, if you haven't read this book, you need to. Ben Goldacre is a brainy muckraker who, with acerbic wit and unassailable accuracy, attacks anti-scientific BS and clearly explains how it cloaks itself in a scientific aura, and how it's wrong. The beautiful thing is, you don't have to be a scientist or even a particularly scientifically literate person to understand. Anybody with a brain can detect BS if given the proper tools. Goldacre's targets cover the spectrum from "quacks, hacks" to "big pharma flacks". He lays bare the alternative realities in which live detox treatments, ear candling, anti-aging cosmetics, homeopathy, diet experts, antioxidants, pharmaceutical companies with large advertising budgets, vaccine opponents, and most frightening of all, people who oppose antiretroviral therapy for AIDS and argue that HIV does not cause this disease. In my opinion, the author is utterly fair in his arguments. But he is not always nice. (Is there a reason why he should be?) Ben Goldacre is my new hero, slaying dragons of ignorance and going head-to-head in intellectual combat with some of the most hysterically irrational elements in society today. Along the way as you read this entertaining book, you'll learn what you need to know about clinical trials, about the power and limitations of statistics, and about how to think critically, to become a little Ben Goldacre yourself. My favorite quote from the book is one of the best science quotes of all time: The plural of "anecdote" is not "data".

I purchased *Bad Science* as a guide to better myself sniffing out the BS of many papers and studies. This affects me in both my daily personal life and professional career. While I have to say there are some absolute gems of rules, guidelines, and examples in the book, I found Ben

Goldacre's long diatribes to make this a difficult read. He seems to take a certain joy in writing pages-long word soup about certain people and groups are terrible citizens for conflating the numbers and results. I don't totally disagree with this, but I have better things to do than wade through the verbal superfluosity. The worst example was a list of pointers which were randomly placed over several pages and broken up by the word stew. I generally enjoy keeping a list as one entity. Overall, I almost put this book down permanently a handful of times, but I'm a masochist when it comes to bettering myself.

The book really sets the scene for book No 2 - Bad Pharma. It has a wider view of science and shows how poor judgement and reporting impacts scientific outcomes. Certainly there is a lot of data here, and it is not a book you are going to fly through and come out the other end with a complete understanding of the issues. At least if you are not a 'rocket scientist to begin with'. I had to work my way through some of the statistical analysis parts, which, by the way, are one of the keys to understanding the issues, and had to take my time to ensure I fully grasped the implications of the data presented. That's not to say this isn't a good read, just that it will make you think. Much of what is presented in this book finds its way into the follow up where the focus is sharper and perhaps more cutting. While it is not necessary to read this one before Bad Pharma it certainly sets the scene. Poor science, poor study design, poor analysis and very poor reporting all contribute to the problem. Credibility clearly is the looser and self interest the driver.

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