

# Book Review: Bad Science by Ben Goldacre

Martin Fenner, Gobbledygook

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Ben Goldacre: Bad Science. Published September 2008 by Fourth Estate Ltd. Paperback, 352 pages, ISBN 0007240198

Ben Goldacre, blogger of the Bad Science<sup>[1]</sup> column in the Guardian newspaper, in September published a book based on material from his blog. Just like the newspaper column, the book is primarily intended for a general audience rather than the trained scientist or medical doctor. And it helps to live in Great Britain, where most of the examples of bad science given in the book happened.

But the book is not really a collection of scary and sometimes hilarious bad science stories. Ben Goldacre takes these examples and tries to teach the reader evidence-based medicine. Evidence-based medicine<sup>2</sup> or EBM uses the scientific method to make decisions about the care of individual patients. It is funny how many people – including medical doctors – throw away all the research evidence that is available and instead rely on personal experiences. And evidence-based medicine helps to distinguish good research from bad research, e.g. by stressing the importance of randomized controlled trials. The book was very stimulating reading for me, including the chapter about the placebo effect<sup>3</sup>. But I'm a medical doctor, and I don't know whether Ben Goldacre succeeded in every reader with this teaching mission. Even so, most readers will look much more carefully at science stories in the media after finishing the book. And that is a good thing.

More reviews of the book can be found in these fine publications:

- Daily Telegraph
- TimeOut London
- British Medical Journal
- New Scientist

fn1. Bad Science

fn2. Evidence-based Medicine Wikipedia entry

fn3. Placebo programme on BBC Radio 4