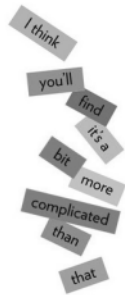


## Book reviews

Edited by Allan Beveridge, Femi Oyeboode  
and Rosalind Ramsay



Ben Goldacre

Selected Writing from the bestselling author  
of *Bad Science* and *Bad Pharma*

**I Think You'll Find  
It's a Bit More  
Complicated Than That**

By Ben Goldacre  
4th Estate. 2014.  
£10.49 (pb). 496 pp.  
ISBN: 9780007462483

Dr Ben Goldacre is too modest. He describes this collection of articles (previously published in the *Guardian* newspaper and elsewhere) as a kind of 'statistic toilet book', and says he is a 'student of wrongness', a self-deprecating 'nerd evangelist'. Do not be taken in. Goldacre has a beguiling facility with numbers, but he is no trainspotter. He is not interested in data for their own sake; his interest is in what that information reveals.

Insight backed by facts is a powerful position, especially when delivered in Goldacre's vividly iconoclastic prose: he writes with the fervour of a buccaneering moralist. What does it feel like to be so engaged? Goldacre writes:

'You might well view my work as pointless: like Sisyphus in an anorak, fighting my way up a greasy waterslide, defeated by the torrent of sewage, desperately trying to scratch one grumpy correction into yesterday's chip wrapper. But journalism like this is a genuine public health problem.'

If you share his outrage at the *Daily Mail's* 'ongoing project to divide all the inanimate objects in the world into the ones that either cause or prevent cancer', and are exasperated by unpersuasive efforts to make 'Ka-Boom!' science 'FUN!' then these articles will evoke a strange feeling: an excited pride at seeing statistics being deployed in anger, mixed with despair at the folly and corruption in public life that Goldacre exposes.

His targets include politicians' mendacious indifference to facts, and the irrationality of public policy. In a piece entitled 'Andrew Lansley and his Imaginary Evidence', he directs his anger at the erstwhile Secretary of State for Health in England:

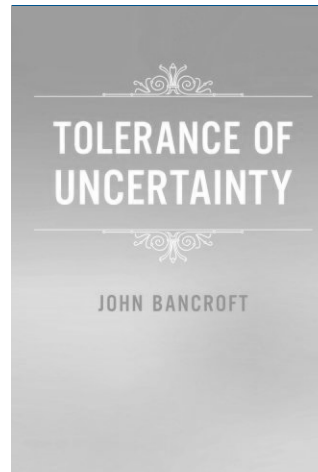
'There's no need to hide behind a cloak of scientific authority, murmuring the word "evidence" into microphones. If your reforms are a matter of ideology, legacy, whim and faith, then like many of your predecessors you could simply say so, and leave "evidence" to people who mean it.'

Goldacre exposes the venality of vested interests, especially in bad Pharma, bad journalism, and a clutch of outrageous quacks. But he also criticises the 'real scientists, who can behave as badly as anyone else'. A word to ourselves: no one is immune to complacency and bias. If we are to practise a 'good' psychiatry rather than a 'bad' one, we need to inoculate our profession with Goldacre antibodies. We might usefully share his admiration for

the motto of the Royal Society: *Nullius in verba* – 'on the word of nobody'.

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**Tolerance of Uncertainty**

By John Bancroft.  
AuthorHouse. 2014.  
£13.07 (pb). 326 pp.  
ISBN: 9781496929365

Professor John Bancroft is an internationally renowned scholar and researcher in the field of human sexuality. After a highly successful working lifetime in academic study, he has now published a book about what he makes of what he has done and learnt.

*Tolerance of Uncertainty* is a deeply personal book, and it is hard to categorise. At one level, it is a (longish) essay in self-reflection: what have I learnt about the scientific method and approach to life? In what sense am I a scientist? What does this say about the way I engage with truth and certainty? Professor Bancroft starts with Popper, moves swiftly to Plato and Socrates, and seeks to argue that you can divide thinkers and theorists into those who can tolerate uncertainty and those who cannot. He does his homework diligently to set out his understanding of how humans have approached the certainty of sex and gender. He particularly focuses on the world religious systems and their accounts of human sexuality, reasoning that their philosophy underpins their approach to science and the development of knowledge. He provides a whistle-stop tour of the tenets of the world's main religious systems with particular reference to their accounts of gender and sexuality.

He concludes that we need a 'two-team' approach to gender role and function in society, and we need to tolerate the uncertainty of the paradox of sameness and difference that makes us who we are. Our differences are significant and meaningful but they may matter less than our similarities. He also offers a very personal account of how he has understood the nature of the unknown in our human experience.

This book is an endearing mixture of expert evidence, general reviews on big topics in philosophy and personal reflections. Not all of it works; the general reviews are inevitably superficial, and I think the conclusions about gender role in the workplace will have radical feminists of both sexes wanting to have serious words with the good professor. I also noted a curious absence of discussion about faith, which to me seems to be essential for the pursuit of