



A Grain of Salt

By Daniel Romm

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Wisdom is the ability to make good decisions, and this book is about decisions

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Editorial Review

From the Author

This book is about wisdom – the ability to make good decisions. Part II is theoretical; it covers pitfalls of letting others decide for you. It challenges accepted truths such as: intelligence is an asset; Einstein's theory of relativity is universally valid; judges must follow the law; high cholesterol causes clogged arteries; God is necessary for morality; gambling is bad; and "a rose by any other name would smell as sweet". Part III is practical; it introduces a useful and straightforward 12-step process for arriving at the best decision possible in any given set of circumstances.

About the Author

Dr. Romm received his BS degree at Caltech in 1962. He went on to attain an MA degree at UCLA, where he also passed the Ph.D. qualifying exam in mathematics. He learned computer science at IBM as a systems analyst before entering a career as a manager of large computer projects at ARCO. After retiring at age 51, he received a JD degree from the University of Illinois law school. His hobbies are bridge (he has won several major championships), modern physics, philosophy, and travel (having visited over 70 countries). He is the father of two and currently resides in Seattle, WA.

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II. Why You Must Decide for Yourself

Perhaps the biggest challenge to today's society is how to separate wheat from chaff when trying to digest advice from purported experts. Academicians, professional scientists, medical researchers, business consultants, political consultants, non-fiction writers, lawyers, psychologists, economists, literary critics, theologians, media commentators and other self-proclaimed "gurus" bombard us daily with their latest arguments recommending what to believe, what to eat, how to be happy, how to succeed in anything, which medicines are good for us and which aren't, what ethics we should espouse, why we should or shouldn't believe in God, which books are worthwhile and which aren't, which products are safe, which environmental practices are essential for survival, how to get rich, which political systems are best, how to run a business, which societies are "evil" and – in a word – why we should think like they do.

Certainly we should pay attention to what the better educated among us say, but we must be particularly cautious about two pervasive influences that justify a high degree of skepticism, namely the profit motive and the human tendency toward presumptuousness. All professionals today are competing for funding, which ultimately comes from us, the non-professionals. The prototype of this syndrome is academia, where a "publish or perish" mentality reigns. Research and results are required for survival. The upshot is that bright people don't have the luxury of waiting for a good idea to occur to them. Instead, they must presumptuously force premature, often bad, ideas upon the laity. Furthermore, the ideas must be presented with the same air of certitude that a thoroughly researched, well thought out, verifiable theory would justifiably have. Economic necessity requires it.

The circumstances that forced {talented} early writers to produce large amounts of drivel in order to survive are even more prevalent today. As a result, the turnover rate of "accepted theories" has increased dramatically. These theories are merely fads, to be replaced every decade or so by the "real facts", even though they are presumed to be authentic by those promulgating them. The miracle food has switched from liver to spinach to broccoli to wine to peanuts in a few short years. The miracle drug has switched from penicillin to vitamin C to aspirin to statins. The miracle cure for heart disease has switched from surgery to

exercise to non-smoking, to low cholesterol to weight loss. The list goes on and on. So-called "proven" research gives way to more recent, "irrefutable" evidence every decade or so. The reason is evident with a little reflection; every new "proven" recommendation ushers in a public frenzy to buy new products. This, in turn, encourages those with vested interests to fund new research. Huge profits percolate down through the chain from the manufacturers to the research institutions, and, ultimately, to the individual researcher.

I will point out some ostensible examples of faulty logic, faulty research, questionable motives, and glaring omissions in various areas. The discussions are intended to be provocative, not conclusive. They focus on presenting arguments, many of them original, mostly in support of minority positions, in order to help you cultivate the practice of reserving judgment until you've studied at least one opposing point of view. Their thrust is to encourage you to think independently and be wary of accepting the statements of others at face value, no matter how authoritative they may seem. Your task is to decide which position you prefer – theirs or mine. Since my credentials justify only a modicum of authority, you can focus on the strengths and weaknesses of my arguments without unduly worrying about my motives (they are entirely altruistic).

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Crystal McMullen:

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