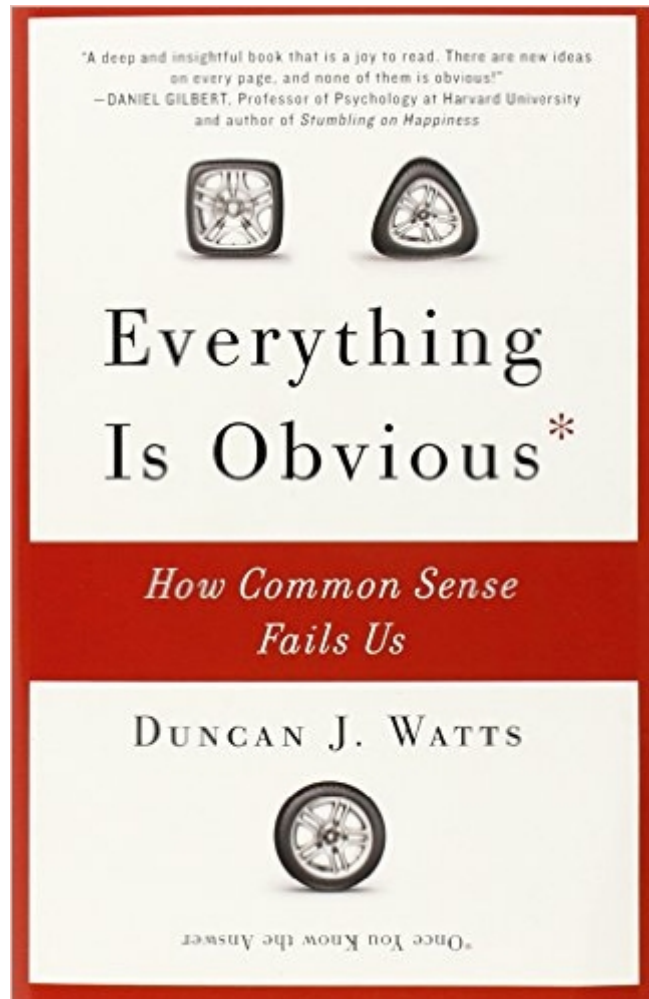


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# Everything Is Obvious: How Common Sense Fails Us



## Synopsis

Why is the Mona Lisa the most famous painting in the world? Why did Facebook succeed when other social networking sites failed? Did the surge in Iraq really lead to less violence? How much can CEOâ€™s impact the performance of their companies? And does higher pay incentivize people to work hard? If you think the answers to these questions are a matter of common sense, think again. As sociologist and network science pioneer Duncan Watts explains in this provocative book, the explanations that we give for the outcomes that we observe in lifeâ€”explanations that seem obvious once we know the answerâ€”are less useful than they seem. Drawing on the latest scientific research, along with a wealth of historical and contemporary examples, Watts shows how common sense reasoning and history conspire to mislead us into believing that we understand more about the world of human behavior than we do; and in turn, why attempts to predict, manage, or manipulate social and economic systems so often go awry. It seems obvious, for example, that people respond to incentives; yet policy makers and managers alike frequently fail to anticipate how people will respond to the incentives they create. Social trends often seem to have been driven by certain influential people; yet marketers have been unable to identify these â€œinfluencersâ€• in advance. And although successful products or companies always seem in retrospect to have succeeded because of their unique qualities, predicting the qualities of the next hit product or hot company is notoriously difficult even for experienced professionals. Only by understanding how and when common sense fails, Watts argues, can we improve how we plan for the future, as well as understand the presentâ€”an argument that has important implications in politics, business, and marketing, as well as in science and everyday life.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is a personal review - if you haven't come across similar material I think it's a very recommendable read. I'm a big fan of Duncan Watts' work on Small Worlds, but I did not get as much as I would have liked from his latest pop-sci offering. Some of the material I found new, such as Grannovetter's intriguing threshold hypothesis as to why some mobs gel into mass action and others do not, and he had a very good discussion on the use of online networked communities as social science laboratories, with some interesting results generated from twitter, Facebook and email. And, as is necessary for this kind of a book, there are a number of illustrative anecdotes, such as why BetaMax and Discman failed in the market, but iPod succeeded or 's "Mechanical Turk" - which I just tried out after reading the book, or Zara's approach to marketing. If nothing else it makes for good entertainment and fodder for conversation. However much of the book hinges around the nature of workable explanations, and I'm surprised that in his wanderings Watts did not come across Herbert Simon's well known

"Everything is Obvious" by Dr. Duncan J. Watts suggests that we are on the brink of a new age of social scientific discovery with profound implications for business, politics and culture. Dr. Watts brings an interesting and rare critical discipline to the soft science of sociology due to his PhD's in the hard sciences of theoretical and applied mechanics. Dr. Watts shares insights gained from his academic and professional experiences including his role as a principal research scientist at Yahoo! Research. Accessibly written for general interest readers, Dr. Watts' enlightening book gives us many good reasons to get excited about sociology. Although Dr. Watts rarely acknowledges it, his book represents an implicit refutation of Malcolm Gladwell's pseudo-scientific *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. Dr. Watts charges Mr. Gladwell with employing an obvious kind of circular logic where a particular social, cultural or artistic phenomenon is heralded simply due to the fact of its success (while ignoring how dozens of others that possessed the same attributes failed). In fact, Dr. Watts argues that answers to the riddles of history are usually not well understood in the moment; it is only with the benefit of hindsight that historians can piece together the relevant factors that might have produced noteworthy events. For example, Dr.

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