



Medicine, Science and Merck

By P. Roy Vagelos, Louis Galambos

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P. Roy Vagelos grew up during the Depression as a wise-cracking son of Greek immigrants. He left his family's small restaurant to become a doctor and went on to master three professions and become the Chief Executive Officer of the multinational pharmaceutical giant, Merck & Co. *Medicine, Science, and Merck* follows Vagelos' life from childhood to retirement, from his academic years at the University of Pennsylvania, Columbia University's Medical School, and Massachusetts General Hospital through his professional career at the National Institute of Health, Washington University, and Merck. Throughout, Vagelos never lost touch with his family values, his intense desire to help others, and his faith in the partnership principle and the competition that makes it work. P. Roy Vagelos and Louis Galambos offer an unusual perspective on working in three leading professions: medicine, science, and business. They take readers inside the laboratory and boardroom of one of America's large corporations, analyzing the mistakes and the innovations of Merck. P. Roy Vagelos, M.D. served as CEO of Merck & Co., Inc. from 1985 to 1994. Before assuming responsibilities in business leadership, he had won scientific recognition as an authority on lipids and enzymes and as a research manager. The author of more than 100 scientific papers, Vagelos has been elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the National Academy of Sciences and the American Philosophical Society. Louis Galambos has written extensively on U.S. business-government relations, on economic aspects of modern institutional developments and on the rise of the bureaucratic state. A professor at Johns Hopkins University, Professor Galambos is the author of several books, including *Anytime, Anywhere* (Cambridge, 2002).

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Editorial Review

From The New England Journal of Medicine

Writing one's life is a risky venture of memory, invention, and desire. With intellectual depth and formal rigor, Roy Vagelos and the historian Louis Galambos have written a serious and nourishing report of Vagelos's life in medicine, science, and the corporate world. Vagelos became chief executive officer of Merck by way of an authoritative career as a cardiologist and biochemist, as a National Institutes of Health scientist at the forward edge of research on the biosynthesis and control of cholesterol, as chair of the Department of Biological Chemistry at Washington University, and as a research scientist at Merck. His scientific life is animated by a set of enduring questions about lipids and heart disease. Spanning enzyme research, molecular genetics, human trials, and the marketing of statins, his career helped to usher in our current powers in preventive cardiology. His interior life has been informed by a set of enduring values, which were derived from the Greek immigrant experience of the Great Depression. By making ice cream and working the sandwich counter in his father's delicatessen in Westfield, New Jersey, Vagelos infused duty and familial loyalty into his bones. *Medicine, Science, and Merck* achieves the goals of autobiography by making the present transparent with the past, showing the subject -- as both narrator and protagonist -- reflecting on his past actions and making sense of them in the light of present knowledge. The book is a seamless weave of many stories -- of the familial and cultural, of the complex fellowship among colleagues, and of the science itself, all the way down to the tales of molecules. The reader not only absorbs each strand of the narrative but also recognizes that these strands are irrevocably linked, that there is no science without them. There is no need to "humanize" science or medicine; it comes to the reader, because the science or medicine itself is humanizing as long as one is equipped with the imagination to heed its generative purpose. (Vagelos's full given name is Pindaros Roy; he lives up to his namesake, the classical Greek poet Pindar.) This is also a moral book. Like an active pump on a membrane, Vagelos injects his idealism into Merck's corporate setting, enacting values of accountability, altruism, and devotion even while toeing the bottom line. Merck's decision to make ivermectin available free to cure river blindness in sub-Saharan Africa presages efforts of the industry, one hopes, to make other pharmaceutical agents affordable. This journey shines with optimism for all of us who have become demoralized by the failure of the ideals of science, medicine, and the corporate world and by the threat of defeat of our shared ethical vision. The book also gives heart to the reader to take a similar look at his or her journey, assessing its enduring values, measuring its missed opportunities, admiring its texture. *Medicine, Science, and Merck* brings into focus hard questions about the social costs of corporate profit structures, scientific pride, and the hunger for political power. No doubt this is but a partial report; no doubt others can tell competing versions of these events. Nonetheless, the moral freshness of the effort poses a challenge to us all to live within our cosmos as searchers, risk takers, beholders of the complexity of our world, and servants to its needs. *Rita Charon, M.D., Ph.D.*

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Review

"...this book is good business history...makes a strong case for institutional autonomy of the pharmaceutical industry against government price controls of drugs." J.P. Brickman, United States Merchant Marine Academy, Choice

"...a very important book...a seamless weave of many stories...tremendous nourishment." Rita Charon, Professor of Clinical Medicine, Columbia University

"A wonderful book about how one individual's values and vision have shaped one of America's most

innovative companies. It is a tale that ranges from the fight against AIDS to the discovery of lifesaving heart medicines. Read this book, and you'll understand more about modern medicine, public health and how private sector science benefits mankind everyday." Former Senator Bill Bradley

"Roy Vagelos is a universally admired leader, and he has used his rare gifts of energy, creativity and idealism to profoundly affect our world. I encourage everyone to read the inside story of his central role in developing some of the most exciting, lifesaving innovations in modern medicine where he functioned in the combined role of scientist and model CEO." Bruce Alberts, President, National Academy of Sciences

"If you want the real story on the pharmaceutical industry, Medicine, Science and Merck is the best place to start. Vagelos and Galambos tell us what it takes to be an innovator in an American industry that has long been the world's leading source of new drugs and vaccines." William C. Steere, Chairman of the Board Emeritus, Pfizer Inc.

"Like so much of America, Medicine, Science, and Merck is, on the one hand, an intriguing story about an extraordinary American and a great American company. On the other and more importantly, it is also an intersecting and overlapping set of narratives about immigrants in America, medicine as a profession and an industry, and public policy that somehow transcends the fascinating story of an extraordinary American. Indeed this book succeeds in telling us a good deal about both ourselves and the nature of an important set of public policy issues that continue to grasp the public imagination and remain unresolved." Harold T. Shapiro, President Emeritus and Professor of Economics and Public Affairs, Princeton University

"This journey shines with optimism for all of us who have become demoralized by the failure of the ideals of science, medicine, and the corporate world and by the threat of defeat of our shared ethical vision. The book also gives heart to the reader to take a similar journey, assessing its enduring values, measuring its missed opportunities, admiring its texture." New England Journal

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Heidi Fritz:

In this 21st century, people become competitive in every way. By being competitive currently, people have to do something to make these individuals survive, being in the middle of the crowded place and notice by means of surrounding. One thing that at times many people have underestimated the item for a while is reading. Sure, by reading a book your ability to survive improves then having a chance to stand out is high. For yourself who want to start reading a new book, we give you this specific Medicine, Science and Merck book as beginning and daily reading guide. Why, because this book is greater than just a book.

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