

NOTES FROM: *Factfulness*, by Hans Rosling

SUMMARY: This is one of the most hopeful, positive, optimistic - and yet *realistic* - books that I've ever read, and its whole purpose is to convince you (with incontrovertible facts, numbers, and data) that the world is not only getting better and better all the time, but that life on earth is the best it's *ever been*.

That may not *seem* like it's true if you watch the news (which I try not to), but you have to remember that the news media is in the business of *monetizing attention*, and nothing captures attention like a blazing train wreck.

News stations could fill their *entire broadcast* with all the spectacular advances and amazing progress being made every single day, all over the world, but they never will, because then people wouldn't watch. And if people didn't watch, their advertisers would reduce their budgets, and they wouldn't make as much money.

You can probably tell that I do *NOT* have a very high opinion of (most) journalists.

Even when they're not blatantly lying to you, they're lying *by omission*, because the planet isn't doing *nearly* as bad as they make it seem.

Again, it's just incentives. But this book comes armed with charts and graphs (and more) that will show you - *beyond a doubt* - that humanity is on an upward trajectory, and if we can survive this (admittedly) precarious moment in history, the *stars* aren't even the limit.

Factfulness Definition: "The stress-reducing habit of carrying only the opinions for which you have strong supporting facts."

"When we worry about everything all the time instead of embracing a worldview based on facts, we can lose our ability to focus on the things that threaten us most."

"If we measured our own knowledge instead of pointing fingers at everyone else, we could all become more knowledgeable."

"People constantly and intuitively refer to their worldview when thinking, guessing, or learning about the world. So if your worldview is wrong, then you will systematically make wrong guesses."

"The world is not as dramatic as it seems."

"'Poor developing countries' no longer exists as a distinct group."

"Low-income countries are much more developed than most people think. And vastly fewer people live in them. The idea of a divided world with a majority stuck in misery and deprivation is an illusion. A complete misconception. Simply wrong."

“Dividing countries into two groups just doesn’t make sense any more.”

“Just 200 years ago, 85% of the world’s population lived in extreme poverty.”

“When you are looking down from the top of a tall building, everything below you looks small.”

“Your firsthand experience is most likely from Level 4, and your secondhand experience often comes from sources which distort reality.”

“Misconceptions disappear only if there is some equally simple but more *relevant* way of thinking to replace them.”

“To control the gap instinct, look for the majority.”

“In the last 200 years, the percentage of people living in extreme poverty has fallen from 85% to 9%, and average life expectancy has more than doubled.”

“Three key things about the negativity instinct: misremembering of the past; selective reporting by journalists and activists; and the feeling that as long as things are bad, it’s heartless to say that they are getting better.”

“Stories about gradual improvements rarely make the front page, even when they occur on a dramatic scale and impact millions of people.”

“I agree. Everything is *not* fine. We should still be very concerned. As long as there are plane crashes, preventable child deaths, endangered species, climate change deniers, male chauvinists, crazy dictators, toxic waste, journalists in prison, and girls not getting an education because of their gender - as long as *any* such terrible things exist, we cannot relax. But it is just as ridiculous, and just as stressful, to look away from all the *progress* that has been made.”

“I’m a very serious ‘possibilist.’ That’s something I made up. It means someone who neither hopes without reason, nor fears without reason; someone who constantly resists the overdramatic worldview. As a possibilist, I see all this progress, and it fills me with conviction and hope that *further progress* is possible. This is not optimistic. It is having a clear and reasonable idea about how things are. It is having a worldview that is constructive and useful.”

“Positive statistics don’t often find you; you have to find them.”

“Would equally positive news have reached you?”

“It’s amazing how well people can work together when they each share the same fears.”

“Without world peace, you can forget about all other global progress.”

“‘Frightening’ and ‘dangerous’ are two different things.”

“The risk that something poses to you depends on how dangerous it is, and how much you are exposed to it.”

“Just as I have urged you to look behind the statistics at the individual stories, I also urge you to look behind the individual stories at the statistics. The world cannot be understood without numbers. And it cannot be understood with numbers alone.”

“Country stereotypes simply fall apart when you look at the huge differences *within* countries and the equally huge similarities *between* countries on the same income level, independent of culture or religion.”

“It makes no sense to talk about ‘African countries’ and ‘Africa’s problems,’ and yet people do, all the time. It leads to ridiculous outcomes like Ebola in Liberia and Sierra Leone affecting tourism in Kenya, a 100-hour drive across the continent. That is farther than London to Tehran.”

“Africans will eventually be welcome tourists in Europe and not unwanted refugees.”

“Slow change is still change.”

“It can be energizing to hear evidence of progress, rather than a constant restatement of the problems.”

“The numbers will never tell the full story of what life on earth is all about.”

“Most of the time, it’s about providing access to things we already have, like hospitals and electricity, instead of inventing some magical new solution.”

“There is no single measure - not GDP per capita, not child mortality, not individual freedom, not even democracy - whose improvement will guarantee improvements in all the others. There is no single indicator through which we can measure the progress of a nation. Reality is just more complicated than that.”

“If you really want to change the world, you have to understand it.”

“Most of the journalists and filmmakers who inform us about the world are *themselves* misled.”

“Without trust, we are lost.”

“Apart from global pandemic, financial collapse, world war, climate change, and extreme poverty, we must also be alert to some sixth, unknown danger that we haven’t even thought of before.”

“If something is urgent and important, it should be measured. Beware of data that is relevant but inaccurate, or accurate but irrelevant. Only relevant and accurate data is useful.”

“Still, I'm possibilistic. The next generation is like the last runner in a very long relay race. The race to end extreme poverty has been a marathon, with the starter gun fired in 1800. This next generation has the unique opportunity to complete the job: to pick up the baton, cross the line, and raise its hands in triumph. The project must be completed. And we should have a big party when we are done.”

“Be wary of drastic action. Ask what the side effects will be. Ask how the idea has been tested. Step-by-step practical improvements, and evaluation of their impact, are less dramatic but usually more effective.”

“When we have a fact-based worldview, we can see that the world is not as bad as it seems - and we can see what we have to do to keep making it better.”

“You have seen his list of global risks, but it couldn't stop him from singing on his way to work. Two thoughts at the same time: concerned and full of joy.”

“I want to thank all of you for sharing your knowledge with me, for making my life so rich and wonderful, and for showing me a world completely different from the one I learned about in school.”