

Factfulness Summary

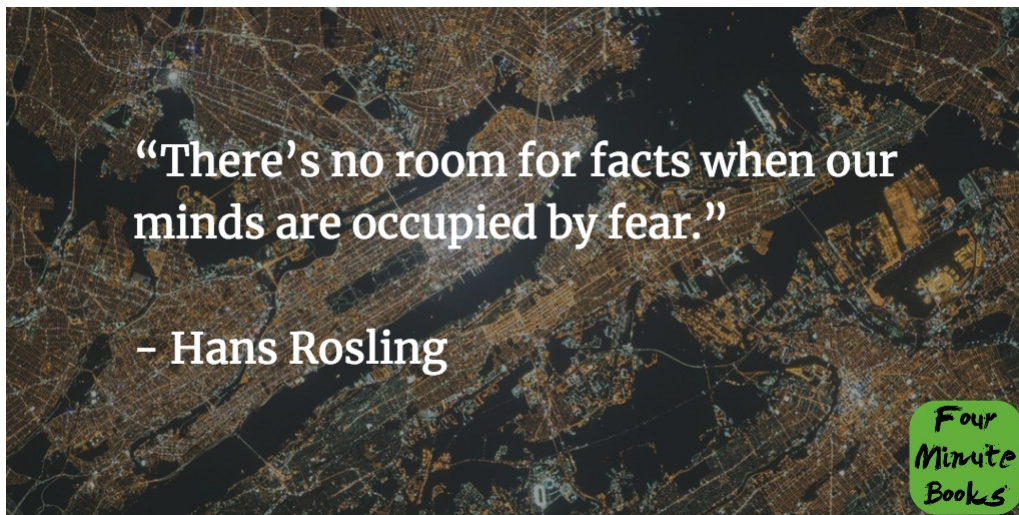


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1-Sentence-Summary: *Factfulness explains how our worldview has been distorted with the rise of new media, which ten human instincts cause erroneous thinking, and how we can learn to separate fact from fiction when forming our opinions.*

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



When I first got into reading blogs, learning about self-improvement, and exploring the startup scene, I was a delusional optimist. I read and read, thinking I would somehow make it as an entrepreneur. But that was just blind faith. I never actually did anything. Over the years, I've learned to become more of a realist-optimist. I still focus on the positive, but I try not to sugarcoat things.

As it turns out, with fake news and advertising-driven media becoming more and more extreme, this was a good move. Usually, life is better than news outlets make us believe, so focusing on the facts, but staying positive, will help you form clearer opinions. That's why Bill Gates is such a big fan of books like Enlightenment Now, which bring us up to speed with data about the world.

It's no wonder, then, that Factfulness is another one of his 2018 favorites. Written by the Swedish, late professor, sword swallower, and public speaker Hans Rosling, it's a book about the current state of the world. But beyond giving us the facts, it helps us see them for ourselves by diving into ten mental biases that obstruct our thinking.

Here are my favorite 3 and the lessons I learned from debunking them:

1. There is no such thing as "the East and the West." We only have one world.
2. Population growth will eventually level off, despite our perception of increasing numbers.
3. To see the world accurately, you always need multiple perspectives.

The world is trying hard to hide the facts from you on a day-to-day basis. Let's learn how to find them anyway!

Lesson 1: The East vs. West mentality is outdated. We all share this planet.

There are two kinds of people in the world: those who divide the world into two kinds of people, and those who don't. What I hope to be a clever Quora answer of mine is also one of the first points Rosling makes. He calls it 'the gap instinct.' It's our tendency to want to see things as black and white. The example he uses to illustrate it is the classic division of the world into East and West.

I, too, have grown up in a time where schools would teach Westerners that their countries are developed, while Asian ones are currently developing, trying to catch up. This instilled an us-vs-them mentality early on. But the truth is, **whatever gap there was has almost completely disappeared over the past 20 years**. How do we even define 'developing' and 'developed?'

If we use child mortality, for example, only 13 countries could be considered 'developing' today. One thing's for sure: dividing the world geographically to determine its economic, demographic, or psychological state is useless.

Lesson 2: Increasing population growth is blown out of proportion, because it's likely to level off rather soon.

A second megamisperception, as Rosling calls these ideas that are rooted deeply, but incredibly wrong, is that of our impending doom due to exponential population growth. Books like *The World Without Us* elaborate on the idea that one day, nature will conceive devastating diseases and catastrophes to rid itself of the growing damage from humans. But while our growing numbers are sure a cause for concern, they might never hit apocalypse-worthy levels.

The UN's projections for population growth see us hit 9.8 billion in 2050, and 11.2 billion in 2100. That'd be a double-up from 6.1 billion in 2000. But in 1900, there were only 1.6 billion humans, which means that in the last century, we grew fourfold, showing **the growth rate is already declining**. That's because as countries get out of poverty, people tend to have fewer children. In countries like Germany, populations are even declining!

There are three biases that prevent our feelings from matching the numbers: the straight-line instinct, the fear instinct, and the size instinct. We misplace our primal fears, think trends continue in a straight line, and overestimate their size. That's why population growth might feel like a huge threat, when actually, it'll likely not be a big deal.

Lesson 3: The only thing that allows you to see the world as it really is is to look at everything from multiple angles.

Democracy is one of the 21st century's most popular ideas, because in it, Western countries have thrived. But right now, most of the fastest-growing countries aren't democratic, indicating it's not the only political system that works. And yet, we tend to see it as the ultimate end goal for any 'developing' nation.

Using only a single perspective to shape our opinions might be our biggest flaw

Sometimes, you come across other viewpoints by accident, but mostly, it's a matter of actively seeking them out. If you don't do it, you're once again stuck in black-and-white land. One of the best remedies, Rosling says, is travel. By exposing yourself to other cultures, you'll naturally get access to many different points of view.

Also, when getting your information online, it's always best to read multiple sources, not just one. It's the equivalent of traveling around the world. Only when we surf the globe can we learn to see it as it really is, so that we may form our opinions based on facts, not feelings.

And that's what factfulness is all about.

My personal take-aways

Factfulness is only one of many books in a long, recent line of works that help us fight our biases. It delivers its research in a way that's easy to understand and uses great examples to help us see clearly. If Bill Gates can learn something from it, I'm sure we can too.

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What else can you learn from the blinks?

- How many people in the world are actually rich
- Why experts are sometimes terribly wrong
- What makes us think the world is getting worse
- How you can avoid over-generalizing
- Why too much activism costs you credibility

Who would I recommend the Factfulness summary to?

The 18 year old graduate, who's just starting to regularly read the news, the 45 year old developer, who never left his town, and anyone who's really worried about population growth.