Sherise Immanuela

DATA303 Written Book Report

April 24, 2023

Introduction

  Factfulness: Ten Reasons We're Wrong About the World - and Why Things Are Better Than You Think is a highly-praised book written by the late Hans Rosling, along with his son, Ola Rosling, and daughter-in-law, Anna Rosling Rönnlund. Hans Rosling was a well-known TED speaker and global health expert. He was a professor of International Health at Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, and co-founder of the Gapminder Foundation, a non-profit organization that promotes a fact-based world view through the use of data visualization tools. Ola and Anna are statisticians and entrepreneurs who co-founded the Gapminder Foundation with Hans. They both led the development of Gapminder's data visualization software.

  Together, the authors of "Factfulness" have created a convincing argument for why the world is not as bad as we might think, and why a fact-based world view is necessary for addressing global challenges. According to them, the book is "data as you have never known it: it is data as therapy. It is understanding as a source of mental peace. Because the world is not as dramatic as it seems" (p.20). They want to emphasize the importance of understanding data and using it to gain mental peace–something we rarely see with how data is being used nowadays.

Summary

Starting off with a quiz about global knowledge, the authors immediately show us that we actually have a skewed, negative outlook of the world. For instance, one of the questions in the quiz is "In the last 20 years, the proportion of the world population living in extreme poverty has…" While the correct answer is "almost halved," on average only 7% of people in the most educated countries get it right. This means that people guess worse than a random choice (1 out of 3) (p.13). The book then continues to challenge us to reevaluate our perceptions of the world. In each of the ten chapters, Factfulness discusses reasons why we're more pessimistic about the world than we should be. The main goal of the book is to make readers aware of certain "instincts" that cause us to exaggerate situations and distort our perception of reality. To further convince us that ur perception of the world is quite inaccurate, the authors use an abundance of data and statistics to demonstrate that the globe is actually *progressing.* This progress can be seen in areas like health, education, and eradicating poverty.

Throughout the book, the authors emphasize the importance of using fact-based reasoning to understand the world. They also provide suggestions for how we can avoid common cognitive biases and misconceptions. They present ten "instincts" that cause people to perceive the world inaccurately. By being aware of these instincts, we may gain a more accurate perception of the world. Some examples of these instincts are:

1. The Gap Instinct: The instinct to divide things into two distinct and often opposing groups, such as rich vs. poor, or developed vs. developing. Rosling emphasized that "the majority is right in the middle, where the gap is supposed to be" (p.45).

2. The Negativity Instinct: The instinct that causes us to focus on news or events that are negative, while overlooking positive ones. (p.69)

3. The Straight Line Instinct: The tendency to assume that trends will continue in a straight line, without considering the possibility of fluctuations or reversals. Rosling used an analogy of how none expects a baby's growth rate to continue for the rest of their lives (p.93).

4. The Fear Instinct: The instinct to respond strongly to threats, which can cause people to make poor decisions based on fear rather than reason (p.111).

5. The Blame Instinct: The tendency of individuals to blame someone when something bad happens. The authors suggest we use our time to find *causes* instead of *villains.* We need to dig deep to find underlying causes of problems instead of trying to blame someone for it (p.190).

Personal Response

From the very beginning of the book, Factfulness challenged many of my assumptions about the world. Coming from a lower-middle-income country, I thought I would know a bit more about what the reality is, but I still scored badly in the quiz. Factfulness was a really eye-opening read, to say the least. I appreciated the authors' emphasis on the importance of data in understanding the world and their practical tips for developing a fact-based worldview.

Additionally, I found the book's discussion of the media's influence on our perceptions of the world to be really interesting. As a Data Science student, I hope to somehow make a little dent of a difference in the world, but this book made it clear to me that I must first have an

accurate understanding of the world. And this requires me to evaluate how much I rely on facts versus my gut instincts. Because of the large amounts of media that we consume, we are also more inclined to have an overly pessimistic view of the world. The media we see everyday unfortunately emphasizes negative news and overlooks positive developments. The book encourages us to find different perspectives and sources of information when looking at a particular issue. Overall, I would recommend this book to anyone interested in developing a more accurate and "hopeful" view of the world.

Works Cited

Rosling, Hans, et al. *Factfulness: Ten Reasons We're Wrong About the World–and Why Things Are Better Than You Think.* Flatiron Books, 2018.