

Introduction

OPTIMISM, LIKE PESSIMISM, feeds on itself. In my earlier years I spent a decade or more deeply pessimistic and depressed. Even though it was a reasonable reaction to the way the human world malfunctions, it wasn't an enjoyable way to live.

These days I am an optimist and I like it. It is also a reasonable option because optimism is a key ingredient for any successful human endeavour – and isn't keeping Earth viable the greatest endeavour we can ever undertake?

There's a hitch, though. The twentieth-century philosopher Bertrand Russell, much reviled by the British establishment, put it in a nutshell: 'The trouble with the world is that the stupid are cocksure and the intelligent are full of doubt'!

We don't know what the future holds but we can be sure that leaving it to stupidity – which is almost always manifested in the inability to see beyond one's self and one's own times – is a recipe for disaster.

Yet the intelligent are unsure. They weigh things up. They look beyond the here and now. They worry about legacy and about grandchildren and using finite resources wisely. They even consider themselves no more valuable than anyone else.

I have some simple advice for heavy thinkers: get over it. Mulling things over while the stupid and greedy ravage the planet is, after all, not very intelligent. Worse, it is a certain road to depression.

Get active rather than depressed. It worked for me.

In this book are some anecdotes from a life set for downfall that found its salvation in action. We have a choice and it is empirical: pessimism or optimism, stupor or action. Suit yourself.

I've been lucky enough to meet remarkable people who are challenging the greed and small-mindedness of our age at risk to themselves, but with an unswerving and intelligent mission: that our global society should not be left to fail under this rampaging age of Materialism.

The contradictions of human society must be challenged: not least the fact that climbing the ladder of political power is easiest for those who care least about treading on other people's fingers and faces. To put Russell's dictum another way: the trouble with the global political arrangement is that the power falls most readily into the hands of the selfish, cruel and cocksure.

But it is no good feeling hopeless.

The challenge to intelligent, sensitive folk is to take over. To do that, the people must be won over. For that to happen, the megaphone message delivered by the captains of Materialism has to be contested and outdone.

Who knows the future of the biosphere? None of us.

But everywhere I go I run into people with the ambition and nous to create a future when the current pillaging of Earth's living resources will be ancient history.

It is exciting to be with them taking up the challenge to bring on an era of a truly sustaining relationship with the one planet that hosted us into life and that, if we get it right, will host our kind into a magnificent future.

I am writing this at Boolcoommatta, in the arid lands of South Australia, west of Broken Hill. Here are 65,000 hectares of Earth in recovery. The sheep (up to 85,000 were shorn each year in the woolshed a stone's throw from my desk) have gone, the saltbush and mulga are returning, and kangaroos and emus once again dominate the plains.

Yesterday Paul and I watched eagles taking off from and soaring above the rocky pinnacles to the west of this homestead: safe, sure and forevermore out of danger from the guns and traps of the last century.

This is Bush Heritage Australia country dedicated to its own ancient natural ecosystem, funded by intelligent, caring people and corporations who find uplift in the idea of restorative ecology, and a new action-oriented reverence for the living planet.

Two nights back we sat on a hilltop far from here, awaiting the end of a total eclipse of the Moon by Earth. We watched Earth's shadow move very slowly off the Moon, from right to left, in a place where Aboriginal Australians have celebrated this interconnectedness between the Sun, Earth and Moon for thousands of years. Below us was a large round boulder: the Moon on the hillside. Near the boulder, on creekbed red rock, were multiple circular etchings of the Moon.

We will not, short of the complete destruction of society as we know it, return to such reverent depictions of the solar system. But we cannot go forward without appreciating Earth's unique place in that system that affords us all we are and have. That appreciation, asserted and enacted, despite the sneering and perhaps violent opposition of the current moguls, will be the world's salvation.

In the Senate I had the following words printed on the back of my business card:

Caring	<i>We champion</i>
Optimistic	<i>future generations</i>
Defiant	<i>and life on Earth</i>
<i>We strive for peace democracy</i>	<i>in all its brilliance.</i>
<i>and a fair go for everyone.</i>	<i>The future is Green.</i>

Here are some stories from my journey to this simple philosophy for happiness.

BOB BROWN

BOOLCOOMATTA, 19 APRIL 2014