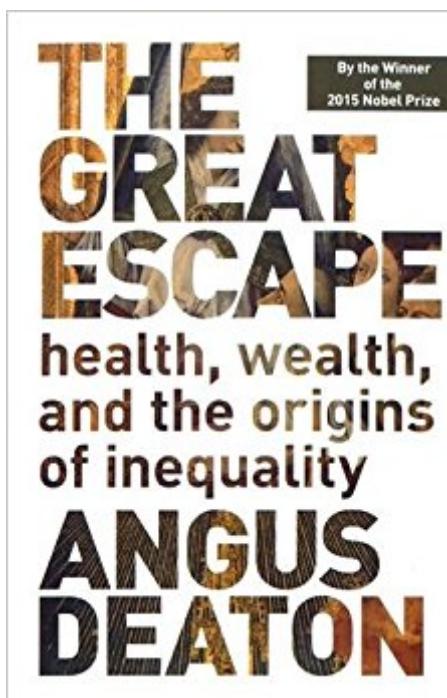


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The Great Escape: Health, Wealth, And The Origins Of Inequality



Synopsis

The world is a better place than it used to be. People are healthier, wealthier, and live longer. Yet the escapes from destitution by so many has left gaping inequalities between people and nations. In *The Great Escape*, Angus Deaton--one of the foremost experts on economic development and on poverty--tells the remarkable story of how, beginning 250 years ago, some parts of the world experienced sustained progress, opening up gaps and setting the stage for today's disproportionately unequal world. Deaton takes an in-depth look at the historical and ongoing patterns behind the health and wealth of nations, and addresses what needs to be done to help those left behind. Deaton describes vast innovations and wrenching setbacks: the successes of antibiotics, pest control, vaccinations, and clean water on the one hand, and disastrous famines and the HIV/AIDS epidemic on the other. He examines the United States, a nation that has prospered but is today experiencing slower growth and increasing inequality. He also considers how economic growth in India and China has improved the lives of more than a billion people. Deaton argues that international aid has been ineffective and even harmful. He suggests alternative efforts--including reforming incentives to drug companies and lifting trade restrictions--that will allow the developing world to bring about its own Great Escape. Demonstrating how changes in health and living standards have transformed our lives, *The Great Escape* is a powerful guide to addressing the well-being of all nations.

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Customer Reviews

Angus Deaton, Winner of the 2015 Nobel Prize in Economics Winner of the 2013 William G. Bowen

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style. It will deepen both your appreciation of the miracle of modern economic growth and your conviction that the benefits can and should be much more widely enjoyed."--Clive Crook, Bloomberg News"This is a book that deserves to be read by as many people as possible, so that the poverty debates we have in India go beyond ideological grandstanding and the usual television dramatics. . . . The recent years have seen several leading economic thinkers write excellent books for the ordinary reader, and the new Deaton book is firmly in that category."--Niranjan Rajadhyaksha, Mint"Deaton's lucid book celebrates the riches brought by growth while judiciously explaining why some people are always 'left behind'. He draws a distinction between the inequalities that are opened up by advances in knowledge and those caused by flawed political systems. . . . The book's rich historical and geographical context adds to the power of this message."--John McDermott, Financial Times"In The Great Escape, he dons the hat of an economic historian to provide a fresh perspective on the march of human progress (and its pitfalls) that should inform our current debate about income inequality."--Konrad Yakabuski, Globe & Mail"It's a privilege to know the author of one of the most important books I've read, not least because it acts as entry point into other significant related books, research and debates. . . . Deaton's work reflects this combined pursuit of economics and ethics, manifested through research in to the wealth and health of nations."--John Atherton, Crucible"It would make for delightful reading for economists, donors and policy makers."--Charan Singh, Business Standard"[A] fantastic book about the origins of global poverty. Deaton's humanitarian credentials are unimpeachable, yet he thinks almost all non-health related foreign aid is making global poverty worse. He proposes a variety of alternatives, like massive investments in medical research and cracking down on the small arms trade, that might actually help."--Zack Beauchamp, Think Progress"[T]hese are wonderful essays, each combining the essential Deaton ingredients of theoretical insight, careful analysis of evidence and graceful writing. There are thought-provoking chapters on the history of health improvements and what has driven them; on material well-being in the US; and on the damage caused by aid to developing countries. Deaton has dedicated many years to thinking about each of these issues, with a long list of academic papers to show for it. Here, he seems to step back and reflect on what he has learned, offering us a sage's wisdom."--Kitty Stewart, Times Higher Education"The Great Escape is a thoughtful work, extensively illustrated with data, from a distinguished economist who tackles a central controversy of our time in a style refreshingly free of ideological baggage."--John Kay, Prospect"Angus Deaton has written a wonderful book, *The Great Escape: Health, Wealth, and the Origins of Inequality*. . . . Deaton's book is a magisterial overview of health, income, and wealth from the industrial revolution to the present, taking in countries poor and rich. Not just jargon-free but equation-free, the book is

written with a beautifully lucid style. . . . [P]owerfully argued and convincing."--Michael Marmot, *Lancet*"Splendid."--Judith Sloan, Australian"In his new book, *The Great Escape: Health, Wealth, and the Origins of Inequality*, economist Angus Deaton questions the usefulness of all aid, and describes how the greater proportion of the world's poor are found not in Africa but in the booming, yet radically unequal, economies of China and India."--Paul Theroux, *Barron's*"The Princeton economist makes a compelling case against the naysayers of economic growth, marshalling a wealth of data and clear- eyed observations to explain how growth allows people to live more freely. . . . Mr. Deaton's seemingly inexhaustible knowledge of all things historical is bound to edify even the most erudite of readers."--Andrew Lewis, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*"[C]areful and magisterial."--Pooja Bhatia, *Ozy Media*"[A] genuine contribution to the emerging literature on rethinking development."--Andrew Hilton, *Financial World*"Deaton . . . is perhaps the single most level-headed student of economic development in the world today. . . . The Great Escape is an extended meditation on the sources and consequences of inequality."--David Warsh, *EconomicPrincipals.com*"Tops my list of must-read books for 2013. Deaton tackles big topics--global improvements to health and well-being, worrisome levels of inequality within nations and between them, and the challenges to curing poverty through foreign aid. His powerful, provocative argument combines careful analysis, humane insight, lucid prose, and a fearless willingness to challenge conventional wisdom. Whether you agree or disagree with its conclusions, this book will force you to rethink your positions about some of the world's most urgent problems."--Christopher L. Eisgruber, president of Princeton University, *Bloomberg Businessweek*"The book deserves to be read by all, especially by the students of economic development."--Tirthankar Roy, *Economic & Political Weekly*"Professor Deaton hits the psychological nail on the head when he suggests that aid is 'more about satisfying our own need to help.' He identifies the related issue of 'aid illusion'--the belief that poverty in poor countries can be solved by rich people transferring money."--Peter Foster, *Financial Post*"This is a fascinating book on health, wealth and inequality."--Bibek Debroy, *Businessworld*"Development economist Deaton draws on his lifelong interest in and considerable knowledge of economic development to tell the story of modernization and the rise from worldwide poverty. Chapters illustrating demographic and economic trends utilize well-crafted charts and graphs to depict the rising paths that countries, first the US and western Europe and more recently China and India, have taken as their populations improve their health, education, and income-making abilities."--Choice"The Great Escape is an eloquent and passionate description of what sickness and health look like for the world's populations and economies. Deaton's history of health and wealth offers a compelling narrative for

both the general reader and academics alike. It raises a range of questions of why some countries falter, why others succeed and what can be done to close gaps between them."--John Parman, EH.Net"The Great Escape is a good place to start if you are looking to increase your own understanding of inequality as you attempt to add more light than heat to the debates. . . . I found the book humbling, disquieting, and lacking in easy answers to complex questions--precisely why I also found it thoughtful and useful."--W. Steven Barnett, Business Economics"Deaton's book ends up making a powerful contribution to economists' evolving understanding of the importance of institutions."--David N. Weil, Journal of Economic Literature"In The Great Escape Angus Deaton has provided an insightful, thought-provoking and highly readable overview of the progress of human wellbeing. There is much that both general and specialist audiences will learn from it--I recommend it highly."--Jeff Borland, Economic Record"[A] wonderful book."--Martin Wolf, Financial Times"This book is a timely reminder that the conditions that facilitated this progress were created not only through the progress of health science, but through a political effort to ensure that science benefited all."--Sara Davies, International Affairs"Deaton takes the reader on a richly detailed tour through a landscape of historical narrative, science, data from across the world, and scholarly debate. And he is a superb guide: erudite, lucid, humane, and witty."--David Weil, Journal of Economic Literature"In The Great Escape Angus Deaton has provided an insightful, thought-provoking and highly readable overview of the progress of human well being. There is much that both general and specialist audiences will learn from it - I recommend it highly."--Jeff B. Orland, Economic Record"Deaton takes the reader on a richly detailed tour through a landscape of historical narrative, science, data from across the world, and scholarly debate. And he is a superb guide: erudite, lucid, humane, and witty. . . . Deaton's book ends up making a powerful contribution to economists' evolving understanding of the importance of institutions."--David N. Weil, Journal of Economic Literature"Deaton's The Great Escape is an uplifting and refreshing read for all who are tired of the many books on economic gloom and environmental doom."--Rolf A.E. Mueller, Quarterly Journal of International Agriculture"Highly accessible."--Jeremy Warner, Daily Telegraph"The Great Escape by Angus Deaton, the Scotsman who got this year's Nobel Prize in economics, is an extremely thoughtful overview of economic development and what goes into it. In ways the book is a stirring tale of the long march since the Industrial Revolution out of generalized poverty to the much more prosperous world we know today, with close attention to the relationship between rising prosperity and generally improved health conditions. Well-written by a superb economist with great command of analysis and data. I recommend it highly."--John Snow, former Treasury Secretary, one of Bloomberg's Best Books of 2015"The Great Escape . . . is a thoughtful and optimistic consideration on why some

nations are wealthy, and thus healthy, and why others are not."--Trey Carson, Review of Austrian Economics

"There is nobody better than Angus Deaton to explain why our lives are longer, healthier, and more prosperous than those of our great-grandparents. The story he tells is much more than an inexorable march of progress--it has also been unequal, uneven, and incomplete, and at each step, politics has played a defining role. This is a must-read for anybody interested in the wealth and health of nations."--Daron Acemoglu, coauthor of *Why Nations Fail*"If you want to learn about why human welfare overall has gone up so much over time, you should read *The Great Escape: Health, Wealth, and the Origins of Inequality*."--Bill Gates"At once engaging and compassionate, this is an uplifting story by a major scholar."--Paul Collier, author of *The Bottom Billion*"Magisterial and superb."--William Easterly, author of *The White Man's Burden*"*The Great Escape* tells the two biggest stories in history: how humanity got healthy and wealthy, and why some people got so much healthier and wealthier than others. Angus Deaton, one of the world's leading development economists, takes us on an extraordinary journey--from an age when almost everyone was poor and sick to one where most people have escaped these evils--and he tells us how the billion still trapped in extreme poverty can join in this great escape. Everyone who wants to understand the twenty-first century should read this book."--Ian Morris, author of *Why the West Rules--for Now*"Deaton's account of global advances in health is magisterial. It is especially convincing in disentangling economic progress from technological growth as sources of health improvements. A very big story, this book should affect the way we think about human development and the role of science and science-based government programs. The language is modest and graceful, the use of evidence compelling, and the illustrations highly attractive."--Samuel Preston, University of Pennsylvania"This factual, sober, and very timely book deals with issues surrounding the higher incomes and longer lives enjoyed by an increasing proportion of the world's population. It assesses improvements in conditions that would have seemed almost a fantasy for people living only a few generations ago. Deaton's arguments, written in an elegant and accessible style, are powerful and challenge conventional opinions."--Branko Milanovic, author of *The Haves and the Have-Nots*"This splendid book discusses how, in the last two hundred fifty years, large numbers of people have achieved levels of well-being that were previously available only to a few individuals, and how this achievement has given rise to equally unprecedented inequalities. Unique in its focus and scope, exceptional knowledge and coherence, and careful argumentation, *The Great Escape* is highly illuminating and a delight to read."--Thomas Pogge, Yale University

Has the human race made progress since the days when all our lives were nasty, brutish, and short? Some might think this question patently silly, since it would appear to answer itself. But Angus Deaton finds in it a point of entry into his inquiry on “health, wealth, and the origins of inequality,” the subtitle of his ambitious new book. He is in no doubt that humanity has progressed, not steadily but by fits and starts and continues to do so to this day.

“Today,” he writes, “children in sub-Saharan Africa are more likely to survive to age 5 than were English children born in 1918 . . . [and] India today has higher life expectancy than Scotland in 1945.” In *The Great Escape*, Deaton, a veteran professor of economics and international affairs at Princeton, explores inequality between classes and between countries with a detailed statistical analysis of trends in infant mortality, life expectancy, and income levels over the past 250 years. He concludes that the large-scale inequality that plagues policymakers and reformers alike in the present day is the result of the progress humanity has made since The Great Divergence (between the West and the rest) since the advent of the Industrial Revolution. “Economic growth,” Deaton asserts, “has been the engine of international income inequality.” No argument there: Deaton is far from alone in this belief. Other scholars have written extensively about this topic in recent years. *A Farewell to Alms: A Brief Economic History of the World*, by Gregory Clark, is just one example. Late in the 18th Century, the countries of Northern Europe and North America on the one hand and those of Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America on the other hand were not that far apart as measured by the available indicators of health and income. Deaton cites one careful study [that] estimates that the average income of all the inhabitants of the world increased between seven and eight times from 1820 to 1992. However, that average obscures a harsh reality. The ever-quickening rate of change in the West since 1760 or so has widened the gap between (and within) countries to an extreme degree. Deaton terms the freedom from destitution and early death that so many of us now enjoy “The Great Escape,” taking his title from the 1963 film of that name about a massive escape of prisoners from a German P.O.W. camp in World War II. Only now is the gap closing between the rich nations and China and India (by far the world’s two biggest countries, with nearly 40 percent of the planet’s population and half the world’s poor). Deaton doesn’t consider a bright future for all a certainty, not by any means, in view of global climate change and the ever-present threat of killer pandemics. But, assuming the species continues to thrive, there is sufficient data available now to have some confidence that the gross inequality now existing among nations will not persist forever. After all, five

sub-Saharan African countries are now growing their economies faster than China's. However, that misleading factoid ignores the outsize role that China has played in the Great Escape globally. Deaton notes, as have other observers, that the number [of] people in the world living on less than a (2005) dollar a day fell from about 1.5 billion in 1981 to 805 million in 2008 . . . [This] decline in numbers is driven almost entirely by the Chinese growth miracle; if China is excluded, 785 million people lived on less than a dollar a day in 1981 compared with 708 million in 2008. (This reality is one of the principal reasons why Paul Polak and I insist in *The Business Solution to Poverty* that traditional methods to end poverty have largely failed. After all, China's methods were hardly traditional!) In the course of exploring the historical record of growing inequality on the world stage, Deaton delves deeply into the role of foreign aid (officially, Overseas Development Assistance, or ODA) and finds it comes up short. You cannot develop other countries from the outside with a shopping list for Home Depot, no matter how much you spend, he writes. With the exception of outside interventions in public health programs including such breakthroughs as the eradication of smallpox and the near-success with polio Deaton finds that foreign aid has done more harm than good. He argues that where the conditions for development are present, outside resources are unnecessary. Where they're absent, ODA entrenches local elites, distorts the local economy, and discourages local initiative. The author insists that the record of aid shows no evidence of any overall beneficial effect. But that's only part of the story. In 2012, ODA totaled about \$136 billion. Throw in another \$30 billion or so from NGOs, and total outside assistance comes to under \$200 billion annually. However, net resource transfers from developing countries to rich countries are well in excess of \$500 billion annually. (Transfers reached a peak of \$881 billion in 2007, fell with the Great Recession, but are rising again.) Quite apart from the fact that an estimated 70 percent of foreign aid is actually spent on products and services from donor nations, ODA merely puts a dent in the huge disadvantage that poor countries suffer as a result of lopsided trade policies and prevailing political and commercial imbalances. In any case, just one factor in those resource flows remittances from overseas residents of poor countries to their families back home are twice as large as ODA. The Great Escape is a worthy effort from a senior scholar whose wide-ranging studies have led him to big-picture conclusions. Policymakers and practitioners should be listening carefully.

Insightful book about the global rise of living standards during the industrial era. Charts a path between the political left and right on where the data supports inferences on economic growth,

health and wellbeing, and inequality. Deaton also generally reflects a recognition that economics often serves best by obtaining and analyzing data to demonstrate the impact of particular policies, but that actual policy choices really often reflect considerations of norms and values that cannot be determined by the data alone. However, I agree with many other reviewers that the final section on the ineffectiveness of international aid is a mismatch from the rest of the book. It is the least data-centered of the sections and the most like a one-sided persuasive essay. I think he raises a number of valid concerns and considerations about the efficacy of international aid as it is conducted, but I fail to be convinced by his seeming conviction that efforts to reform how aid is conducted would be fruitless. He comes off as a person who has become deeply disillusioned by development aid and can no longer see the legitimacy of any arguments in its favor. However, his even-handedness and open-mindedness about other economic matters in other areas of the book does mean that I am more willing to fully consider his arguments on this issue than I might have been from someone who had not demonstrated such qualities on other issues.

This is a great book. It combines a beautiful writing style with amazing insights. Deaton won the 2015 Nobel prize in economics but you definitely do not need to be an economist to enjoy it. It will cause thinking people on the left, right and middle to think differently (and better) about public health, equality of opportunity, and foreign aid. This is the best book I have read on equality of opportunity because it appeals strongly to both the heart and the mind. Deaton's in-depth expertise with the negative impacts of foreign aid (especially with smaller countries) is compelling. This counter-intuitive reality shows the importance of smart metrics (which was the foundation for Deaton's Nobel prize). From a positive perspective, he shows that public health usually provides a huge return on investment and lays the foundation for education and equality of opportunity. I believe a focus on "equality of opportunity for everyone" could drive economic growth and reduce inequality in the U.S. and the world. *The Great Escape* is a book that the world's leaders need to read, understand and embrace.

A lot of data, though he conveniently left out any discussions that did not fit his purpose, as obvious as they may have been. Only one sentence that even referenced war, for example, and he didn't even say the word. He may not believe it's a factor but I thought he should've at least said why not. I also didn't think there was much that hadn't already been said. Ironically, he trashed Paul Collier, (*Bottom Billion*), then proceeded to say essentially the same thing. The only reason I have him a two was because I found his mortality stats interesting.

Some great economists, which we used to know only through very formal papers, are proving to be good writer. Among them, Deaton excels. It brings very good stories with an exposition that we feel like reading a Tolstoi of Science. He knows how to tell good stories, which any scientific writing should search, and which involves concepts and notions that evolve. There some impressing exposition on Wealth and Health, on Income inequality within the USA, on income inequality in the world, as well as on some attempted remedies. Worth Reading for economists and non-economists

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