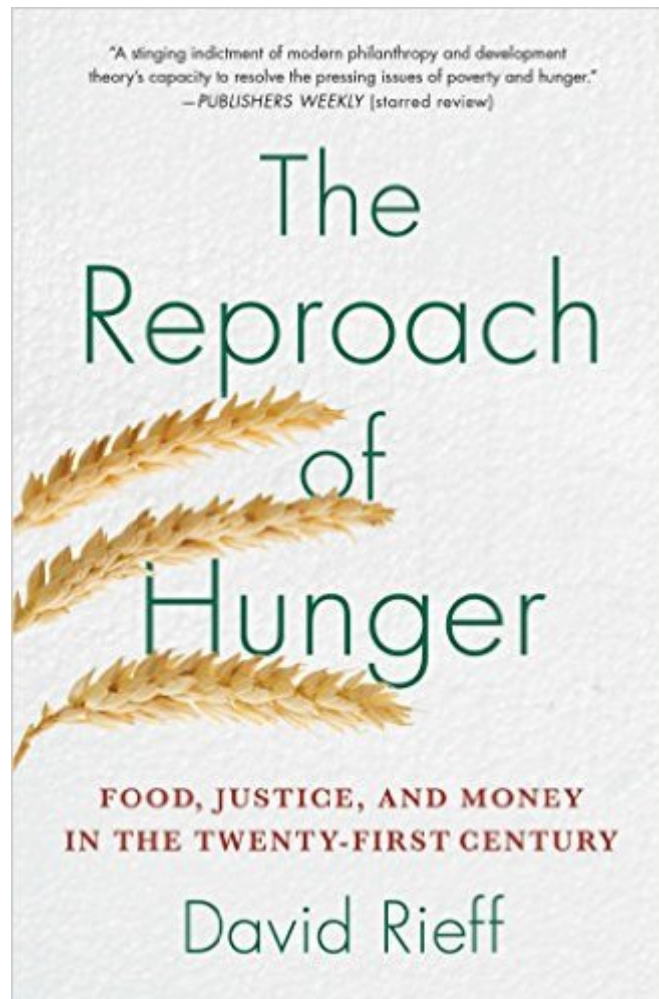


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The Reproach Of Hunger: Food, Justice, And Money In The Twenty-First Century



Synopsis

Hailed as "an invaluable" and "substantial work of political thought," (New Statesman) in a groundbreaking report, based on years of reporting, David Rieff assesses whether ending extreme poverty and widespread hunger is truly within our reach, as is increasingly promised. Can we provide enough food for nine billion people in 2050, especially the bottom poorest in the Global South? Some of the most brilliant scientists, world politicians, and aid and development experts forecast an end to the crisis of massive malnutrition in the next decades. The World Bank, IMF, and Western governments look to public-private partnerships to solve the problems of access and the cost of food. "Philanthrocapitalists" Bill Gates and Warren Buffett spend billions to solve the problem, relying on technology. And the international development "Establishment" gets publicity from stars Bob Geldorf, George Clooney, and Bono. "Hunger, [David Rieff] writes, is a political problem, and fighting it means rejecting the fashionable consensus that only the private sector can act efficiently" (The New Yorker). Rieff, who has been studying and reporting on humanitarian aid and development for thirty years, takes a careful look. He cites climate change, unstable governments that receive aid, the cozy relationship between the philanthropic sector and giants like Monsanto, that are often glossed over in the race to solve the crisis. "This is a stellar addition to the canon of development policy literature" (Publishers Weekly, starred review). The Reproach of Hunger is the most complete and informed description of the world's most fundamental question: Can we feed the world's population? Rieff answers a careful "Yes" and charts the path by showing how it will take seizing all opportunities; technological, cultural, and political to wipe out famine and malnutrition.

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Customer Reviews

Can we have our cake, and see that the poor also have enough so we don't feel guilty about our rather excessive slice? That's my abbreviated take on the question that David Rieff explores here, in far greater complexity. Mainstream development "experts" say that with enough money, world hunger can be wiped out and that corporate conglomerates will help it all happen. Look! There's the Gates Foundation, partnering with Coca-Cola in East Africa. That's not going to stop hunger, say others. Rieff writes: "For the critics... the mainstream position that it was possible to meet the needs of the poor and the hungry adequately without calling into question the social, political, and economic status quo was at best the purest wishful thinking and more likely needed to be understood as providing a form of 'humanitarian' cover for the multinationals to dominate completely those areas of the global food system over which they did not already exercise control." This captures both the book's content, and its style, and I'd like to digress for a moment to the latter. The sentence above is longer than his average, but by no means his longest. The writing is dense at times. Not dense in the manner of an economics professor whose prose puts you to sleep. These sentences take you to fascinating places. They are often eloquent, sometimes elegant; but his recent Nation article "Philanthrocapitalism: A Self-Love Story," showed Rieff's ability to be all that, and also more easily understood. In a novel, or a history of the Byzantine empire, style is entirely his call. For a book discussing the fate of the world's poor, I'd make the case that if you are on their side (and he is), you should make more effort to include them in the conversation.

David Rieff turns a critical eye to the holy trinity of modern international development and aid, the neoliberal holy trinity of the World Bank, the IMF, and willingly co-opted NGOs. For an additional splash of critique, his gimlet eye includes turns to the world of philanthrocapitalism and what Rieff calls Bill Gates' second monopoly, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Rieff does not buy into every critique of the neoliberal development machine as offered by peasants groups', other local Global South advocates and their non-neoliberal Global North supporters, but he does give an open listening to all of them and agrees with a fair amount. He even engages somewhat with Hayekian-type naked capitalism supporters in the development game, without agreeing with them at all. So, to the degree this is a polemic, it's a well-argued, thought-out polemic, one that Rieff notes has been several years in the making. His critique of the neoliberal development machine has several main points. 1. While it ostensibly calls for "transparency" and "accountability" it does NOT call for "democracy." 2. It does not bring human rights into issues of hunger and poverty in any great way. 3. The hypercapitalism of neoliberalism believes that it's "enough" for a rising tide to lift the

global poor's boats out of poverty, even if income inequality increases.4. Referencing Yevegny Morozov (mentioned once here, though his famous word is not) it has a "solutionist" approach to developing world agricultural problems.5. It has a scientific approach to its own ideas, along with that believing that if it does make mistakes, they're all self-correcting.

This book took a long time to get through. It seems to rehash points with only slight variations, and at times resembles a polemic, but Mr. Rieff lays out all the positives and negatives of the current approach to trying to end hunger. Bill Gates is especially singled out, his every utterance and deed placed under Rieff's withering microscope. There are lots of points made, but the essence is using only technology to try to get farmers to grow more food has many drawbacks and essentially enables corporations to gain more control of markets all over the world that perhaps don't need their corporate influence. Relying on market forces and the technologies of GMOs, etc. causes more problems than it solves for the poorest. Political solutions are more likely to succeed, but they all require reducing the influence of capitalism and its fundamentals. Rieff (whom I agree with) tends to see the biggest problems with helping the poor and hungry as a contest between stakeholders like Coca Cola continuing to make huge profits while selling unhealthy products (sweetened beverages, bPA lined cans and plastic bottles) vs. the poor getting more and healthier food and better living conditions. We cannot continue the conspicuous consumption and exploitation of the poor and the environment driven by the current corporatocracy and decrease hunger and poverty to the levels the NGOs and UN, etc have targeted. Fundamental governmental and tactical changes have to occur: corporations have to pay a fair price for their resource extractions and tax avoidance and multi-billionaires need to give up the rigged systems that help them get extremely wealthy without working any harder or better than the struggling masses scraping by on a dollar a day.

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