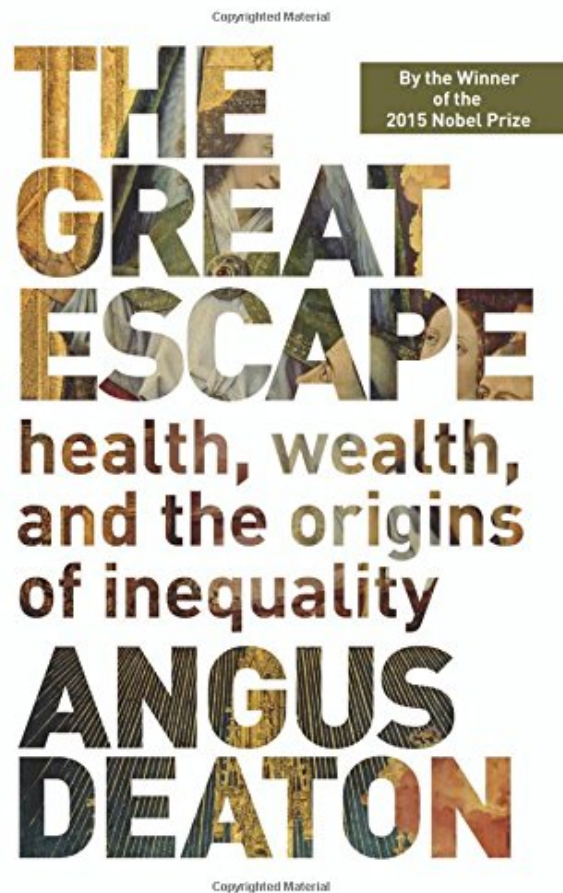


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"*The Great Escape* tells the two biggest stories in history: how humanity got healthy and wealthy, and why some people got so much healthier and wealthier than others. Angus Deaton, one of the world's leading development economists, takes us on an 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*

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#### About the Author

Angus Deaton, winner of the 2015 Nobel Prize in economics, is the Dwight D. Eisenhower Professor of Economics and International Affairs in the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs and the Economics Department at Princeton University. His many books include *The Analysis of Household Surveys* and *Economics and Consumer Behavior*. He is a past president of the American Economic Association.



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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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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*

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#### About the Author

Angus Deaton, winner of the 2015 Nobel Prize in economics, is the Dwight D. Eisenhower Professor of Economics and International Affairs in the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs and the Economics Department at Princeton University. His many books include *The Analysis of Household Surveys* and *Economics and Consumer Behavior*. He is a past president of the American Economic Association.

#### Most helpful customer reviews

145 of 158 people found the following review helpful.

Essentially a survey course

By MT57

I was underwhelmed. Professor Deaton is highly regarded in his field of development economics, and there is one chapter, the penultimate, that focuses on that sector and it was hard-hitting, pithy, and insightful. Professor Deaton is a proponent of the theme that external aid does not make much difference in the least developed countries, due in large measure to corruption within the recipient nation. He lays out his case forcefully. For those who have encountered the philosophical, non-empirical argument of Peter Singer in favor of such aid, this chapter is a very effective rejoinder.

But otherwise, the book is basically a survey course -- at a 50,000 foot, totally macro level -- of the developments, mostly positive, in material wellbeing and health over the last couple of centuries -- the "Great Escape " of the title -- with some very high-level consideration of the reasons why they have not been uniform and the implications of the lack of uniformity. Pretty much everything is studied at the level of comparing statistics collected at the national level, which I find to be maddeningly frustrating as there are so many differences one can find between any pair of nations. And then one gets to the chapter on cross-border

aid, and the author completely switches his vantage point and says that you can't limit your scrutiny of cross-border aid to the nation-to-nation level, you have to look at what is going on inside the recipient nation. I agree, but by the same token doesn't that perspective conflict undermine the nation-to nation comparisons that make up the prior chapters?

There are definitely insights of value -- for instance, that improvements in health and income are not as closely correlated as one might expect, and that economic inequality can be a spur as much as a constraint -- but I felt an inordinate amount of pages was devoted to setting up every point, as if the reader were an undergraduate student with no prior exposure to any of the issues. For a specific example, there is a chapter on "Material Wellbeing in the United States" of 50 pages length, but it largely rehashes themes and materials that you can find in the New York Times and other sources on the web. The work of Piketty and Saez is laid out for instance (as the NYT does every year when they update their work) and a few of the limitations in their data collection that skew the analysis to overstate inequality are noted (as Cato and others do every year in response) and then the author moves on. If you are not familiar with that work at all, I guess this is an introduction - just as you would get in a survey course - but it is not particularly insightful relative to other work already published much of which is available for free on the web.

I found the title partially misleading. There was very little about the "origins" of inequality in here, unless you count the chapter on globalization. And, to reiterate my theme, however strong or weak that link may be, did you not already know that globalization has been linked to increases in economic inequality before you read this book? Again, I felt I was getting a survey course level of presentation.

There is a secondary theme that runs through this book that I would have liked to have seen played up more, which is that, repeatedly in making his points, Professor Deaton shows that an economic hypothesis is based on a skewed collection of data, on incomplete data, or ignores conflicting data and does not hold up under moderate scrutiny from an unbiased analyst. I personally would have found it much more compelling a read had this point been played up more explicitly, although it probably would not have endeared him to his colleagues in the economics profession. I wondered whether the professor was being cunning and embedding the criticisms in a book that, on its face, appears to be more aligned with the point of view of the academy and ngo community that might be most inclined to pick it up. Although a book called "The Great Hoax; How Economists Obscure Reality to Convince You They Have Magic Powers" might sell more copies, albeit through different channels.

Other reviewers have noted that the book is quite readable and indeed it is, although I suggest the readability is in part a bug and not a feature, because so much time is devoted to setting up points. That is what makes it readable, I think, but also, to me, slowed it down and made it less efficient than I would have liked.

Although one might think that a 3-star review conflicts with the other, 5-star reviews, I think if you read the higher-starred reviews and this review, you will see that we are basically saying the same thing about the book, as a descriptive matter; our differences lie in how much value we assign to its level of generality. I hope this added point of view will be "helpful" to you as you decide whether to acquire the book.

56 of 60 people found the following review helpful.

A once-in-a-decade book about economic and social development

By Guy P. Pfeffermann

This is an important book by one of the foremost development economists in the world. It is highly readable, indeed written in an entertaining manner. Deaton paints on a vast canvas in time and space, embracing both developed and developing worlds. His theme is how in the course of history, and especially during the past three decades, hundreds of millions of people managed to escape abject poverty. He brings new insights into



the sequencing and the many interwoven and often counter-intuitive linkages between growth and quality of life, especially health and longevity. His story begins when we were all hunters/gatherers and ends in 2013 in the unresolved aftermath of the financial crisis.

One of Deaton's main themes is that economic growth does not necessarily produce improved quality of life, especially when income is distributed very unequally - as is the case in today's United States. So for example, in spite of lower economic growth in France than in the United States, because of a less unequal distribution of income, "all but the top 1 percent of the French population did better than all but the top 1 percent of the American population". (p. 260)

In discussing the relationships between rich and poor countries, I very much like Deaton's implicit framework, which distinguishes "us" (the people of the North), "we" (the Northern governments), aid recipients ("their governments"), and "they" (the people of the South). This helps to cut through a lot of semantic and conceptual confusion, especially when discussing "development assistance".

The book concludes with a chapter about how to help those left behind the "Great Escape" from poverty. While I tend to agree with his main thrust: that foreign aid works best where it is least needed, i.e., where governance is reasonably good, and works worst in poorly-governed countries where the people are most miserable. But from all I have seen, the evidence on aid effectiveness is inconclusive, largely, as Deaton notes, because the data are so bad. Deaton is very critical of aid, but illustrates his argument with selected examples, when one can almost always find counter-examples. However, one can only agree with his observation that increased flows of money don't help - quite the opposite - when recipient countries lack basic capacities and/or are poorly governed.

Although he doesn't say it quite this way, Deaton implies throughout much of the book that while it is quite easy for development experts to come up with lists of conditions that are necessary for successful development - including for example respect for the Rule of Law and sound macroeconomic policies - nobody has yet come up with a list of sufficient conditions.

30 of 32 people found the following review helpful.

Inequality, Infant Mortality, and Foreign Aid

By Mal Warwick

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-quickenening 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.

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# THE GREAT ESCAPE: HEALTH, WEALTH, AND THE ORIGINS OF INEQUALITY BY ANGUS DEATON PDF

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Review

Angus Deaton, Winner of the 2015 Nobel Prize in Economics

Winner of the 2013 William G. Bowen Award, Industrial Relations Section of Princeton University

One of Bloomberg Businessweek's Best Books of 2015, chosen by John Snow

One of Bloomberg/Businessweek Best Books of 2013, selected by Christopher L. Eisgruber (president of Princeton University)

One of Forbes Magazine's Best Books of 2013

Honorable Mention for the 2013 PROSE Award in Economics, Association of American Publishers

Shortlisted for the 2014 Spear's Book Awards in Financial History

Longlisted for the 2013 Business Book of the Year Award, Financial Times/Goldman Sachs

A "Best Business Book of the Year for 2013" selected on LinkedIn by Matthew Bishop, Economics Editor of The Economist

Featured in The Sunday Times 2013 Holiday Roundup

"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

"[O]ne of the most succinct guides to conditions in today's world. . . . The story Deaton tells--the most inspiring human story of all--should give all of us reason for optimism, so long as we are willing to listen to its moral."--David Leonhardt, New York Times Book Review

"[A]n illuminating and inspiring history of how mankind's longevity and prosperity have soared to breathtaking heights in modern times. . . . [Deaton's] book gives a stirring overview of the economic progress and medical milestones that, starting with the Industrial Revolution and accelerating after World War II, have caused life expectancies to soar."--Fred Andrews, New York Times

"[A]n engaging and sure-footed guide to the 'endless dance between progress and inequality . . .'"--Martha C. Nussbaum, New Republic

"Is the world becoming a fairer as well as a richer place? Few economists are better equipped to answer this question than Angus Deaton of Princeton University, who has thought hard about measuring international

well-being and is not afraid to roam through history. Refreshingly, Mr Deaton also reaches beyond a purely economic narrative to encompass often neglected dimensions of progress such as better health. . . . [T]he theme requires a big canvas and bold brushwork, and Mr Deaton capably offers both."--Economist

"[E]loquently written and deeply researched. . . . For those interested in world poverty, it is unquestionably the most important book on development assistance to appear in a long time."--Kenneth Rogoff, Project Syndicate

"[A] masterful account."--Anne-Marie Slaughter, CNN.com

"A truly elegant exploration. . . . It offers an erudite sojourn through history, all the way to the domestic and international policy issues pressing in on us today. Unusual for scholarly works in economics, this book is rendered in easily accessible prose, supported by fascinating statistics presented graphically."--Uwe E. Reinhardt, NYTimes.com's Economix blog

"As the title of his book suggests, Deaton sketches out the story of how many people have escaped from poverty and early death. It is a powerful tale. In Deaton's hands, the all too frequently forgotten accomplishments of the last century are given prominence that is both refreshing and welcome."--Edward Hadas, Reuters BreakingViews

"The Great Escape combines, to a rare degree, technical sophistication, moral urgency, the wisdom of experience, and an engaging and accessible 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

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"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

From the Back Cover

"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

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"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

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