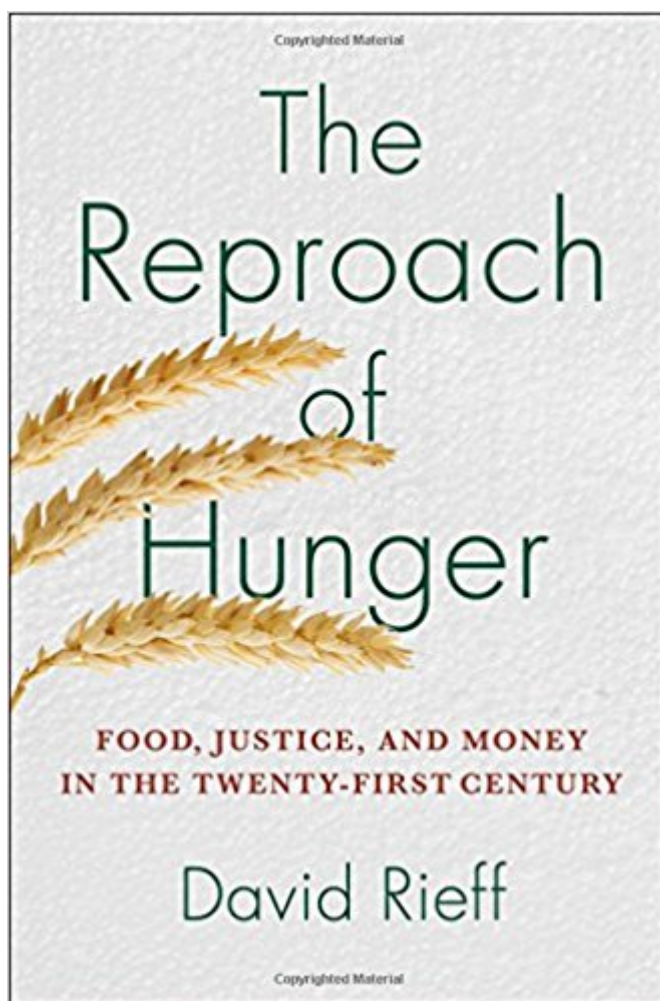


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# The Reproach Of Hunger: Food, Justice, And Money In The Twenty-First Century



## Synopsis

In a groundbreaking book, based on six years of on the ground reporting, expert David Rieff offers a masterly review about whether ending extreme poverty and widespread hunger is within our reach as increasingly promised. Can we provide enough food for 9 billion (2 billion more than today) in 2050, especially the bottom poorest in the Global South? Some of the most brilliant scientists, world politicians, and aid and development persons forecast an end to the crisis of massive malnutrition in the next decades. However, food rights campaigners (many associated with green parties in both the rich and poor world) and traditional farming advocates reject the intervention of technology, biotech solutions, and agribusiness. Many economists predict that with the right policies, poverty in Africa can end in twenty years. “Philanthrocapitalists” Bill Gates and Warren Buffett spend billions on technology to “solve” the problem, relying on technology. Rieff, who has been studying and reporting on humanitarian aid and development for thirty years, puts the claims of both sides under a microscope and asks if any one of these efforts will solve the crisis. He cites climate change, unstable governments that receive aid, the cozy relationship between the philanthropic sector and agricultural giants like Monsanto and Syngenta, that are often glossed over. *The Reproach of Hunger* is the only book to look at this debate refusing to take the cherished claims of either side at face value. Rieff answers a careful “yes” to this crucial challenge to humanity’s future. The answer to the central question is yes, if we don’t confuse our hopes with realities and good intentions with capacities.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“[Rieff’s] unflinching analysis is an invaluable corrective to the happy-clappy unreality of much of our current thinking on hunger. A forceful critique of the ideology that has captured many transnational institutions in recent decades, *The Reproach of Hunger* is a substantial work of political thought.” (John Gray *New Statesman*)

“As refugee crises fill the news, David Rieff reminds that hunger is a war not won. Rieff, a veteran thinker on development issues, spent six years researching the nexus of population, food commodification and persistent poverty for this critical analysis. Scathing about the alarmist or over-optimistic pronouncements of development officials, agribusiness multinationals and philanthropic nabobs, he notes that any issue involving billions of humans cannot be neatly engineered. Thoughtful, trenchant and bracingly sceptical.” (Nature)

“An erudite and well-researched analysis of the problem of world hunger and the challenges associated with international development. . . . [the book] exposes the contradictions of the philanthrocapitalist dogma currently in vogue and challenges readers to reexamine the causes of growing development inequality among countries.” (Philanthropy News Digest)

“Hunger, [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)

“A stinging indictment of modern philanthropy and development theory’s capacity to resolve the pressing issues of poverty and hunger. In the wake of so many books rehashing the same arguments about how to help the developing world, readers will be grateful for a different (and impeccably researched) perspective. This is a stellar addition to the canon of development policy literature.” (Publishers Weekly (starred review))

“Will we be able to feed the nine billion people expected to populate the world by 2050? Scientists, politicians, and economists, backed by abundantly wealthy philanthropists like Bill Gates, say yes. Advocates of food rights and traditional farming counter that the biotech and agribusiness means suggested are deeply flawed. With 30 years’ worth of studying humanitarian aid and development behind him, Rieff listens to both sides and comes out with a qualified yes.” (Library Journal, prepub alert)

“A realistic examination of the world’s ability to solve the global food crisis.” (Library Journal, review)

Praise for *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis*

“A withering, thought-provoking study.” •The Wall Street Journal

“Hardheaded, sophisticated, and urgent.” •The New York Times Book Review

Praise for *Slaughterhouse: Bosnia and the Failure of the West*

“Rieff writes with a knowledge so thorough, an intelligence so keen, a passion so scalding, and a morality so vigorous, that one cannot come away from reading this without despair for mankind.” •The Advocate

“It is David Rieff’s shocking conclusion . . . that we have reached the point where to bear witness is the remaining alternative to losing hope in the face of unchecked crimes against humanity.”  
•The Baltimore Sun Praise for At the Point of a Gun: Democratic Dreams and Armed Intervention  
“Rieff’s lucid, fair-minded, and provocative essays should be mandatory reading for anybody who is trying to make sense out of our ever-more-troubling, post-September 11 world.”  
•San Francisco Chronicle  
“Rejecting equally utopian humanitarianism and neoconservative ideology, Rieff’s collection of essays provides a compelling analysis of when military intervention is necessary and when it is doomed to fail.”  
•George Soros (\* \* \*)

David Rieff is the author of eight previous books, including *Swimming in a Sea of Death*, *At the Point of a Gun: Democratic Dreams and Armed Intervention*; *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis*; and *Slaughterhouse: Bosnia and the Failure of the West*. He lives in New York City.

Severe income disparities between the global rich and all others is a tradition too entrenched to challenge. The wealth of the richest 1 percent of humanity is sixty five times that of the bottom half of the seven billion people who populate the planet. While innovation and economic reform can improve life for the masses, nothing will brake the seminal concentration of wealth among the very rich. Just as wealth is concentrated, so is chronic poverty, food insecurity and political instability, all of which the World Bank categorizes as entrenched in much of Sub-Saharan Africa. The continent of Africa suffers unending financial devastation with inflows of revenue totaling \$96 billion versus outflows of \$121 billion, the latter including \$21 billion in debt servicing payments each year. Recent migratory flows are unprecedented, in numbers, as they land in Italy from sub-Saharan Africa and from Syria. Population increases from this Muslim culture are among the world’s highest where attendant food scarcities, culture conflicts, water wars, and sanitation issues are problematic and chronic. Uganda has a population of some 35 million and with perhaps the world’s highest growth rate this number will reach 104 million by mid-century. The population of Tanzania is 49 million, Kenya is 45 million and both will double these numbers by mid-century. World population is now adding 70 million to annual numbers as India is perched to overtake China as the most populous country. In 2013 some 1.2 billion people lived in extreme poverty on less than \$1.25 a day. Water crises are underway globally, well exemplified in the fast growing populace of 2 million as the capital of Yemen contemplates being the first major city to soon exhaust the underground aquifer; it was thirty meters below ground in 1970; today that number is 1,200. Waterways suffer massive pollution

today as nitrogen-based fertilizers supplant what once were animal resourced. In his final pages author David Rieff forcefully concludes (reiterates) that the current food system suffers collectively from mystical faith. Countless references identify nations' economic growth as the vehicle to stimulate and sustain the desired results for the mitigation of hunger and poverty. Many reports and opinions about solving hunger and poverty crises overwhelmingly embrace economic growth as the imperative to success. The author's savvy intellect and sophistication dismisses this baggage connected utopia as the machine that transported us aboard the silver bullets that came before. Growth can provide benefits to food and social dependents but providing essentials to trajected ten billion people? Water is no doubt the most limiting element where big agra already consumes most available sources, where rivers-streams-and lakes are heavily polluted, where sanitation is back-seated in India and South Asia as 1.2 billion people defecate openly, where human and animal wastes pollute rivers,... All of this is just for starters. The notion that planet earth can, should and would comfortably accommodate a few billion more tired, poor and hungry consumers as industry, farmers, developers and politicians plan for the next phase of tarmacs, roads, freeways, bridges, schools, farms, mining factories, houses, hospitals, restaurants,... Where, and how, will it all end?

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. How long should we put off helping children whose development and future success are so adversely affected by the current unjust food distribution systems in place? How many children have to have their brains and bodies stunted by the stresses of poverty and hungry while Philanthrocapitalists (one of the most frequently used terms in the book) ration out their fortunes to various measurable projects to see what ways might help them while also guaranteeing there will be more billionaires around to pick up part of the tab after causing all sorts of problems on their rise to their riches? These are all great questions, all issues that need to be raised and considered, and the motives and methods of the super wealthy in their philanthropy need some serious criticism rather than sycophancy. Mr. Rieff knows the subject inside and out; unfortunately he relies on very long and complicated sentences to make his case. You might want to cut to his brilliant conclusion - it alone is worth the price of this valuable contribution to the debate on humanity's future in this age of abundance and extreme inequality.

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