

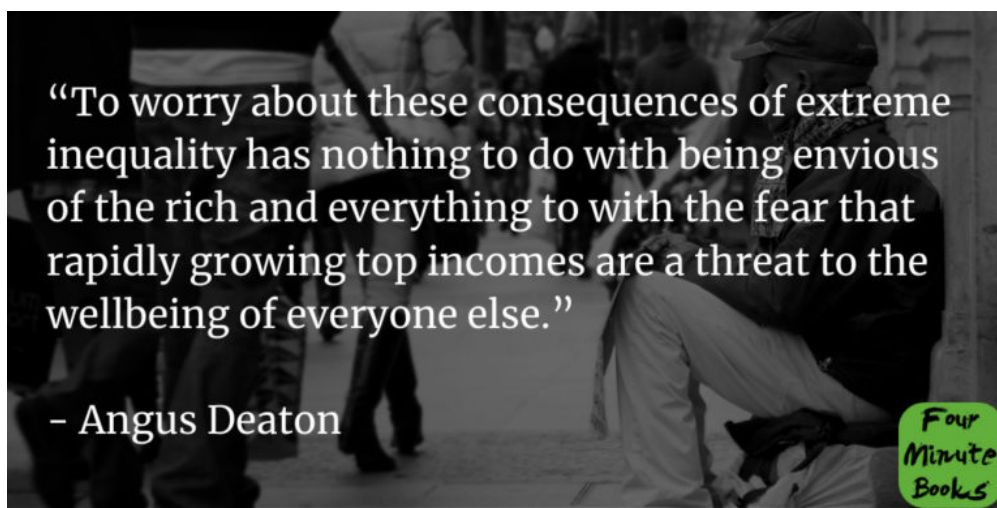
The Great Escape Summary

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1-Sentence-Summary: *The Great Escape* challenges the idea that the world is on fire by declaring that things have never been better in many ways, although the advancements we've made and the ways they have improved many lives haven't reached everyone equally.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



If you were born in the eighteenth century, you could expect to live around 35 years. Countless people were lost to diseases like dysentery and smallpox, and most of the world lived in poverty. Needless to say, a lot has changed since then.

Now, someone born in the United States can expect to live an average of 78 years. Thanks to new scientific discoveries and technologies, many people worldwide live longer. They also enjoy conveniences and free time that no other generation has had before them.

In short: for most of us, there has never been a better time to be alive. But life has not improved equally for people around the world. Richer countries have benefited immensely from technological advances. Meanwhile, poorer countries continue to suffer. Though overall well-being is better than ever, more than a billion people still live in extreme poverty.

The Great Escape: Health, Wealth, and the Origin of Inequality by Angus Deaton takes a deep look into the history of inequality in the world. He explains that though we are doing better than ever, a wide gap of inequality persists. By looking at inequality in history and now, he offers solid advice on how we can finally close the gap.

Here are just 3 of the many eye-opening lessons I got from this book:

1. We live much longer and healthier lives than our ancestors did.
2. Mortality has plummeted in the last 250 years thanks to advancements in society, politics, economics, and science.
3. Globalization is changing the nature of inequality, but it will not magically cure poverty in poor countries.

Let's get right to learning!

Lesson 1: Our ancestors didn't live as long or as well as we do now.

The first humans on earth were hunter-gatherers. While they lived healthily, their lives were short. On average, they lived only until age 40, with most of their life dedicated to finding food and shelter.

As hard as it probably was, they did have the benefit of a very nutritious, balanced diet. They worked together and shared the wild plants and meat they found. There wasn't disease because they were able to move before there were unsanitary, germ-infested conditions.

It wasn't until the Neolithic Revolution that hunter-gatherers started to settle into a new, agricultural way of life. Now that they had domesticated animals, disease emerged. This led to a massive increase in mortality.

You'd probably think settling in villages would help their well-being because they wouldn't have to travel, struggle, and compete to obtain food constantly. But it actually turned out that their well-being decreased. They lived in dirty cities where food and feces were too close together, and epidemics spread like wildfire through trade.

So both their quality of life and life expectancy took a sharp decline during this revolution. People died at even younger ages because of things like diseases, droughts, or famines.

Lesson 2: The last 250 years have seen a dramatic rise in human lifespans thanks to political, economic, scientific, and societal advancements.

Just in the last century, we have seen the average life expectancy increase by about 30 years in wealthy countries. **The biggest driver of this monumental feat is the decrease in child mortality.**

Healthcare and disease prevention have meant that children dying is a fairly rare occurrence. Many countries have brought the mortality rate down to only 0.5 percent. This is even more impressive when you consider that only a few centuries ago, about a third of kids didn't even make it to age five.

Most kids born in wealthy countries can now expect to live long enough to know their grandchildren and even their great-grandchildren. That's all thanks to better healthcare, nutrition, and education.

Thanks to the spread of scientific knowledge, we understood advances like germ theory. We improved sanitation, increased disease prevention, and discovered how to treat many diseases. One of the first examples of this is when London improved water sanitation in the early nineteenth century. In doing this, they quickly helped fight off the cholera epidemic.

But these advances, unfortunately, have not reached every part of the earth. Sadly, there are children today that still suffer or die from preventable diseases such as measles, cholera, or diarrhea. Then there are 34 million people worldwide who have died of HIV/AIDS.

Lesson 3: Inequality is changing because of globalization, but this isn't going to fix the poor state of some countries.

When we consider inequality, sometimes we only think about disparities between the rich and poor in our society. But if we are going to start really changing things, we need to think globally.

Sure, you can find inequality among citizens in all countries. But the biggest gaps are between nations. Before the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, most countries worldwide were similar in disparity. Most countries had poor farmers and rich aristocrats who owned the land they worked on.

When the Enlightenment all but abolished aristocracy, the middle class began to grow. It led to disparities becoming smaller. **After this, technological and intellectual advancements started to bring in great wealth for some countries, while other countries were left behind.**

Because of this, the United States and many European countries enjoy plenty of wealth and have high living standards. Meanwhile, some countries in Asia and Africa still struggle immensely just to get by. And it's getting worse— the number of poor people in Africa actually doubled from 1981 to 2008.

Within nations, the problem persists as well. In the United States, a wealthy country, the top one percent of income earners control almost all of the wealth. The rest of the population either only lives slightly better than their parents or in poverty.

Poverty doesn't just make it hard to buy food or afford housing. It makes it harder to be socially and politically active and makes it almost impossible to get a higher education. What's worse, these top income earners are getting richer from lenient tax regulations. The author goes as far as to argue that the US is essentially making a modern-day aristocracy in this way.

The Great Escape Review

What I liked about *The Great Escape* was that it blew away all the doom and gloom stories of how bad things are in the world that we see in the news all the time. Things really are much better than we think, and I wish we could see that more often. It was tough to learn how bad poverty is throughout the world. But I think we can keep moving forward to improve this as we have in many other areas.

Who would I recommend The Great Escape summary to?

The 42-year-old who is tired of the news making them feel like the world is on fire, or the 20-year-old that wonders if their quality of life is really that great. Also, every politician that has any power to do something about the rampant inequality in the world.