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## BOOKS


### Giving Till It Hurts

By CLAUDIA ROSETT  
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Upfront I must acknowledge a debt to Jeffrey Sachs. One night a decade back, when I was reporting for this newspaper out of Moscow, the power blew out as deadline was approaching, taking with it all outbound means of communication. As I sat in my office wondering how to reach anyone, the phone rang. It was Mr. Sachs on his cellphone from Boston, returning a message. He gave me exactly the quote I needed for that night's story.

It was a classic Jeffrey Sachs moment. He is a man of inexhaustible energy and public-relations talents beyond the wildest dreams of most economists -- always ready to supply a neatly turned phrase or make an apt observation. For more than 20 years, he has served as economist-on-call not only to reporters but to villagers, aid workers, ministers and presidents around the globe. In his foreword to "**The End of Poverty**" (Penguin Press,

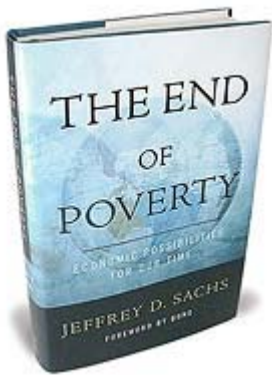
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396 pages, \$27.95), he tells us that he has "visited and worked in more than a hundred countries with 90 percent of the world's population." But it doesn't stop there. He is a professor at Columbia University and an adviser to a United Nations project aimed at halving world poverty by 2015 and eliminating extreme poverty everywhere by 2025. He is bold, clever and experienced in just about everything.



Will billions of dollars more to poor countries help them or make things worse?

Which is exactly the problem. In "The End of Poverty," Mr. Sachs offers a tour of the economic headline-events of the past generation, including his own role in most of them. There are interesting moments, such as Mr. Sachs's eyewitness account of Boris Yeltsin's bursting into a December 1991 meeting at the Kremlin to announce: "Gentleman, I want to tell you, indeed I can be the first to tell you, the Soviet Union is finished." But after all of Mr. Sachs's years spent trying to salvage or kick-start economies from Bolivia to China, he has concluded that what the world needs is an army of Jeffrey

Sachs, deployed around the globe, doling out \$135 billion to \$195 billion in aid a year and reporting back to the U.N.

It is clear that Mr. Sachs has the best of intentions; he just wishes that the rest of us did too, as he often reminds us in "The End of Poverty." ("This task is a collective one -- for you as well as for me.") Whatever his aims, his grand plan ends up looking a lot less like a guide to ending poverty than a bible for employing aid bureaucrats, and there is a very good chance that it

would end up doing more harm than good.

What he basically proposes for the world's poorest countries, and for the 1.1 billion people who live in them, is a world-wide central plan for the new millennium -- as if many of the world's most wrecked economies hadn't had enough central planning in the past millennium. Using input-output diagrams, extrapolations and anecdotes, Mr. Sachs offers page after page of proposals, often with dollar amounts attached.

He calculates, for instance, exactly how much it would take in the way of fertilizer, bore-wells and village trucks to salvage a region in western Kenya from extreme poverty. For all I know the plan might be a good one, as long as Mr. Sachs himself stays there to administer it. But the record of such efforts is dismal, the hitch being that most places in dire poverty operate under the influence of even more variables than are dreamt of in Mr. Sachs's highly detailed philosophy.

Indeed, the problem basic to central planning anywhere is that, even if you happen to be the smartest man on earth and to have visited more countries than Santa Claus, you still cannot possess all the information dispersed among the individuals who make up a society or an economy. What stymies the people in poor countries, as a rule, is not a lack of aid. It is forms of government, often corrupt and tyrannical, that do not allow people to exercise free choice under fair law.

Unfortunately, aid plans have a long history of reinforcing precisely the lousy governmental varieties that keep people poor. While Mr. Sachs punctuates his book with comments to that effect, he goes right on, undeterred, spelling out his plan. He calculates that in Africa,

whatever the failures of aid to date, \$30 billion a year would take care of the problem. "I have identified the specific investments that are needed," writes Mr. Sachs. For him, the only remaining question is, "Will the world act?"

The world probably will not act, at least not in the way Mr. Sachs has in mind -- and a good thing, too. Mr. Sachs talks about the importance of ensuring people the freedom to innovate for themselves. But "The End of Poverty" is mostly a plea that aid workers begin by doing the innovating for them -- using other people's money. He argues that rich countries should dedicate a steady 0.7% of gross national product to foreign aid to the poor. He even reckons how much could be extracted from the 400 richest U.S. taxpayers if they devoted 10% of their incomes to his plan. Along the way he deplores U.S. military spending, although the U.S. Army, in this millennium and before, has done more to eliminate poverty than any aid package ever could, by removing dictators who cause it.

The preface to "The End of Poverty" is written by Bono, a self-described "rock star student" who invites us along as he and Mr. Sachs, "the great economist," jet yet again into Africa on their mission to save the world. "In Jeff's hands, the millstone of opportunity around our necks becomes an adventure, something doable and achievable," writes Bono (who has evidently not learned how to handle the millstone of metaphor). The big question, he says, is whether our generation will take up the challenge of ending poverty. "Future generations flipping through these pages will know whether we answered the key question."

Ending poverty is devoutly to be desired. If the U.S. cleaves to its own democratic principles in its dealings abroad, we do seem headed for a richer world for all. But no one is going to get there by flipping through the pages of this book.

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