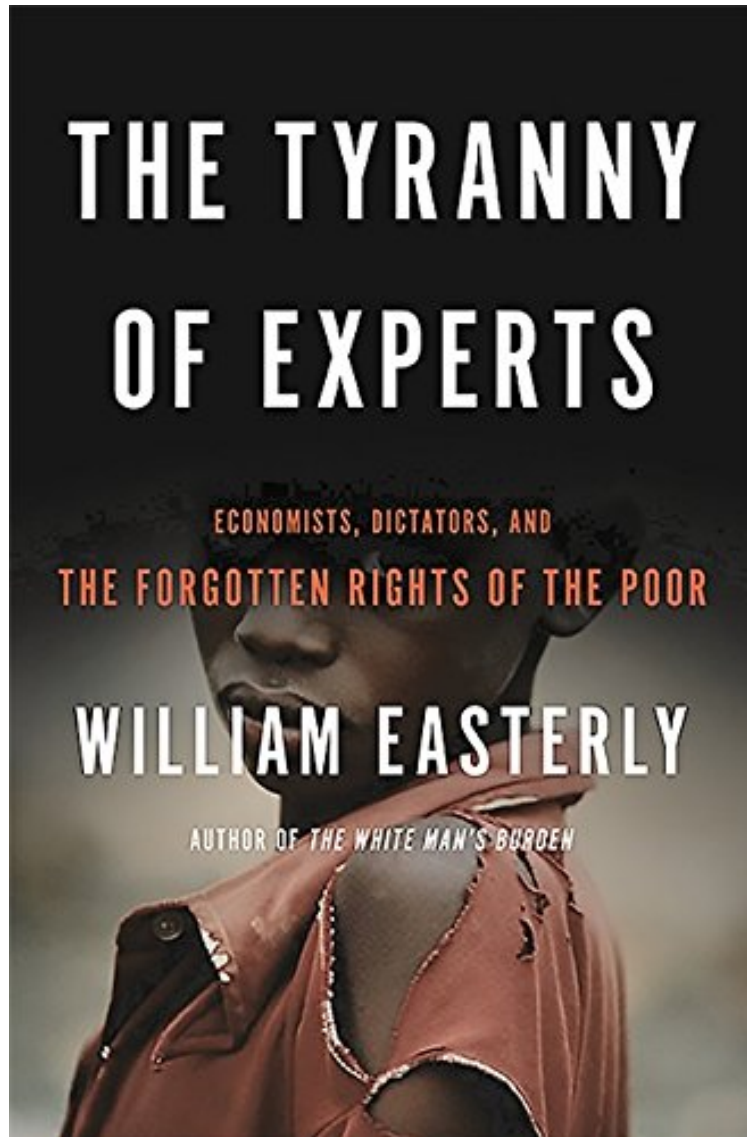


(Ebook free) The Tyranny of Experts: Economists, Dictators, and the Forgotten Rights of the Poor

The Tyranny of Experts: Economists, Dictators, and the Forgotten Rights of the Poor

William Easterly

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William Easterly : The Tyranny of Experts: Economists, Dictators, and the Forgotten Rights of the Poor before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Tyranny of Experts: Economists, Dictators, and the Forgotten Rights of the Poor:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. *A Thrashing Of Bill Gates And The Legacy Development Industry* By Charles William Easterly is a leading critic of traditional approaches to development that is, of traditional approaches to bridging the Great Divergence. He, and everyone else studying development, want to know why and how the West and a few Western-influenced countries have become wealthy, and everyone else in the world has stayed poor, despite trillions of dollars spent fruitlessly over seven decades by the West to bring the poor out of poverty. Easterly's latest book focuses on the defects of autocratic technocratic development schemes cooked up by Westerners. Such schemes treat citizens of undeveloped countries as fungible pawns to be passively developed, and result in no positive outcome. Easterly suggests that superior outcomes are likely from instead empowering individuals in developing countries to make their own choices. Easterly's core premise, the one around which everything in this book revolves, is that releasing the talents, ingenuity, hard-work and self-motivation of poor people from the bondage of central planning and repression of individual rights will allow those people to lead themselves out of poverty. He is a modern-day Moses, saying to the Pharaoh of the global development industry, Let my people go! A prime service of this book is the historical perspective Easterly gives the reader. He discusses at length the origins and growth of the development industry (i.e., the complex of national and multi-national organizations that receive money from individuals and governments, and undertake to apply that money to the development of undeveloped countries). The reason the historical perspective is valuable is that the development industry thrives on ignoring the past. In the development industry, the focus is relentlessly on the future on today's Utopian plans that, with enough money from others, are promised to finally bring about the elevation of the poor, despite all the failures of the past seven decades. A current example of this focus is the UN Millennium Development Goals, pushed globally by a wide range of players in the development industry, perhaps most prominently by the Gates Foundation. The reason for the focus on the future, of course, is that a focus on the past would show what a gruesome failure the development industry has been for seventy years, and might even require accountability for all the trillions wasted and Utopian promises totally unfulfilled. Easterly frames the book around what development should NOT be and do. To do this, he discusses at length the once-lionized, now-forgotten Nobel laureate Gunnar Myrdal. He posits a fictional debate between Myrdal and the not-forgotten Friedrich Hayek. Through that device, he analyzes Myrdal's thought, showing three major pillars that underlie the development industry today. First, Myrdal held that every society is a blank slate, just waiting for a cookie-cutter solution to be imposed by outsiders, rather than a unique culture with its own unique needs and desires. Second, the focus in development should be on abstract national well-being rather than on the well-being of individuals. Third, technocratic government central planning rather than spontaneous individual action leads to development success. (Interestingly Myrdal's highly successful response to his own critics at the time was to refuse to debate them and instead shriek that there was a consensus in favor of his views, so everyone who disagreed was stupid, not part of the development priesthood, and should just shut up shades of today's climate change alarmists.) The rest of the book uses this three-part framework to analyze the modern development industry, with the conclusion that Myrdal was wrong on all counts and that his thought was in many ways the original sin that has caused the development industry to be a nearly total failure. Easterly's writing is anecdote heavy. He writes in a jaunty style, as well presumably his main goal is to keep the reader's interest, while fitting anecdotes into his framework. This approach is pretty successful. Each of these pillars of the modern development industry (the blank slate; national well-being over individuals; and central planning over spontaneous activity) gets a thorough beating, though Easterly is careful to note that he does not promise an alternate utopia, merely a revised way of doing things that on average is likely to be more beneficial for people of the undeveloped world. Easterly also addresses possible counter-arguments, most importantly by pointing out that the few non-Western countries that have successfully developed, namely a set of Asian nations, are almost certainly not the result of some unique type of successful Asian autocracy, but rather the result of simple economic freedoms combined with technology. One flaw of the book is that Easterly never considers whether it's not just the technocratic central-planning and one-size-fits-solutions that are to blame, but also the people of undeveloped countries themselves. He does not consider if some cultures are simply not as good at, or totally incapable of, lifting themselves up by their own bootstraps. There is non-trivial evidence this is the case, and a cottage industry of writers to this effect. For example, the very existence of the Great Divergence suggests this conclusion, in that the tools that enabled the Industrial Revolution, where productivity soared in England and areas with an English-style culture, have not been adopted by much of the world in the past 150 years, even though there is no obvious barrier to doing so. Gregory Clark's *A Farewell To Alms* discusses this extensively. No doubt Easterly perceives a focus on cultural differences as pessimistic, and he is nothing if not an optimist. Easterly does recognize some cultural differences, in particular noting that some societies recognize individual rights, instead of collective rights, and that different levels of trust characterize different societies. He correlates lack of individual rights and lack of trust with lack of development though as usual, he is cautious in drawing sweeping conclusions. But he does not consider more baleful and harder-to-address cultural characteristics such as high time-preference (i.e., laziness), certain religions inculcating fatalism and apathy, opposition to hard work (especially manual work for men, such as in Arab cultures), predilections for violence, inability to plan for the future, and lack of impulse control. All these characteristics are common in cultures outside the West and the Far East (and yes, I mean to use Far East, or alternatively The Orient).

Such cultural obstacles seem nearly insurmountable, regardless of rights or other empowerment given to individuals, and it may well be the failure of the development industry is not due just to the wrong approach, but to the impossibility of the task. Perhaps where the culture needs outside help, it cannot use it; and where it can use it, it does not need it (which is pretty much the point of Angus Deaton's *The Great Escape*.) On a more specific point, reviewers strangely repeatedly criticize Easterly for his fascinating multi-century historical analysis of New York's Greene Street. They frequently say it's irrelevant and pointless. Nothing could be farther from the truth. It's obvious to any open-minded reader that Easterly's point (which he makes explicit, so it's not hard to miss) is that the history of Greene Street shows how individual rights, such as those found only in America and a few other countries, lead to spontaneous individual decisions. And that those individual decisions, with individuals directly making choices and individuals organizing together in a democratic framework, maximize societal benefits and, just as importantly, that government planning and blank-slate impositions, even if well-meaning, are likely to lead to much worse results. It is a microcosm of Easterly's point about nations. Easterly's history of Greene Street culminates in Robert Moses's mid-century plan to demolish the entire area and turn it into a centrally-planned paradise (which, like all such paradises, would shortly have become a hell, just like the liberal-led technocratic destruction of urban ghettos and replacement by high-rise public housing was a total disaster, now falsely blamed on supposed conservative racism). But Moses was stopped by Jane Jacobs, and Greene Street is now a wealthy, redeveloped area, purely as a result of individual actions and choices. Easterly means we should expand this microcosm to the globe. It's certainly better than what we've been doing as they say, the definition of insanity is continuing to do what has failed and expecting a different result. Bill Gates should pay attention.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Don't counsel me! By Adonay Navarro
Reading it gives a great deal of how history based on the economy and markets happens. The powers give "counsel" to the poor (countries). Always using a great deal of intelligence and approaching the right people, the powers, even if it is not a safe adventure, as it happened with the Mao's revolution and the "loose" of China for the West, will do whatever necessary to control the markets and resources. From an economic point of view, and taking for granted that every country is responsible for itself, why only a small bunch take steps to control the others? Very interesting, and written before the recent "change" of China to the "free" market. Highly recommended for students of world economy. Easy to read, apt for non-economists also.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Tyranny of Experts is a valuable history lesson and a highly recommended read. By Anonymous
I highly recommended Easterly's new work to my staff. Here is an excellent review from one of those who read it: William Easterly's *The Tyranny of Experts*
Reviewed by Katelyn G. William Easterly's *The Tyranny of Experts* is an eye-opening book and worthwhile reading for anyone who wants to work in development or gain a deeper understanding of effective methods to alleviate poverty. The book serves as a strong argument in favor of spontaneous solutions to problems in development over an authoritarian, technocratic approach that denies individual rights. Through many historical examples from Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas, Easterly demonstrates that although technocratic solutions may solve some development problems in the short term, greater long-term prosperity can be achieved in societies that promote free trade, innovation and entrepreneurship. The sense of history within *The Tyranny of Experts* is one of its great strengths. Critiquing Blank Slate thinking throughout the book, Easterly provides valuable historical context to educate the reader on how current development thinking evolved, tracing its beginnings to the post-colonial era, when Western powers needed a reason to retain power and influence as their empires collapsed. Later, Cold War strategy would lead countries like the United States to support autocratic leaders and technocratic development initiatives that helped it retain influence in the face of the Communist threat. It is clear that the Western approach to development has always served multiple political purposes. Easterly's emphasis on history over the long term enables him to highlight how different practices work over generations. For example, in discussing the insular trading practices among the Maghribi people, Easterly is able to identify how the level of trust between group members facilitated trade, but ultimately inhibited prosperity by limiting with whom the group could and would trade. Again, Easterly brings home the message that history must not be ignored, and therefore a good solution in one country may not be the right solution for another based on the specific context of each. Throughout *The Tyranny of Experts*, we see that poverty is complex, and not caused by a lack of talent or intelligence among people who are just waiting for development experts to save them (as the deeply racist post-colonial leaders seem to have thought). This examination of history and motive makes for an exciting read, providing a new lens through which to review topics most of us have researched before, like the slave trade. Easterly argues that oppression has broad consequences that hold back development (159). He explains that even today, countries from which people were taken to be sold as slaves experience greater levels of poverty, and are more reluctant to trade with local neighboring communities that helped capture their people. Italy serves as another example Easterly provides to highlight the long term consequences of oppression as the author shows how Italian cities that experienced absolute rule in the twelfth century and were more restricted in trade do not fare as well even today as those that were free cities. A history of limited rights and damaged relationships negatively impact trade opportunities, thereby inhibiting development. Easterly's examples demonstrate that those consequences can last for centuries. The book maintains credibility by acknowledging arguments his detractors could make about the success of technocratic initiatives. Easterly questions solutions that, at first glance, seem to have worked. One example provided is an autocratic

Ethiopia's reduction of child mortality, which led to accolades from leaders and influences like Tony Blair and Bill Gates. Easterly acknowledges this perceived success, but uncovers flaws in reporting that call into question whether such results are worth. We find that childhood mortality data is known to be imprecise, especially in nations where birth and death rates are not reliably reported (123). Meanwhile, this Ethiopian regime was known for oppressing political rivals and denying them food aid, a fact ignored by those who were celebrating the regime's success in health initiatives. I also want to credit Easterly for consistency in his approach. When he argues in favor of protecting individual rights to promote prosperity, he values the individual above the state. I was struck by his inclusion of arguments in favor of freedom of movement, which particularly caught my attention, as the immigration debate is ever ongoing. Easterly gives the example that most Haitians who have lifted themselves out of poverty are living outside of Haiti. In addition, he questions why a skilled professional like a doctor from a poorer country should remain at home out of loyalty to the needs of his other country, particularly when that individual could live a much more prosperous life by relocating to the United States. To see Easterly treat individual rights with enough importance to transcend borders was especially refreshing after reading through the many ways that racism has influenced development policy. The ultimate purpose of all of this history, all these different case studies from across the world, is to highlight how an emphasis on individual rights is proven to lead to greater prosperity. Although an autocrat may be able to accomplish specific development goals faster, it may not be sustainable or worth the price of oppression. Easterly writes that, oppression has broad consequences that hold back development (159). As we have seen in the examples I have cited, the negative consequences of autocratic rule can last for generations. Of course, moving away from autocracies cannot happen overnight, and in certain cases it may make sense to support positive initiatives that will promote health, and therefore prosperity, even if the government itself is deeply flawed. In reading *The Tyranny of Experts*, I appreciated that Easterly is ever grounded in reality, and the author posits that, an incremental positive change in freedom will yield a positive change in well-being for the world's poor. Although change will not happen instantaneously, moving toward greater autonomy will encourage innovation, trade and prosperity. Easterly concludes that we must not be seduced by seemingly benevolent autocrats, whose power means that they can accomplish development goals faster, but at too great a cost. It is here that I believe Easterly misses an opportunity. I would have been interested to see the book discuss the rights of women in relation to autocracies. To me, this would have been particularly relevant, as rights for women have been known to increase under autocrats. Under Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak, women enjoyed such perks as proportional representation in parliament. As Mubarak's government was overthrown and a new government was forming, laws that increased the rights of women were labeled, Suzanne's Laws after Mubarak's wife, linked to the old regime and seen as initiatives whose true purpose was to appease the West. This strange connection between women's rights and oppressive rule is part of the reason women so often see their rights disappear during political transition. I would be interested to see Easterly include a comparison of case studies specific to women in autocratic societies versus free societies. Such a discussion could have fit nicely with Easterly's exploration of the decline of child mortality in Ethiopia, and how it led to the Western leaders overlooking the problematic aspects of a dictator's rule (such as denying political opponents food aid). And as Whole Planet Foundation has a strong focus on empowered women changing their own lives through entrepreneurship, it would have made the book even more relevant to our work (surprisingly, Easterly did not write this book only for us). *The Tyranny of Experts* is a valuable history lesson and a highly recommended read. It will ask the reader to question facts and statistics presented by development institutions, to rethink old ideas about historical events and to value the rights of the individual, even when an autocrat manages to accomplish some good initiatives. I often think that confirmation bias causes people to seek out books that will verify what they already think, and that it is difficult to change anyone's opinion. I believe this book presents arguments compelling enough to challenge existing beliefs.

"Bracingly iconoclastic." --New York Times Book Review

"A provocative book that will rile the development world.... A timely blast against the complacency of those who think progress and prosperity can be detached from politics." *Guardian (UK)* "Easterly's message is simple: Before you offer a helping hand, look hard at the core beliefs that brought you good fortune." *Washington Post* "There is something indomitable about William Easterly, and he has struck the development establishment where it is weakest: its appalling human rights record." *Los Angeles Times Book* "Easterly is one of the most consistently interesting and provocative thinkers on development." *Bloomberg View* "Thought provoking." *Economist* "This powerful polemic against top-down aid projects convinces." *Times of London (UK)* "A passionate, if fitful, argument against the conventional approach to economic development." *Washington Post* "Easterly has written a book that grabs a reader's attention from the first sentence.... Highly recommended." *Choice* "Fascinating." *Lancet* "The Tyranny of Experts is intellectual comfort food for people ... who are skeptical of the idea that the only things standing between us and a world free of poverty are insufficient funding and political will." *Cato Institute's Regulation* "Easterly delivers a scathing assault on the anti-poverty programs associated with both the United Nations and its political and private sector supporters.... A sharply written polemic intended to stir up debate about the aims of global anti-poverty

campaigns" Kirkus" Easterly's research may help start a dialog about identifying better methods for alleviating global poverty and should assist readers interested in humanitarian efforts who want to draw their own conclusions about how to aid the world's poor." Library Journal About the Author William Easterly is a professor of economics at New York University. He was a senior research economist at the World Bank for sixteen years. He is the author of *The White Man's Burden* and *The Elusive Quest for Growth*, and was listed as a Highly Cited Researcher of 2014 by Thomson Reuters. Easterly lives in New York City.