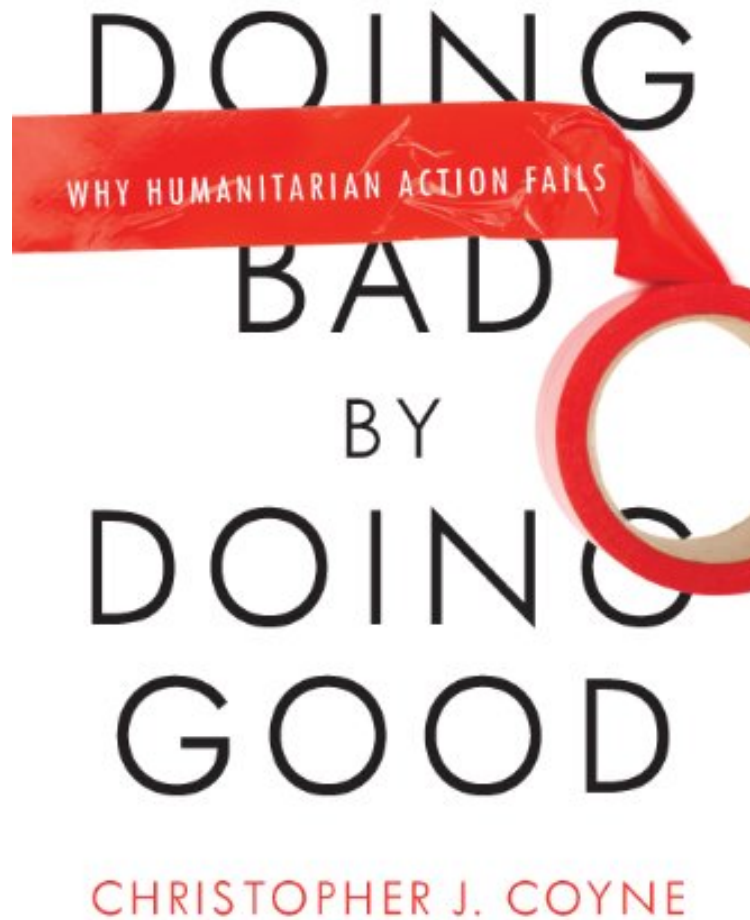


[Free pdf] Doing Bad by Doing Good: Why Humanitarian Action Fails

Doing Bad by Doing Good: Why Humanitarian Action Fails

Christopher J. Coyne

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Christopher J. Coyne : Doing Bad by Doing Good: Why Humanitarian Action Fails before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Doing Bad by Doing Good: Why Humanitarian Action Fails:

9 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Powerful insights for understanding the failures of Humanitarian Action through Economic and Systems Thinking By Mike Mertens Doing Bad by Doing Good by Chris Coyne is a very powerful application of economic reasoning and systems thinking to the sphere of Humanitarian Action. Coyne uses the concept of the "Man of the Humanitarian System Mentality" to describe those who think that improving the human condition is like a technological problem (like sending a man to the moon). He points out why this approach fails with

compelling examples and the underlying reasons for those failures. He begins by giving a brief history of Humanitarian Action and he notes the dramatic growth in the state's involvement in humanitarian aid in the last several decades. His discussion of the growth of "Military Humanitarian Interventions" was very interesting (including the unintended consequences that arise in these situations). In Part 2, he covers the realities of humanitarian action. This section has very good chapters on "Adaptability and the Planner's problem", "Political Competition replaces Market Competition", "The Bureaucracy of Humanitarianism", and "Killing People with Kindness". There are many valuable insights and examples in each of these chapters. For this review, I want to focus on his discussion of systems and systems effects (which is covered in the chapter on "Killing People with Kindness"). Coyne discusses the difference between linear ("changes in outputs are directly proportional to changes in inputs") and complex systems. The "Man of the Humanitarian System Mentality" treats humanitarian problems as if they were linear when they are in fact complex. Coyne gives a definition of complex systems (from Robert Jervis) and then draws out 3 key implications when we apply systems thinking: 1.) aggregate results and outcomes cannot be easily predicted from separate, individual actions 2.) people behave strategically (an action or anticipated action by one person will change the behavior of people in the present) 3.) actions in the present will contribute to changes in the system environment itself, which will change behaviors and actions in the future. He then proceeds to show how this plays out with examples from recipient governments (Haiti, North Korea and others) and then has an enlightening section on the impact to citizen recipients (the "Samaritan's Dilemma") as well. His last section has the implications for Humanitarian Action and covers what Coyne believes can be done and what cannot be done. He shares his reasons for optimism as well as reasons for pessimism. He discusses "Development as Discovery" and the importance of removing barriers to the discovery process. He discusses the powerful benefits that can be had from reforming migration policies and increasing global economic freedom. Coyne notes in his last paragraph that "The economic way of thinking is crucial for understanding human civilization and improvements in human well-being. It ultimately is up to those concerned with human well-being whether they will appreciate the insights provided by economics." Coyne has done a remarkable job in articulating those insights. I highly recommend this book and I hope that it gets the wide readership that it deserves. 14 of 15 people found the following review helpful. This book is bigger than its title. By Veeon My policy wonk side was intrigued by the theme and cover, but reading it got me thinking about the deficiencies in all endeavors, not just humanitarian, that fail to use markets to allocate resources. Currently I have been blogging about Paul Krugman (spenders) versus the "Austerians" (non-spenders) where I had trouble articulating the difference between good versus bad spending. This book has given me back the tools that I forgot I had. 10 of 11 people found the following review helpful. No remedy for all the sorrows of the world . . . By Kent Price "The fact that I have no remedy for all the sorrows of the world is no reason for my accepting yours. It simply supports the strong probability that yours is a fake." H. L. Menchen, 1956. The book gives many examples supporting the above quote. Perhaps there are too many words, but the conclusion seems to be that top down solutions imposed by supposed "experts" are bound to fail. A better approach to help is to focus on the processes that allow imperfect people to experiment, learn, and interact with others. This is a thought provoking book on how to help others.

In 2010, Haiti was ravaged by a brutal earthquake that affected the lives of millions. The call to assist those in need was heard around the globe. Yet two years later humanitarian efforts led by governments and NGOs have largely failed. Resources are not reaching the needy due to bureaucratic red tape, and many assets have been squandered. How can efforts intended to help the suffering fail so badly? In this timely and provocative book, Christopher J. Coyne uses the economic way of thinking to explain why this and other humanitarian efforts that intend to do good end up doing nothing or causing harm. In addition to Haiti, Coyne considers a wide range of interventions. He explains why the U.S. government was ineffective following Hurricane Katrina, why the international humanitarian push to remove Muammar Gaddafi in Libya may very well end up causing more problems than prosperity, and why decades of efforts to respond to crises and foster development around the world have resulted in repeated failures. In place of the dominant approach to state-led humanitarian action, this book offers a bold alternative, focused on establishing an environment of economic freedom. If we are willing to experiment with aid—asking questions about how to foster development as a process of societal discovery, or how else we might engage the private sector, for instance—we increase the range of alternatives to help people and empower them to improve their communities. Anyone concerned with and dedicated to alleviating human suffering in the short term or for the long haul, from policymakers and activists to scholars, will find this book to be an insightful and provocative reframing of humanitarian action.

"Coyne attempts to explain why conventional approaches to humanitarian aid and longer term economic development have failed miserably . . . Recommended." (M. Q. Dao) "Coyne's message is desperately needed within the development community. He develops a systematic theory that enables us to better understand foreign intervention, expertly revealing its application in a wide range of countries over time." (Benjamin Powell, Professor of Economics Texas Tech University) "Insanity has been defined as doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a

different result. Bringing public choice and Austrian economics to bear, Coyne explains why conventional approaches to humanitarian aid and longer-term economic development have failed miserably and how to avoid repeating the same mistakes." (William F. Shughart II, J. Fish Smith Professor in Public Choice Utah State University)"Coyne is to be congratulated for a book that strongly calls into question the conventional wisdom that we must look first to government to accomplish humanitarian ends." (George Leef Regulation Magazine)"If you seek to assist people in need because of chronic poverty or natural calamities, steer clear of government aid programs and provide the assistance directly or via private organizations. Government aid programs have a proven record of failure, which is not coincidental, but systematic, owing to faulty knowledge and perverse political incentives. Christopher Coyne's new book provides the relevant facts and analysis to understand this important matter." (Robert Higgs, Senior Fellow in Political Economy The Independent Institute)"Coyne offers a classic neo-liberal economic analysis to explain why the humanitarian project in its current state is doomed." (Zoe Cormack)About the AuthorChristopher J. Coyne is the F.A. Harper Professor of Economics at George Mason University and the Associate Director of the F. A. Hayek Program for Advanced Study in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics at the Mercatus Center. He is the author of *After War: The Political Economy of Exporting Democracy*, coauthor of *Media, Development, and Institutional Change*, and coeditor of *The Handbook on the Political Economy of War*.