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Review of *The Idealist: Jeffrey Sachs and the Quest to End Poverty*. Nina Munk. Reviewed by Edward U. Murphy

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facilities enhanced by inspections and accountability mechanisms. Newbold describes Paremoremo, a maximum security prison opened in New Zealand in 1969 that initially paralleled the path of FCI-Marion but that experienced physical and operational decline due to New Zealand's increasing violence and drug crime.

The book's biggest weakness is the inclusion of the chapters on the conditions of confinement at Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib. While these are fascinating historical accounts of neo-conservative practices, including supermax and questionable interrogation techniques, these chapters feel misaligned in this book. Since the U.S. chapter generalizes about supermax practice for the entire country, another chapter or two highlighting specific state supermax prisons would have made for a nice contrast with the detail given about other countries' supermax regimes. However, Ross successfully delivers on his comparative analysis of supermax in nine countries and offers a measured discussion of diffusion and globalization. One is struck by many of the global patterns found: the disproportionate incarceration of minorities; the enormous differences that individual leaders make in successful implementation; and how public scrutiny usually results in improved and more humane conditions of confinement. *The Globalization of Supermax Prisons* is a must-read for any student, practitioner, or scholar of punishment and correctional practices.

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Nina Munk, *The Idealist: Jeffrey Sachs and the Quest to End Poverty*. Doubleday (2013). \$15.95 (paperback).

Jeffrey Sachs wants to save the world. More precisely, his goal is to eliminate extreme poverty worldwide in a few decades. Is this a preposterous, Promethean dream? No. It is conceivable, and perhaps feasible: the percentage of the global population living on less than \$1.25 per day has fallen by more than half during the past 25 years, actually meeting the Millennium Development Goal set in 2000. However, much of the recent global progress on poverty reduction is accounted

for by rapid economic growth in Asia. The principal challenge remaining is in Sub-Saharan Africa, which has seen only a modest reduction in the proportion of the very poor—to just under one in two.

The Idealist is the story of Jeffrey Sachs' single-minded drive to rescue Africa from poverty. Who is this man? Sachs is a high-profile economist based at Columbia University. Initially a wunderkind macroeconomist at Harvard, he notoriously advised Russia and Bolivia in the 1980s to address their economic problems with a form of "shock therapy." In the 1990s, after discovering Africa beset by AIDS, malaria, and persistent poverty, Sachs resolved to do something about it.

He became special advisor to UN Secretaries General Kofi Annan and Ban Ki-Moon, helped create the Millennium Development Goals, published the widely-read *The End of Poverty*, campaigned with celebrities, and lobbied world leaders for a doubling of foreign aid to Africa. For Sachs, the existence of desperate poverty is an outrage that must be addressed immediately with all the resources that the world can muster. He and U2 singer Bono became the world's leading evangelists for the idea that that extreme poverty is a shameful failure of moral imagination and, with sufficient global political will and donor assistance, it can be eliminated in a matter of decades.

The Idealist is a riveting account of the centerpiece of Sachs' vision and extraordinary fundraising, the Millennium Village Projects. The MVPs are series of unusually well-funded integrated rural development projects in Africa encompassing coordinated improvements in agriculture, small-scale industry, education, health care, housing, and water and sanitation. If these succeeded in raising living standards, Sachs reasoned, he could demonstrate to donors that the only thing keeping Africans in poverty was lack of adequate funding. Hence, the MVP approach could then be scaled up massively with the \$200 billion—just a quarter of the 2013 Pentagon budget—needed to eliminate extreme poverty.

Nina Munk, a contributing editor at *Vanity Fair*, wrote a profile of Sachs in 2007 that ultimately led to this book. What is especially admirable is that she spent time in two of the MVPs: Dertu, a semi-arid community in northeast Uganda near the Somali border; and Ruhiira, a village in the highlands of

southwest Uganda. She talked extensively with project managers and others living in these villages. Her reporting allows her to compare Sachs' grand design against the realities on the ground. The setbacks were legion: the rains fail, economic opportunities are lacking, fertilizer prices soar, and both expectations and resentments rise. The MVP headquarters in New York insisted that farmers plant drought-resistant maize, but the villagers just don't like the taste, and so on.

The lives of those in The Millennium Villages have indeed improved, according to various metrics, but progress has also been made elsewhere in Africa. How much is attributable to the MVPs? Unfortunately, we can't know because Sachs was uninterested in supporting rigorous, independent evaluations such as randomized control trials. Experienced development experts, explains Munk, are almost universally skeptical of what they consider the unsustainable nature of the MVPs, and they are personally offended by the man's megalomania and dismissal of their concerns. The rub is this: whereas Sachs advocates big ideas and comprehensive solutions to African poverty, development economists such as Esther Duflo advocate modest, empirically-grounded strategies. In addition, recent Asian experience demonstrates that rapid economic growth is the best way to reduce extreme poverty. Foreign aid, as far as we know, cannot foster economic growth, but it can help improve lives.

It is a case of hubris versus humility, but perhaps social change needs both. Despite Jeffrey Sachs' grandiosity, missteps, and rough edges, there is much to be learned from the story of a brilliant, passionate visionary obsessed with ending extreme poverty in our time. In this fine book, Nina Munk has brought the man and his mission to life, giving us much food for thought.

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Sarah Banks (Ed.), *Ethics*. (Critical and Radical Debates in Social Work, I. Ferguson & M. Lavalette, series editors). Policy Press (2014). \$15.00 (paperback).

Ethics, edited by Sarah Banks (who also contributes the