

Amartya Sen, *Home in the World: A Memoir* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2022), pp. 464, \$39.98. ISBN: 9781324091615.

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The import of Amartya Sen's work in economics and philosophy, quite apart from its impact on human lives, is well known. This memoir, dealing with the early part of Sen's life, traces the origin and development of his ideas. It makes it clear that its author ventured out rather early to inquire into the nature of decision making at the collective and individual levels, a subject that would be central to his mature output. A good example is the paper he co-wrote with Garry Runciman when he was just twenty-six, which was accepted by the prestigious journal *Mind*, edited by Gilbert Ryle. More recently, he attempted to broaden the contours of justice (*The Idea of Justice*, published in 2009) by reasserting an old strand of moral philosophy: the inequality-reducing aspect of justice.

As Sen makes it clear in the preface, the title *Home in the World* carries an ideal of an undivided world within it, as well as a description of a life lived in many parts of the world. Sen writes: “[T]he book is not, of course, an investigation of the nature of civilization, but, as the reader will see, its sympathies are with an inclusive rather than a fragmentary understanding of what the world offers” (p. xiv).

The book is divided into five parts and further into twenty-six chapters, and ends somewhat abruptly in 1963, around the time Sen joined the Delhi School of Economics as a professor of economic theory. In these five sections, which refer often to contemporaneous issues (so extensively that it makes it impossible to call this book a record of his growing years), he captures an early childhood spent in three countries—India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar (all before the age of three)—and his student and teaching years in Britain and at MIT, Stanford University, and the University of California, Berkeley, in the USA.

Among other things, the book helps us understand three different approaches to economics followed on three continents in Amartya Sen's early academic career: at Presidency College, Calcutta, mathematical rigor mattered the most in a program that did not strictly categorize the subject into neoclassical or neo-Keynesian economics. In Cambridge, UK, the subject was divided sharply along ideological lines between the Keynesians (Richard Kahn, Nicholas Kaldor, Joan Robinson), the neoclassicals (Dennis Robertson, Harry Johnson, Michael Farrel), and the Marxians (Maurice Dobb, Piero Sraffa). Taking care not to be pulled into any of these groups and thereafter fighting their ideological turf battles, Sen instead preferred to engage with peers and mentors from every strand of economic thought, such as Dennis Robertson, Maurice Dobb, and Peter Bauer. He found it easier to maintain this stance at MIT, with Paul Samuelson (“He remained entirely focused on the truth that could emerge from the argument, rather than being concerned with winning the debate” [p. 364]) and Robert Solow (“Bob Solow may not have been aware how much I was learning from him through our intermittent conversations” [p. 360]) at the helm, both highly accomplished figures with a healthy attitude towards criticism. In fact, it was this welcoming approach that made him take seriously the prospect of returning to the US in the future (“I told myself that a mixed life, if well organized between India and a good American or British university, could be both enjoyable and productive” (p. 365)).

“What to Make of Marx” is the sole chapter that is exclusively devoted to discussing one thinker’s ideas. Following Maurice Dobb’s view that the labor theory of value is “a factual description of socio-economic relationships,” not just as a first approximation of relative price of commodities (such an approximation, said Samuelson, could be dropped, but Dobb disagreed, saying that if there is something in the first approximation that is not in the second, the first could be retained with profit), Sen suggests that Karl Marx was an neglected thinker in the teaching of economics even in left-dominated Calcutta (“with his towering presence looming on the periphery” [p. 207]). Sen finds striking the originality of Marx’s ideas such as “objective illusion” and “false consciousness.” The need-based allocation of resources as suggested by Marx (“arranging for payments according to people’s needs, rather than their work and productivity” [p. 213]) is an important principle for the welfare states of today.

The fourth chapter, called “The Company of Grandparents,” is much more personal than the others. One amusing anecdote is that of a five-year-old Amartya, who was taken to the meeting hall of Santhinikethan (the campus town of Viswabharati, the university created by the poet Rabindranath Tagore) by his maternal grandmother. She told him in advance that everyone in the hall, including himself, was expected to keep quiet so as to maintain silence. Suddenly, Tagore, who was seated on the stage, started speaking. Perplexed by this violation of the common rule, little Sen asked his grandmother rather loudly: “So why is that man there speaking then?” This precocity, even what could have been perceived as disobedience at the time, seemed to have kept Sen in good stead as a critic of, say, economic theory or moral philosophy.

The three recurring characters in the book are Kshiti Mohan Sen, his maternal grandfather and reputed Sanskrit scholar; Rabindranath Tagore; and Adam Smith. While Sen quotes Smith often to make a point in economics or philosophy, Kshiti Mohan, who had published in five languages, is acknowledged as the source of his early appreciation of precision in expression. Rabindranath Tagore made larger problems of the world matters of concern for Sen and for everyone around him. Since Sen was brought up on Tagore’s campus, Viswabharati, from the age of six to sixteen, the poet’s overwhelming influence in his life is obvious. To mention a minor but significant fact: the book ends with a quote by the poet. However, on an intellectual ground, Sen finds Kshiti Mohan and Smith more agreeable than Tagore, who is admired by Sen for his monumental contributions to the culture and literature of Bengal and the world in general, where Sen finds himself at home.

It is clear that those pressing problems of his early days—famine, inequality, poverty, and social choice—were to be the same ones he worked out later in his career. His disappointment is obvious when he speaks of his PhD days: “It [Cambridge University] was much less concerned with other critically important issues, such as inequality, poverty and exploitation” (p. 287).

Sen’s effort to relate his personal experience to theory is not limited to the well-known example of his book *Poverty and Famines*, which directly links to his personal experience of the Bengal famine in the year 1944; as he says in *Home in the World*, “the continuous cries for help—from children and women and men—ring in my ears even today, seventy-seven years later” (p. 115). That effort is equally present in his conceptualization of identity and its bearing on planned violence (“When, many decades later, I wrote a book called *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*, published in 2006, on the dangers of seeing other people—and ourselves—in terms of a singular identity, I

could not help feeling that I was merely completing a journey that I had begun many decades earlier, on that blood-soaked afternoon of Kader Mia's murder" [p. 123], and his inquiry into how individual preferences and collective choices work ("Though the demand for the partition of the country began with the Muslim League, many upper-class [and mostly upper-caste] Hindus in Bangal moved rapidly towards wanting to partition the province, as a part of the general bifurcation of India" [p. 126]).

Among other things, the book is a master class on how the social phenomenon of life ought to be perceived. His approach is so comprehensive and interwoven that any issue at hand is looked at from all possible points of view. The care with which social life is discussed from childhood—for instance, his encounters with his grandfather on matters related to Mughal history or the methods of scientific research—is, to say the least, unusually exacting.

Home in the World is full of layers of meaning. Each word is used in a measured and precise manner—both Sanskrit and Bengali are known for such diligence—making the writing transcend even the level of clarity that characterizes Sen's prose. For example, the title of the book could be an allusion to Tagore's famous novel *Home and the World*, or it could well bring to mind the house of his paternal grandparents in Dhaka named *jagat kutir* (the cottage of the world), or even an allusion to his maternal grandfather, whom he was very close to ("Kshiti Mohan" could also be translated—roughly though—as "charmed by the world"). It could be a necessary corrective to the limited world view of the propagators of the "clash of civilizations" or perhaps a precept for the people of Bengal—a linguistically proud society at large yet now divided into two countries. It could equally be an evocation of the Vedic line *yatra viswam bhavathieka needom* (let the world happen here like a bird's nest) that Tagore later made the motto of Viswabharati, where Sen was educated in his childhood. The title could, of course, remind one of Socrates, who is quoted to have said, rather memorably: "I am not an Athenian or Greek but a citizen of the world."

Sen's book is soaked through with ideas and conversations about ideas, and the intellectual camaraderie that spontaneously forms around these. It is filled with hope and a sturdy optimism that never doubts the human capability to address larger issues of the world.

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COMPETING INTEREST

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

Antonio Magliulo, *A History of European Economic Thought* (London and New York: Routledge, 2022), pp. 206, \$128 (hardcover). ISBN: 9781032037677.

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The aim of this book is to fill a gap in the discipline, i.e., the lack of a history of economic thought specifically devoted to Europe, in which the European community is considered