



Welfare Goes Global: Making progress and catching up

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BOOK REVIEW

Welfare Goes Global: Making progress and catching up

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The outcomes of welfare are visible more to the naked eye than imbibed in graphical two-dimensional representations. In the pre ‘global village’ era, the notions and definitions of welfare were local. There was no comparison or catching-up. In the contemporary context, however, a global standard of minimum level(s) of welfare have been set. Each single country from across the world consists of aware and informed citizens who vote for an increase in welfare. To document the notions of modern-day welfare which is above the commonly understood economic welfare, Richard Rose comes up with a timely intervention in the form of the book, ‘Welfare Goes Global ...’. The book systematically traces the evolution of the notion, concept and practice of the concept and applications of welfare at a global scale over the past four centuries. An informed and evidence-based context is created throughout the book to anchor the modern connotations of welfare.

The immediate part of the book raises some timely and fundamental questions. The fundamental question raised by the book is: how is modern-day (global) welfare defined? What parameters constitute the uncompromising pillars of welfare? The furtherance of discussion and analysis raises more questions of timely significance like: Is welfare different from economic welfare? Is welfare primary or secondary to contemporary ruling elites and common citizens? Is catching up a real and parasitized phenomenon and do countries really aspire to catch up? What constitutes an ideal welfare mix? What is the position of money in contemporary global welfare? How are the non-monetized welfare measures measured?

2024 is the right time to educate the world and its population about the difference between economic development and overall development. In the past centuries when both the agency and resources of the government were limited, welfare would essentially come from two of three institutions of welfare including the market and the household. In contemporary times, the agency and capability of the governments have increased and as such now is the time that welfare comes predominantly from the third institution of ‘state’. The book though covering four centuries of welfare trajectory, analyzes the past three decades (1991–2019) in detail. The discussions and axiomatic paradigms of the book generalize the notions for approximately 07.3 billion people globally. An exhaustive scope of 127 countries across all continents

is covered and the broad parameters are compared. The derived importance of the book is also anchored in the realization of computers and the internet on the changing know-how, information and knowledge frontiers of people from across the world.

Rose re-validates three basic parameters of welfare viz. health, education and employment (opportunities). It is axiomatically validated that the scope of welfare always has to be inclusive of these three basic pre-requisites to further sustainable development. A detailed section of the book is dedicated to the understanding and validation of these basic welfare forms. Globalized perspectives on health, education and gendered employment opportunities and outcomes are discussed in detail and simultaneity. The book validates the impact of computers and the internet on globalizing these three uncompromised measures of welfare. To decode modern-day problems of people and states the decoding of these three basic parameters is essential. Each social scientist needs to be aware of this interplay to make an informed intervention eventually.

The evolved and changing frontier of welfare have evolved to create a welfare mix for an individual. A combination of efforts by the state, market(s) and household results in the eventual welfare outcomes. Rose empirically substantiates the axiom that depending on the contribution and effort made by each one of these institutions, differing outcomes of welfare are registered across different instances. Systematic unfolding of the arguments in the book validates the changing and altering role of institutions over time. While initially, household held the prominent position of providing individual welfare, it has seen a shift over time. Increasingly over time, the state has been gaining prominence in facilitating individual welfare. The increase in access to information has validated the uncompromising importance of health, education and employment. Rose points out that the agency of the state to facilitate and provide such needs. It is through axioms and validations like these that the book is a timely attempt in validating both the prominence and importance of welfare globally in the twenty-first century.

While the undeniability of universalization of welfare is a self-validating axiom, the question is: can the notion and definition of welfare be universalized? The understanding of welfare will always be subjective and liable to personal and regional interpretations. The attempts to universalize the definition, interpretation and attainment of a universal welfare might be too ambitious a dream to realize in practicality. It may at the same time not be required as well to generalize and universalize welfare. Different nations are under diverse structural mechanisms at distinct points in time. The welfare demands, needs and requirements are unique for each time period. Similar to definitional diversity, catching-up is a tricky concept. Rose argues that the developing and under-developed nations are constantly aiming to catch up with the developed nations. The developed nations themselves are constantly evolving in their understanding, provisions and practices of welfare. In a scenario of constantly changing and altering benchmarks the goal of catching-up holds no grounds.

Realizations like these validate the inwards-looking nature of the welfare phenomenon as against the projections of universalization.

Despite these limitations in the furtherance of universalization of welfare, the book is an appropriate attempt to contextualize global individual welfare. The expectations and requirements from the household, state and market immediately needed a recheck, which Rose is justifiably doing. The dynamic nature of welfare is acknowledged right at the onset of the discussion. The uncompromising elements of welfare including health, education and employment have also been successfully quantified over the past three decades. The same data further convincingly predicts that given the current interventions made in this direction, these parameters are going to witness a further rise and improvisation. The results from the book are skeptically promising. While the trajectory does in fact seem promising, the costs of upscaling the process need not be ignored or depressed.

The frontier attempt by Rose toward a better understanding of welfare and its global notions in contemporary times has all the potential of invoking the curiosity of common people and policy makers alike. The book toward its end brings out the reader from the neo-classical and traditional notions of welfare. At the same time, the reader is duly pushed closer toward the frontiers of critical understanding. While some of the concepts from the book directly appeal to the logic of the reader, others make him question the larger knowledge frontier. In both cases, an average reader is pushed out of his comfort zone of accepting the ideas and practices as they are. The reader is instead invoked to think outside the box. A critical reader by the end of this book will very much be a potential writer exploring the unanswered questions that Rose leaves written, under-written or un-written.

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