

An Adaptation of John Rawls' Concept of Democratic Autonomy to the Citizenship Question in African Politics

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Abstract

After decades of independence, many African states are still enmeshed in the web of misrule. Among other factors, this problem stems from abysmal conception of the duties and responsibilities of citizenship among the proletariat, due to the perennial denial of social justice in pseudo-democratic regimes. Against this background, this paper adopts critical and expository methods to explore John Rawls' theory of justice, with the overarching aim of using the veritable tools therein to resolve the citizenship crisis in Africa's democracies. Rawls, a foremost social and political thinker of the twentieth century, contends that each person in society possesses basic dignity and rights that can never be compromised by the state for its own end; that is, each citizen of the state is an end in themselves as a human being and, thus, cannot be treated as means of achieving the self-serving purposes of the state and its leaders. This dignity is inherently reposed in humans simply because of their rational nature. For Rawls, therefore, these premises lead to the conclusion that all citizens, especially those who suffer neglect and marginalization from the pervasive bad governance in Africa, must be accorded due consideration in the distribution of social goods and services. To this end, the paper submits that Rawls' theory provides the blueprint for addressing the citizenship question in African politics, because it is a consolidation of the African traditional communal system of life and politics. Africa will be more likely to gain the status of a well-ordered society when its diverse polities rekindle the sense of dignity, rights and democratic autonomy in its citizenry, as citizens demand

accountability through active democratic participation. Data used for this study came from library and archival sources and were subjected to critical and content analysis.

Key words: Democracy; John Rawls; Nigeria; Political; Social; Theory of justice

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INTRODUCTION

Why are most African countries stuck in the quicksand of bad governance and abject lack of accountability of leadership, after several decades of independence and attempt at democratization? What factors are responsible for this shortfall, and what kind of theoretical framework of social and political arrangement would fill the vacuum? The argument of this paper is that, aside from the perennial factor of neo-colonialism that encourages bad governance across Africa, a much more entrenched challenge to the social and political advancement of most African nations is abysmal understanding and appreciation of the concept and phenomenon of *citizenship* among the members of the governed public. This problem is not confined to the uneducated class; it exists even among the well-educated sections of society.

For example, many Nigerians have no clue of the power that accrues to them simply as citizens of the state. Rather, they unwittingly (sometimes willingly) regard themselves as the appendages of political office holders and politicians who control state resources and abuse authority, with the concomitant high degree of poverty of the mind in the land, and eroded sense of

self-worth, carefully crafted into the polity through the weaponization of poverty and brazen withdrawal of the basic necessities of life (Oduowo, 2024; Omenuko, 2025; Gabriel and Nkwopara, 2025). This has widened the gap between the leaders and the citizens, as well as heightened lack of transparency and accountability in governance. In fact, many Nigerians launch vicious verbal attack against their fellow citizens who raise critical questions about the social and economic situation in the country (Odozor et al., 2019). They support mediocre leadership by sacrificing good governance on the altar of partisanship and ethnicity. In this way, they derail the basic sustainable development goals (SDGs) (UNDP, n.d.) and national development. Politicians reciprocate the gesture by treating their compatriots with levity: bad, unpopular policies, inaccessibility, lack of accountability and transparency, condescending behaviour and inability to provide credible answers to burning national issues.

The aim of this paper is to fill this gap by adopting John Rawls' theory of justice as theoretical framework, while using Nigeria's current democratic dispensation as a case study. This choice of Rawls' work is informed by the fact that it is a useful social contract blueprint that consolidates the subsisting African communal way of life, while furnishing a conception of citizenship that is based on autonomy and equality, duties and responsibilities towards the state, and active ownership and participation in community and state governance. To this end, the paper also examines and assesses the merits of Rawls' proposals in view of the establishment of a well-ordered social framework in Africa, for sustainable peace, justice and development. After an analysis of Rawls' theory of justice against the basic sustainable development goals (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 16) and the objections raised against the theory by Rawls' contemporaries, the submission of this paper is that Rawls' idea of democratic equality and autonomy duly resolves the citizenship question in Africa's current pseudo-democracies, despite the shortcomings. These SDGs were selected for this study because they are the minimum standards a society must meet to be, at least, among the developing societies. The limitations of this study include the fact that the claims made herein may not necessarily apply to African countries to the same degree, as some of them have made more remarkable progress than others in certain indices; also, the research is qualitative rather than quantitative, which means that it relies quite substantially on published materials that may not capture the most recent data on an hourly basis. However, further research can fill these gaps by focusing on the peculiarities and the more specifics of individual African states, and by continuing from where the current research has leaves off.

RAWLS' A THEORY OF JUSTICE

In his book, *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls (1971, p.7) sets the tone by noting that:

Many different kinds of things are said to be just and unjust: ... laws, institutions, and social system, ... actions of many kinds including decisions, judgments, and imputations. ... Attitudes and dispositions of persons, and persons themselves ... Our topic, however, is that of social justice.

According to Rawls, the basic structure of a well-ordered society is the primary subject of justice; that is, "the way in which the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation" (p.7). Examples of major social institutions include factors like competitive markets, private property as means of production, the (monogamous) family, with legal protection of freedom of thought and liberty of conscience. This basic structure of society carries various social positions and those born into such positions tend to have different expectations of life which are determined by the political system and the economic and social circumstances of a given environment.

For Rawls, therefore, an ideal society is "A more or less self-sufficient association of persons who in their relations to one another recognize certain rules of conduct as binding and who for the most part act in accordance with them" (p.7). These rules specify a system of cooperation designed to advance the common good. Even though the state promotes the mutual advantage interest of the citizenry, the state is also marked by conflict of interests among the citizens. There is conflict of interests, because citizens sometimes prefer—even advocate—a larger share of social assets for themselves. Identity of interests is founded on the fact that social cooperation makes possible a better life for all than each person would have as an individual.

This, in Rawls' reckoning, is where the principles of social justice determine which similarities and differences among citizens are relevant in distributing rights and duties, as well as specifying the appropriate division of advantages (p.5f.). So, Rawls submits that institutions are just when no arbitrary distinctions are made between individuals in the assigning of basic rights and duties and when the rules determine a proper balance between competing claims.

Original position of equality

Rawls' theoretical concept of *original position* refers to that initial situation of equality corresponding to the "natural state" of the social contract theorists. But Rawls' variant is a purely hypothetical situation, not an actual one. The original position is the primordial beginning before humans closed ranks to initiate social cooperation, during which no one understood their status or role in society; nor did anyone know yet their own fortune as

regards the distribution of natural assets and abilities. In fact, the parties did not yet even know what constituted the good for them, nor their "special propensities" (p.12), because everything was still arbitrary, as there was no common point of reference. It is said to be 'original' because it is the *status quo ante*. No one had any biases against another; rather, everyone was anxious for a just and equitable situation in the ensuing society. Rawls believes that the choice of the principles of justice must be made at this stage to regulate all subsequent criticism and reform of other social institutions. Once the principles were unanimously chosen and accepted, they became somewhat irrevocable to stop anyone from sneaking in any changes to favour themselves. Since this original position is a fair initial situation, the fundamental agreements reached in it must, thus, be considered fair.

Two Principles of Justice

Rawls talks about *principles* of justice, which were the objects of the original agreement for the basic structure of society, as it evolved from the Original Position of equality into an actual state under the rule of law. These principles specify what kinds of social cooperation that may be initiated, as well as the forms of government that may be chosen by the parties constituting the state. Through them the people assign basic rights and duties to each citizen and then determine the division of social benefits and burdens as appropriate. The principles are as follows:

- Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others.
- Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both i) to everyone's advantage, and ii) attached to positions and offices open to all (p.60f.).

Among the basic liberties of citizenship, Rawls includes political liberty, in the right to vote and to be eligible for public office; freedom of speech; liberty of conscience and freedom of thought; freedom of the person from arbitrary arrest and seizure and the right to hold (personal) property. The aim of the first principle of justice is to ensure that these liberties are equal, so citizens of a just society may have the same basic rights.

Based on the second principle above, Rawls urges that, even though the distribution of wealth and income need not be equal, it must be to everyone's advantage; and positions of authority and offices of command must be accessible to all citizens. This principle specifically insists that any change, law, or socio-economic arrangement in the society, must aim at benefiting the "least advantaged" in the society (Freeman, 2023, par.1). This is the Difference Principle, with which Rawls substitutes the utilitarian "efficiency principle" that advocates the greatest amount of satisfaction for the greatest possible number of persons, even if some bona fide citizens of the state were to be left out of consideration in the distribution of social

assets (Parijs, 2003). Rawls does not so much advocate equality of wealth and social positions as he does that of opportunities. There is no objection to one individual being richer than another or being in a higher position than another, so long as they all have equal opportunities; and no question of "the rich getting richer and/or the poor poorer" (Omogbe, 1993, p.269). In summary, Rawls (1971, p.62) two principles mean that social and economic inequalities are unacceptable unless they take equal cognizance of the individual citizens of the state:

All social values—liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the bases of self-respect—are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any, or all, of these values is to everyone's advantage.

Veil of Ignorance

Another important notion in Rawls' account of social justice is *veil of ignorance*. Precisely, the principles of justice decided in the original position are chosen behind the veil of ignorance. The purpose of this veil is to ensure justice and fairness (impartiality) to all the careers, professions or positions in the emerging society; for if a person were to know beforehand what his career was going to be, he would naturally be moved by selfish interest to focus on advocating the principles that would favour that career. But the veil of ignorance would make the individual advocate the principles that would be fair to all careers such that whatever career a person finds himself in, he would not be disadvantaged. In this way, no one would be unduly advantaged or disadvantaged by the outcome of natural chance or the contingency of social circumstances. Once the veil of ignorance is removed, as noted earlier, the principles cannot be changed or reversed.

Implications for basic SDGs (1, 2, 3, 4, 16)

The Rawlsian theory of justice has some implications that facilitate the realization of the basic SDGs focusing on the eradication of poverty, hunger, diseases, and illiteracy, and the establishment of peace, justice and strong democratic institutions (UNDP, n.d.) in the African setting. The first is the universal validity of the dignity of the human person. This implication constitutes the main basis of Rawls' moral philosophy and, in fact, the core element that should be found in a well-ordered society and every carefully thought-out theory of justice. To that end, the questions are: how well does that society treat its citizenry, as a collective and as individuals? And to what extent does the proposed theory address the issue of human rights abuse and uphold the inherent dignity of the human person? For a society like Nigeria, where human rights abuse persists, even after more than twenty-five years of uninterrupted civil rule in the current dispensation, Rawls' theory is readily relevant and on point. The dignity of the human person is a vital issue to which every society must devote considerable attention to avoid the pitfalls

of totalitarianism, anarchy and disintegration. It is an expression of the worth of the human person and includes the right to life, free speech and access to information, moral and cultural values and expression, good education, religious freedom and practice, and freedom from undue harassment and arrest by the government. A society that takes these things into account is a well-ordered one, destined for peace, development and progress, as Pope John XXIII (cited in Blaser, 1981, p.10) succinctly notes:

Any human society, if it is to be well-ordered and productive, must lay down as a foundation this principle, namely that every human being is a person.... He has rights and obligations flowing directly from his very nature. And as these rights are universal and inviolable, so they cannot in any way be surrendered.

This theme is the basis of the social teachings of the Catholic Church; and it is squarely based on the nature of the person as a rational being. So, Rawls (1971, p.3f.) avers that:

Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override. For this reason, justice denies that the loss of freedom for some is made right by a greater good shared by others. It does not allow that the sacrifice imposed on a few are outweighed by the larger sum of advantages enjoyed by many. ... [A]n injustice is tolerable only when it is necessary to avoid an even greater injustice.

Thus, Rawls' theory resonates, and is consistent, with Immanuel Kant's (1953, p.96) "categorical imperative" notion that the human person is an end in themselves, to be viewed and treated accordingly, and never simply as a means (Acton, 1970, p.4).

The second implication of Rawls' theory is that the privilege to lead is a trust, not a right in the exclusive sense that is typical of the Nigerian polity; the politics of "winner-takes-all" (*Daily Trust*, 5 Nov. 2023). In as much as each citizen is to be accorded respect due to their inherent dignity, the principal role of the government is to protect and uphold these dignity and rights. Since the Rawlsian circumstance is that of equality of liberty, opportunity and right, therein lies a framework of democratic equality in which the citizens have some say on how they are governed; and it is the obligation of the governing authorities to comply with these demands, as long as they are reasonable and for the common good. One of the basic duties of the government includes acting as an impartial judge between contending parties, interests, classes, races, creeds, and other divergent parties.

The third thing that can be deduced from Rawls work is the principle that assets and endowments, especially the natural assets of individuals, should be duly acknowledged, respected and tailored towards the wellbeing of the community or society. The productive class of citizens must not use their talents in a way that detracts from the wellbeing of the least endowed. It is in this that Rawls circumvents the Utilitarian dilemma which sees "no reason in principle why the greater gains of some

should not compensate for the lesser losses of others; or more importantly, why the violation of the liberty of a few might not be made right by the greater good shared by many" (Rawls, 1971, p.26).

Finally, Rawls' account implies the jettisoning of the notion of desert or merit. Aristotle (1962, V, iii, 1-3) agrees that there is some intrinsic relationship between justice and merit. For example, a man is treated justly if he is given *what he deserves*; another acts justly if he treats others *as they deserve*. Further, justice is satisfied if a person convicted of a crime gets *the punishment he deserves*. There seems to be hardly any more intuitively appealing view of justice than that, and it is widely held. But Rawls banishes considerations of desert from the discussion of social justice. This exclusion of desert apparently implies "a rejection of the notion of moral responsibility and following that, an undermining of the whole notion of personhood" (O'Connor, 1977, p.170).

DISCUSSION: CRITICAL CHALLENGES TO RAWLS' NOTION OF INDIVIDUAL AUTONOMY

Andelson (1975) notes that equal liberty, rightly interpreted and understood, is an idea broad enough to serve as a single criterion that renders gratuitous Rawls' three separate criteria of justice. Equally, Rawls casts his theory of justice as what would guide rational deliberation, as each party seeks to secure its share in the distribution of social primary goods. Since parties in the original position do not know that they will occupy the least advantaged place in society, would it not be more rational for them to insist upon certain minimum guarantees, thus, choosing a societal arrangement with expectations in all positions, and not merely the least favoured? However, this objection is a restatement of what Rawls precisely aims to accomplish: the establishment of "minimum guarantees" in all positions, albeit, in such a way that everyone is happy and no one is unduly disadvantaged through the sharp practices of fellow citizens.

Rawls describes the original position as a "purely hypothetical" situation, not an actual situation. He writes:

[T]he original position is not to be thought of as a general assembly which includes at one moment everyone who will live at some time; or less as assembly of everyone who could live at some time. It is not a gathering of all actual or possible persons (p.139).

What is the guarantee for the successful application of his theory to a concrete situation? For all *a priori* reasonableness, Rawls' proposals depend on this concretization process for whatever validity they possess; their usefulness is determined by the extent to which they can apply in the resolution of the social and political inequalities of an *actual* human society. Further, Rawls'

(1971, p.13) description of the parties in this position depicts them as “rational and mutually disinterested.” What better way is there to describe egoistic human beings?

Even though it is not necessary to Rawls whether or not the beings in the original position, in fact, exist, and although it is easy to imagine a person who does not know what his future profession will be, it is not so easy to imagine someone who does not know what his race, sex and temperament will be. To vote, for instance, a person will necessarily possess *some* genetic and temperamental features. A person with no temperamental features is unimaginable, because he would lack volition and, therefore, would hardly be a person at all. Being nothing specific, he would do nothing specific, let alone cooperate with other people in any form of social arrangement (Hospers, 1974). Again, Rawls favours government ownership of some (but not all) of the means of production: the free market, Rawls believes, is not just, and coercion by the state is required to correct it. Thus, he is not opposed to the inevitable consequence of such state coercion, the creation of a large bureaucracy to administer the affairs—an inefficient and wasteful bureaucracy over whose decisions the helpless individual citizen has virtually no control (Hospers, 1974). Yet freedom is foremost in Rawls' list of social primary goods.

Rawls' account says a great deal about the “distribution” of goods and very little about where the goods to be distributed are to come from. The more you penalize the productive class for their productivity by making them slave for the unproductive class, the less motivated they will be to produce and the lower the standard of living of society. Why produce beyond one's daily needs if one is taxed out of business by having to confer productive benefits upon the rest of society? This tendency “to seize the goods of some in order to provide unearned wages for others has been a main source of decay of many civilizations and would, undoubtedly, kill Rawls' civilization” (Hospers, 1974, p.75). Rawls makes the concept of “rights” conditional on it aiding the rest of society; and if such a right is maintained only through the sanction of the rest of society, then it is not something a person possesses because he is a person but only a privilege given him. This right is, therefore, “a considered moral judgment of some force” (Rasmussen, 1974, p.304). Clearly, an individual can still possess a right to their property—regardless of whether this contributes to the welfare of the rest of society.

Rawls theory of justice presupposes that the Difference Principle is the most rational decision open to the hypothetical contracting parties in the original position. Even if we granted Rawls this position, it would still be seen that people do not always have a duty to accept the most rational alternative in decision making. It can be contended that a person is under no moral liability to

accede to even the fairest and most reasonable bargain provided that his refusal to do so does not positively interfere with the freedom of anyone else. Under such circumstances, the individual reserves some freedom and right in choosing to be irrational. But, again, why would one “choose to be irrational” simply for the sake of freedom of choice?

Finally, Rawls insists on liberty of conscience, imagining that it is possible to preserve intellectual and spiritual freedom while curtailing economic ones. But his system is grounded on a premise fraught with sinister implications for freedoms of every kind. For instance, Rawls would make certain actions and omissions subject to legal interdiction and compulsion, not because they transgress rights or violate authentic claims of value, but merely because they are contrary to the decisions which would be made by rational persons in the original position of equality. Hospers (1975, p.76) summarizes this situation as follows:

The society Rawls envisions, so liberally sprinkled with the seeds of totalitarianism, so careless of the right to the fruits of one's labour that these fruits would be seized from him and left to the wasteful distribution-schemes of power-hungry bureaucrats, is not one that a person who wants to ensure his own long-term survival as a human being enjoying the continued benefits of civilization, would choose “from behind the veil of ignorance”.

Despite the logical weaknesses, Rawls' system remains “an impressive contemporary version of the social contract idea in the Kantian tradition” (Andelson, 1974, p.207) and a sustained and formidable critique of Utilitarianism. This section re-examines the objections to Rawls' work, to demonstrate that Rawls' insights can bolster the African social, economic, and political landscape, particularly from the perspective of the basic elements of the sustainable development goals. One central criticism is that the application of Rawls' Difference Principle necessarily violates his substantive thesis, namely the priority of freedom among the primary social goods. For if the unproductive were to be supported by the productive, the least advantaged by the wealthy citizens through the mediation of the state, then the freedom of the latter would be severely curtailed. However, such objections have certain individualistic underpinnings: they are a perfect blend of Western individualistic idiosyncrasies. In the Western outlook, individual freedom—as a concept—is often contrived as being diametrically opposed to and incompatible with the idea of allegiance to the community or communalism found in the traditional African society. Still, even in the West, large corporations provide employment for the larger section of society consisting of the middle- and lower-class citizens.

The ideas Rawls proposes about freedom do not necessarily have anything alien in them to the African context (Mulhall and Swift, 2003). In traditional African

communalism, members of a given community naturally pay allegiance to their community; they contribute their own quota to the common good, from which the least privileged are helped. They see this as a sacred duty to the community that takes precedence over personal interest, because it is understood that the latter is assured by the promotion of the former. The individual is, therefore, far from seeing his freedom as threatened; rather he sees himself as an important part of the larger unit. There are fulfillment, honour and pride in contributing to general wellbeing of one's community; in seeing the community benefit from one's efforts. Aja (1998, p.392) depicts it as follows:

The [extension] of the surplus ... to [those] in need, does not "relax the bounds" between the self and others. The individual never had the right to that surplus in African thought. [He] never had the right to benefit alone from his capabilities; and others [receive] the surplus because in them the individual derives his self-fulfillment. In fact, the idea of natural talents, as social assets in traditional African communalism, does not require any conception of the community which does not partake in the identity and interest of the individual. ... [T]he social body is a "We" which includes the individual; the right [freedom] of the individual is as such not curtailed.

In the absence of stark individualism, contributing to the common good of the community one lives in does not always or necessarily play down one's freedom, nor diminish one's individual existence. In fact, it can be considered as natural biological adaptation and survival, because of the contingent nature of human social living.

To have personal freedom presupposes other things besides being out of the control of another, for example: ability to exercise reasoning, and the strength of character required to implement what reasoning dictates (Aja, 1998, p.393). As such, the assumption that a person paying allegiance to their community's economic, political and social wellbeing does not think for themselves squarely ignores the possibility that the person could have deliberated on the issue and decided that the community ought to be obeyed in a particular circumstance and, perhaps, not in another one. Obedience may even stem from the simple moral principle that a person ought to assist others in need, and to obey the reasonable customs and traditions of the community in which they live. Rationality, in fact, sometimes consists in, and demands, this compliance. The individual is, in other words, thinking for himself: he thinks or believes that he should conform to these requirements because those in authority are reasonably expected to act in the interest of the collective; or because the very survival of the community depends, to a very large extent, on the loyalty of individual members. The dichotomy, therefore, between the person who acts on his reasoned judgment as a free person, and another who conforms to the dictates of the state authorities is a false one (Aja, 1998, p.394).

It might still be objected that the fact that traditional Africans do not *feel* their freedom being eroded away by communal allegiance does not mean that it is not indeed. In this view, freedom is not a subjective phenomenon such that it is only the individual that feels or knows whether he is free or not. A person can still be having a good time under the most severe condition of slavery. The fact that he does not show it by overt behaviour cannot automatically mean that he is free. One might as well, on that account, justify or approve of the exploitation of a primitive race of people on the grounds that they are/were uncivilized, uninformed or ignorant. However, there is something subjective about freedom; subjective in the sense that the individual is aware of it deep down. As Aquinas (1981, IIa-IIae; q.59; a.2f.) puts it, a person does properly and essentially what he does voluntarily; and a person suffers in a proper sense only what he suffers against his will, since the proper principle of action in the human species is the will.

Another criticism against Rawls suggests that taxation is theft by the state. But Rawls would grant that taxation does not necessarily violate the principle of liberty. The citizens of a just community would agree that taxation is necessary for achieving the aims and objectives of the community. Most Western societies have taxation systems in which citizens pay as they earn. The citizens see this as a duty and consider it reasonable and in their own interest and that of the common good. To this end, it is not merely the improvement of the livelihood of the least favoured members of society that Rawls advocates, as such, but the improvement of *all* social positions. It is to every citizen of the state that his theory applies. Indeed, Rawls considers the wellbeing of the least advantaged, but not in isolation from the rest of society. Another issue brought against Rawls is that his structure necessitates a complex and awesome bureaucracy. But such criticism would not be definitive enough because sometimes extensive public agencies are required to prevent people from interfering with the freedom of others (Andelson, 1975).

It was also objected against Rawls that it is impossible to conceive of what it would be like to be under the veil of ignorance. How can someone who does not know what his sex or race will be make a choice? In any case, Rawls need not deny that these people have a temperament because this state is simply a matter of attitude, akin to the suspension of judgment, or putting into brackets one's beliefs, preconceptions or biases towards others (Sagal, 1974), which is just one of the basic requirements of doing good science. Why should it be a problem where Rawls theory is concerned? Still, Rawls would reply that the original position is purely hypothetical as a mental construct, not an actual situation. This objection mistakes the Original Position for an actual situation. The issue is not *being* in the veil of ignorance but *acting as if one* were in it.

Another problem with most of these criticisms is that in them “freedom” is employed or used in ways Rawls has not intended. It is interesting to note that Rawls does not discuss the notion of responsibility or the freedom-responsibility problem, which would inevitably arise if freedom was interpreted too loosely. It is important to note that Rawls' motivation springs not merely from the resentment of injustice, but from commiseration with those whose lives have been scarred and stunted by the tragedy and misfortune of totalitarianism, particularly of the type found in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. Rawls' determination to select a principle of justice which imposes the duty of subsidizing those who have been unlucky on the more fortunate seems morally arbitrary indeed. But this objection might still be countered on the ground that the justification for Rawls' determination to nullify natural inequalities springs at least in part from the fact that the constraints placed on the parties in the Original Position are responsible for the anomaly, by leading the parties to adopt the “maximin rule” (Stell, 1978, p.213).

CONCLUSION

This paper is an attempt to sketch out the merits of John Rawls' principles of social justice, despite criticisms and shortcomings, as a blueprint for consolidation of the basic sustainable development goals (SDGs) on poverty, hunger, education, equality, peace, justice and strong institutions in African states, and for filling the lacuna of citizenship education, which has been eroded by decades of misuse in most of Africa (Ellis, 2005). Following a rigorous examination, Rawls' conception is found to be, at bottom, continuous even with traditional African communalism. His theory of social and political justice is a rejection of the Classical Utilitarian ethical principle that in all social engagements the greatest happiness of the greatest possible number of persons should be sought after, apparently because it is not possible to reach and please everyone in society. Rawls' substantive grouse is simply that every such neglect constitutes an injustice by default; that every law-abiding citizen of the state possesses individual autonomy and so, can only be accorded dignity and respect in the distributive scheme of any rightly ordered society. Rawls' account of distributive justice includes the notion of the veil of ignorance, required by those coming into a social arrangement to ensure justice to all relevant positions in the ensuing social space. Given that the provisions made by Rawls have replicated basic democratic advancement across the Western nations where they have been duly recognized and implemented, it is evident that African political leadership and citizenship cannot afford to remain in the doldrums, if there is, indeed, genuine intention to build a lasting peace in a well-ordered African society. With the insight and

enlightenment gleaned from Rawls' notion of democratic autonomy and proffered in this paper, the citizenry is now politically enlightened enough and strategically positioned to catalyze the long-expected paradigm shift and, thereby, extricate Africa and its various peoples from the vicious cycle of mediocre and tactless leadership without resorting to violence.

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