

Social Justice and Sustainable Development

Sprawiedliwość społeczna a zrównoważony rozwój

Mayavee Singh

*Department of Philosophy, Goa University, Goa, (Former Institution), India
E-mail: mayaveesingh@gmail.com*

Abstract

Rampant urbanization, climate change and growing demands for scant resources are just some of the myriad challenges facing our planet. It is indeed crucial for man to analyse the implications of his actions on an increasingly fragile environment. Present human interaction, with his environment, is clearly unsustainable due to the ruthless and imbalanced act of consumption of natural resources sans any parallel thought of nurturing the environment or protecting the interests of future generations. Against this backdrop, this paper argues that the notion of justice can play a pivotal role in understanding the idea of sustainable development. It concludes that the notion of sustainability can be envisaged, in the course of a critical analysis of John Rawls's *theory of justice*, as *justice as fairness*, a concept that contains sustainable behavior as a pertinent trait.

Key words: justice, sustainable development, environment, basic structure, theory of Justice, natural resources

Streszczenie

Gwałtowna urbanizacja, zmiany klimatu i rosnące zapotrzebowanie na kurezące się zasoby – to tylko kilka z niezliczonych wyzwań, przed którymi stoi nasza planeta. Konieczne jest więc dogłębne przeanalizowanie przyczyn i konsekwencji naszych działań na coraz bardziej kruche środowisko. Współczesna interakcja człowieka z jego otoczeniem jest wyraźnie niezrównoważona z powodu bezwzględnego aktu niepomiarowanej konsumpcji zasobów naturalnych, bez jakiegokolwiek myśli o pielęgnowaniu środowiska lub ochronie interesów przyszłych pokoleń. Poszukując rozwiązań tego kryzysu niniejszy artykuł sugeruje, że pojęcie sprawiedliwości może odgrywać kluczową rolę w zrozumieniu idei zrównoważonego rozwoju. Stwierdzono, że pojęcie zrównoważonego rozwoju można antycypować w trakcie krytycznej analizy *teorii sprawiedliwości* Johna Rawlsa, koncepcji której istotnym elementem jest zrównoważone zachowanie, traktując *sprawiedliwość jako uczciwość*.

Słowa kluczowe: sprawiedliwość, zrównoważony rozwój, środowisko, struktura podstawowa, teoria sprawiedliwości, zasoby naturalne

1. Introduction

The post-second world war scenario continues to promote developmental policies aimed at raising living standards. Thus, both qualitative and quantitative improvement in the areas of education, health, sanitation, nutrition and employment stand out as one of the key concerns and goals. Unfortunately, overall records of success, in these areas, are not indicative of the state of progress in some fundamental and significant aspects of development. Modernization, for example, is being intimidated by global warming, which is turning success into failure. The need,

therefore, is of a new paradigm that can tackle the challenges of traditional developmental practices. Sustainable development advocates development, within the framework of inter and intra-generational justice, to protect environment (Prakash, 2018).

Sustainable development, thus, propagates the *tri-partite goal* to attain the required success, so that living standards are raised meaningfully. Three elements of sustainability lead to the tripartite goal, to maintain the multidimensional potential of objectives. The first element is economic and endeavors at maximizing welfare. It aims at the efficient allocation of resources in a manner that counters the dam-

ages of industrial and agricultural production. The second element is environmental, that curbs excessive consumption of scant resources and maintains atmospheric and biodiversity functions. The third is social, that embraces distributional equity to maintain adequate social system (Harries, 2000, p. 5-6). This formulation of sustainable development can be clearly envisaged under the concept of social justice. Socrates's declaration on social justice is *doing one's own*. This exemplifies in a state wherein all citizens must participate by one of his occupations, that is best suited for them (Kamtekar, 2001, p. 189). However, justice is not limited to the distribution of social duties. It extends to the distribution of benefits. Plato's principle of social justice distributes goods to maximize the happiness of the entire city. The notion of social justice and happiness, both, emerge as the foundation of social organization in Plato's ideal city (Kamtekar, 2001, p. 191). At first, Aristotle's examination of politics, economics, law, social institution, and ethics divulges the unanimous ground of critical moral philosophy of political science, that is the social foundation for the realization of human nature (Mccarthy, 2009, p. 19-20). All citizens underlie the political community because the aim of this political community is to provide advantageous life to the whole (Arist. *NEVIII.9*, 1160a, p. 28-30). Here it is significant that, being inspired by Aristotelian notion of Justice, John Rawls showered accolade on the framework of the basic structure of justice (Rawls, 1971, p. 10). Being a political philosopher, John Rawls is principally recognized for his theory of *justice as fairness* which develops a just social system that proposes a nation state that looks upon the global community as a cooperative venture of individuals. Rawls theory of justice incorporates societal models. It implies the obligation of present generations, towards future generations, that would be fulfilled through sustainable development goals. In this paper, I have attempted to divulge this connection between justice and sustainable development.

2. Basic structure

Rawls's elucidation upon *A theory of justice* puts forth *justice as fairness*. It is indeed similar to a state wherein one elucidates upon *poetry as metaphor*. For Rawls, justice is the foremost value in politics and one should employ this into the basic structure of society. One adheres to society as a system of cooperation for the mutual advantage of individuals (Lacing). Thus, individuals work together to live a possibly better life in the basic structure of society. Rawls proposes that social institutions are to be just for all individuals irrespective of their gender, class

of origin, race, reasonable notion of good life etc. Consequently, as per the Rawlsian perspective, basic structure is the primary subject of justice. In order to understand the basic structure of society, we shall first take up Rawls's conception of person. Rawls rebuttal of utilitarian position, with regard to the concept of person, is due its dependency only upon gross happiness. He implicates those features in the person that can help the person choose as per the maximum rule and this approach reflects moral attitudes that play a vital role in living a successful life. Further, his proclamation is that person should be moral and inherently possesses two specific moral powers, namely, a sense of justice and a conception of the good. Thus, Rawls analyses the idea of person for developing a political notion of justice (Pogge, 1989, p. 96-97).

Being a member of the society, a citizen has some characteristics as a moral rational person. Rawls upholds equality among individuals so that all have approximately same needs and interests, to evaluate, and choose their ways of success, maintaining cooperation with others. It follows that individuals are not envious of each other and pose rational plans of life (Wolf, 1977, p. 28). For developing the two moral powers of a person, Rawls exercises the notion of primary goods – basic liberties, freedom of movement and choice of occupation, the powers and prerogatives of offices, income and wealth, the social bases of self-respect (Lehning, 2009, p. 20). These, according to the philosopher, aid the selection of the principles of justice.

Rawls, in his account of the basic structure of society, further says that the society should be well-ordered, which is why it needs to embrace the public conception of justice. It follows that all persons need to concur with the underpinnings of a well-ordered human association and, in that, all are admissible under the same principles of justice and need to be satisfied with the rules of basic social institution (Rawls, 1971, p. 5). Interestingly, in a state, things are said to be just and unjust with reference to the laws, institution and social system, particular actions of many kinds, judgments and imputations. However, for Rawls, the primary subject of justice is the basic structure of society (Rawls, 1971, p. 7). By focusing on the major social institutions¹, he allocates fundamental rights and duties to establish the advantages of division that springs forth from social cooperation. As per Rawlsian perspective, the structure of society contains different social positions due to the deferent expectations of life, as determined by the political system. Thus, the institutions of society favour certain starting places over others. Consequently, deep inequalities gain ground and these adversely affect individual gain. Therefore, the princi-

¹ Here it is noteworthy that by major institutions, Rawls means political constitution and the principal economic and social arrangements. So, the legal protection of free-

dom of thought and liberty of conscience, competitive markets, private property in the means of production and monogamous family are examples of major social institutions.

ples of social justice must be first applied to the basic structure.

Rawls's basic argument for justice, with regard to the basic structure of society, ensures sustainability. Sustainable development implies the conservation of natural resources for the benevolence of human beings. Thus, conservation of natural resources is an issue of justice, exemplifying itself in the form of environmental protection. As seen before, for Rawls, basic structure is a primary concern of justice. So, before going deep into any discussion of the principles of justice, Rawls sets out rules for the basic structure of society. If basic structure of society is just, then one can ensure sustainability within the society that embraces fundamental rights and duties to establish the advantages of division that ensue from social cooperation. Sustainable development lowers chances of natural calamity and this facilitates the development of a just basic structure. The probability of natural calamity accelerates due to the insensitive consumption of scant natural resources. Natural calamities obliterate the environment and, if the environment is damaged, the social fabric frays. Everyone loses their fundamental rights, duties and even a good life that comes from establishing the advantages of division that ensues from social cooperation. The connectivity between basic structure of society and sustainable development is being treated as the de-facto concern under the idea of *justice as fairness*. Therefore, Rawls ensures sustainable development, through the basic structure of society, as the primary concern of justice. For Rawls, the guiding idea is that the principles of justice, with regard to the basic structure of society, are the object of the original agreement (Rawls, 1971, p. 11). In the next section, I will take up the doctrine of original position.

3. Original position

All of the relevant formations of person and society, and principles of practical reasoning for making judgments about justice, deploy the original position.

² As these principles are the outcome of an agreement but 'justice as fairness' resonates with the idea of moral relationship, and does not confirm with the long tradition of contract theory. Theory of rational choice is also inherent in the theory of justice.

³ Rawls, John, *A Theory of Justice*, pp.137. Rawls writes that the parties do not know the particular circumstances of their own society:

- No one knows his place in society, his class, position or social status; nor does he know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence and strength.
- No one knows his conception of the good, the particulars of his rational plan of life, or even the special features of his psychology such as his aversion to risk or liability to optimism or pessimism.
- They do not know their economic or political situation, or the level of civilization and culture they have

This is an original agreement, which follows an artificial device, wherein every person is a rational moral being and follows just procedure in opting for the principles of justice. Here, all individuals are considered equal because all have the same rights of opting for principles of justice (Rawls, 1971, p. 19). Rawls clarifies that utilitarianism, intuitionism and perfectionism do not explicitly explain the virtues inherent in a stable social system. Interestingly, this original position corresponds to the traditional social contract theory², but not completely.

For Rawls, social institutions have no reason to favour or disfavour on behalf of an individual's race, gender and class. It follows that each one, in the original position, is deprived of such particular information that precludes flourishing injustice amongst them. Rawls terms this deprivation of information as the *veil of ignorance*, that is an instrument of original position.³ For Rawls, the notion of justice does not accept that the loss of freedom for some is justified on account of greater good, and that *Justice as fairness* is a *deontological theory*⁴. Subsequently, Rawls' elucidation of the original position does away with bias through the removal of particular information. It does not, however, talk of the removal of all of the general information. It is pass muster and comes forth as the guiding light for the theory of justice. From its commencement, *justice as fairness* embraces the notion of *pure procedural justice*, which is a method where there is no independent criterion for the right result but a fair procedure which has a fair outcome⁵, in resulting that, the original position emerges as the best principle of justice. In the original position, through the veil of ignorance, one can obtain justice that depends on circumstances. Here, it is significant that Rawls has borrowed many of his basic ideas, from Kant's *conception of autonomy* and *the categorical imperative*, for his original position. Kant assumes men as free and equal rational beings under moral legislation and adds that autonomous man exists as an end in himself (Kant, 1969, p. 396).

been able to gain or as to which generation they belong.

The parties know these particular circumstances of their own society:

- They know that their society is subject to the circumstances of justice and whatever this implies. It is taken for granted that they know the general facts about human society.
- They know the basis of social organization and the laws of human psychology.
- They know whatever general facts affect the choice of the principles of justice.

⁴ A moral doctrine that formulates the principles of right besides considering the outcome of actions.

(Deontology, p.391)

⁵ Example of gambling represents this procedure; several persons engage in a betting process, the distribution of cash and bet is fair but there is no expectation of gain.

Rawls's original position implies sustainable development, namely, that we should not only curb the imbalanced consumption of natural resources for the benevolence of the present generation, but also for the future generations. Original position does not differentiate between individuals on behalf of their race, gender or status and allows them to pursue appropriate notions of good life in order to live well. Taking this into account, one can admit that the original position guarantees stability of society, which is visualized under a comprehensive moral hypothesis within the parameters of *justice as fairness*. As a follow-up, Rawls proposes a new hypothesis that does away with bias and maximizes each individual's benefit. Thusly, Rawls's theory of justice gives a boost to the idea of sustainable development and advocates justice, as a prerequisite, for sustainable-development goals.

One can find that, in this artificial device agreement, all participants know that they are contemporaries. Notwithstanding the same, Rawls succeeds to provide inspirational assumption caring for not only the contemporaries, who joined the agreement, but also for the immediate descendants. This emotional attachment ties the knot, between consecutive generations, that would secure intergenerational justice through the savings principle, and this intergenerational justice can take initiative of appropriate consumption of natural resources for infusing sustainable development into the society (Beekman, 2003, p. 7). This enduring social order is applicable for upcoming generation. Hence, the original position provides tenable argument to grasp the savings principle that entails intergenerational justice that, in its turn, encompasses the goal of sustainable development. In the next section, I will delineate the two principles of justice that are the upshot of original position.

4. Two principles of justice

As per Rawlsian perspective, in the original position, behind the veil of ignorance, rational moral beings choose two principles of justice as a cooperative venture, for the mutual advantage of basic structure (Lehning, 2009, p.47):

First Principle:

P1: Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all (the principle of equal liberty).

The Second Principle (which has two separate parts):

P2: Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both:

P2.1: Attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity (the principle of fair equality of opportunity);

P2.2: To the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, consistent with the just savings principle (the difference principle).

The Priority Rules (L) (which give the principles of justice their lexical order):

L1: Principle P1 is lexically prior to principle P2 (the priority of liberty).

L2: Principle P2.1 is lexically prior to principle P2.2.

L3: Principle P2.2 is lexically prior to the principle of efficiency and to that of maximizing the sum of advantages (the priority of justice over efficiency and welfare).

As mentioned above, Rawls epitomises that the first principle guarantees an equal scheme of basic liberties for all citizens. These include liberties, familiar to the existing constitutional democracies, as – the right to vote and the rule of law and liberty of conscience, among others. In this system of comprehensive liberties, greater liberty is preferable for without some restriction on one kind of liberty, another loses its value. It means that some restrictions are necessary to enhance the best total system of equal liberty. *It is essential in this case to distinguish between rules of order and rules restricting the content of speech* (Rawls, 1971, p. 203). For example, when we organize a game or debate then some rules of order limit our freedom. Thus, we cannot take extra time to speak or speak only on a given topic. These kinds of restrictions on freedom accelerate the value of our equal liberty. Further analysis shows that these rules support the sustainable development policy, which is why the application of such rules means a curb on the exploitation of natural resources, so as to protect the environment. For example, carbon-emission is one of the key reasons leading to the threat of global warming. For curbing the emission, the state can charge high taxes on all forms of carbon emission products. This will discourage the consumption of products such as petroleum. This partial, but substantial carbon tax, would reduce emission significantly besides positively affecting the tax revenue. Rawls prefers special kind of equal distribution, in the second principle, that accentuates *maximizing the minimum*. Rawls's perspective on inequality justifies his egalitarian point of view. In the first part of the second principle, he elucidates that *open to all* means that no one is precluded from applying to careers, which are open to talent. For Rawls, all individuals in offices should have a fair chance to grasp the relevant opportunities. Rawls tries to provide adequate education to all so that all individuals can, adequately, access the free market. This fair equality of opportunity can protect the environment by allocating natural resources appropriately. His requirement of fair equality of opportunity has added a new chapter to the idea of formal equality. This requirement is

meant to sustain one's own reasonable goals and ambitions and not to preserve excess of wealth (Henderson, 2011, p. 17-18). Thus, this both provides fair equality of opportunity to the future generations and, also, obstructs the path of excess consumption of natural resources.

Rawls's declaration of the second principle is a valid relation from an egalitarian point of view. (In the second part, Rawls states the maximin principle which is a valid relation from an egalitarian point of view.) *The term maximin means the maximum minimum, and it directs our attention to the worst that can happen under any proposed course of action, and to decide in the light of that* (Rawls, 1971, p. 154). Further, I herein draw attention to the loss and gain table to make one understand the difference principle or maximin rule. Suppose, there are three persons X, Y and Z and they have A, B and C distribution respectively:

Person	A	B	C ↵
X	21	14	15
Y	4	10	9
Z	15	2	6

Among the above-cited three kinds of distribution, we must admit the C-type of distribution, due to its being more beneficial for the least advantaged people. Rawlsian assumption for selecting lexicographical relation between two principles is rational because of its role in the acceleration of civilization or economic development in society (Barry, 1973, p. 45). This distribution is also applicable to both the consumption of natural resources and calamities. Following the difference principle, one can find that distribution, which is *bête-noire* of exploitation of natural resources succumbing into natural calamities. The maximin rule is not only applicable to the entire society, to remove disparities between the prosperous and destitute, but also maintains harmony between people and natural resources. The effect of the application of this principle is clearly superior to the other distributions. The utilitarian distribution fails to provide any kind of assurance regarding individual benefit. It is exclusively engaged with the concept of maximum utility. Thus, the distribution includes only the total development of the society, rather than harmony between people and natural resources. On the other hand, Rawlsian distribution does not make any difference on the ground of a person's personal loss and gain, while trying to balance harmony. This makes the difference principle better (at promoting sustainable development characteristics) than the average principle distribution. It reveals that Rawlsian difference principle supports natural resources distribution and has characteristics to sustain climate as well. Therefore, the alacrity support given by Rawlsian theory of justice to the perpetuation of harmony, between man and natural resources, is commendable.

In due course, Rawlsian justice demands that the present generations ought to be treated in a just manner. Also, in this society, the least advantage people must have just opportunity for development and future generations ought to be treated with due concern.

5. Conclusion

Justice is paramount in politics and the basic structure of society is being treated as the de-facto concern in Rawls's theory of justice. The latter is also innately connected with sustainable development. Rawls's proposes original position, as an artificial device, that removes the risk factor of bias that is predominant in other theories. Also, the original position maximizes individual benefit and sets a stage for sustainable development, besides acting as a prerequisite for sustainable development.

In the original position, behind the veil of ignorance, individuals (as rational moral beings) choose between two principles of justice, as a cooperative venture for mutual advantage that is the key to accelerating progress toward the accomplishment of the entire spectrum of sustainable development goals. After evaluation, I conclude that the first principle distributes natural resources equally and puts a curb on the exploitation of natural resources for environmental safeguard. The second principle is applicable to the issue of excess consumption of natural resources, sustaining one's own reasonable goals and ambitions in lieu of preserving excess of wealth. This not only prepares the path of fair equality of opportunity, for the future generations, but also opens the path of excess consumption of natural resources. Therefore, the difference principle stands in favor of the equality of welfare distribution, which is *bête-noire* of exploitation of natural resources succumbing into natural calamities. Justice corresponds to the welfare of society so that, to live well, all citizens sustain the balance between development and environmental conservation. The theory of Justice, inter and intra-generational, indeed seems to be a promising route to grasp and implement the coveted concept of sustainable development.

References

1. BARTLETT R. C., COLLINS, S. D., 2011, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, (trans.), University of Chicago Press, London.
2. BARRY B., 1973, *The Liberal Theory of Justice – A Critical Examination of the Principal Doctrines in A Theory of Justice by John Rawls*, Oxford University Press, London.
3. BEEKMAN V., 2004, Sustainable Development and Future Generations, in: *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, 17(1), p. 3-22.
6. HARRIS J.M., 2001, Basic Principles of Sustainable Development, in: *Development and Comp Systems 0106006*, University Library of Munich, Germany.
4. HENDERSON G.E., 2011, Rawls & Sustainable Development, in: *McGill International Journal of Sus-*

- tainable Development Law & Policy*, 7(1), <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2621713> (12.12.2018).
5. LACEWING M., Rawls and Nozick on justice, <http://documents.routledge-interactive.s3.amazonaws.com/9781138793934/A2/Political/JusticeRawlsNozick.pdf> (12.12.2018).
 6. LEHNING P.B., 2009, *John Rawls: An Introduction*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
 7. MCCARTHY G.E., 2009, *Dreams in Exile: Rediscovering Science and Ethics in Nineteenth-Century Social Theory*, State University of New York Press.
 8. MICHAEL N., 2001, *Deontology*, in: *Encyclopaedia of Ethics*, eds. Becker L.C., Becker C.B., Routledge, New York.
 9. POGGE T.W., 1989, *Realizing Rawls*, Pogge, Cornell University Press, London.
 10. PRAKASH G., 2018, Buddhist Attitude towards Sustainable Development, in: *Problemy Ekorozwoju/Problems of Sustainable Development*, 13(1), p. 217-220.
 11. RACHANA K., 2001, Social Justice and Happiness in the Republic: Plato's Two Principles, in: *History of Political Thought*, 22(2), p. 189-220.
 12. RAWLS J., 1971, *A Theory of Justice*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
 13. WOLFF R.P., 1977, *Understanding Rawls- A Reconstruction and Critique of A Theory of Justice*, Princeton University Press.