

The Individual and the Society: A Comparative Study between John Stuart Mill and John Rawls

Roger MONDOUE¹, JUMBAM Gideon²

¹(Department of Philosophy, Psychology, Sociology, Professor-University of Dschang, Cameroon)

²(Department of Philosophy, Psychology, Sociology, Doctorate-University of Dschang, Cameroon)

ABSTRACT: This research paper seeks to examine the nature of the relationship that exists between John Stuart Mill and John Rawls's conceptions of the individual and the society, given that the need for comparing and contrasting their views is of major necessity in the field of philosophy of humanity and persons. Having acknowledged the fact that both thinkers are being situated within the liberal tradition, we intend to argue that they all have incompatible and compatible conceptions to the question of the individual/society relationship. This will be in opposition to those who only perceive their views in regard to the reflection of individual and the collective from an exclusive or from an inclusive perspective. Mill accords more powers to the individual above the society while Rawls on his own path reconsidered the balance between the two. However, beyond their opposing dimensions, we shall argue that Rawls remains Millian despite his claimed to have rupture from Mill liberalism of autonomy and individuality. Finally we shall equally propose an alternative that goes beyond their liberal ambitions and that can serve as the base for overcoming the tension between the individual and the society in our present liberal and neoliberal context.

KEYWORDS: *Autonomy, Individual, Liberalism, Society, Philosophy of Humanity.*

RÉSUMÉ: *L'objectif est d'examiner la nature de la relation qui existe entre les conceptions de l'individu et de la société chez John Stuart Mill et John Rawls, notamment au regard de la nécessité de leurs points de vue dans le domaine de la philosophie de l'humanité et des personnes. Après avoir reconnu le fait que les deux penseurs se situent dans la tradition libérale, nous voulons mettre à nu leurs conceptions relatives à la question de la relation individu / société, comparativement à ceux qui ne les perçoivent que dans une perspective exclusive ou inclusive. En effet, tandis que Mill accorde plus de pouvoir à l'individu, Rawls privilégie l'équilibre entre les deux. Cependant, au-delà de ces divergences, nous soutenons l'idée selon laquelle Rawls reste Millian malgré sa prétendue rupture avec le libéralisme de l'autonomie et de l'individualité de Mill. Ainsi, nous proposons une alternative de dépasser leurs ambitions libérales et de surmonter la tension entre l'individu et la société dans notre contexte libéral et néolibéral actuel.*

Mots clés- *Autonomie, Individu, Libéralisme, Société, Philosophie de l'Humanité*

I. INTRODUCTION

The question of examining the relation that exists between the individual and the society is one of the major fundamental preoccupations across the history of ideas. As earlier noted, this question rotates around certain questions of common interest, for instance like: between the individual and the society, which one dominates the other? Or better still, is there an inter-dependent between the individual and the society? These problems have been tackled from diverse perspectives which equally at the same time justifies the persistence of the argument. This explains the reason why Alain Laurent¹ remarks that the debate of the individual and the society is a restarting one at every given moment. John Rawls and John Stuart Mill were equally preoccupied with this question in their liberal philosophy.

Etymologically, the term individual is being derived from the Latin word '*individuum*' which means that which is indivisible, a single distinct entity or unit which is incapable of being divided actually or conceptually while preserving his identity. In a standard sense: "an individual is something that can be

¹Cf Alain Laurent, *Histoire de l'individualisme*, ville de Paris, bibliothèque baudouyep, PUF, 1993, p.123.

individuated that is, counted or picked out...and thus be distinguish from other things”². The word individual from the Cambridge Advance Learner’s Dictionary implies a single person or thing as compared to group. It could still be refer to a person who thinks or reason in his own original way. While the word society on the other hand, has been derived from the Latin word “*Socius*” which implies companion, association or fellowship. Due to the fact that man always lives in the company of his fellow beings, a sociologist George Simmel then remarks that, sociability is the essence of society which he considered society as: a number of individuals connected by interactions. That is, the sum total of these interactions³. The word society from the Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary simply refers to a group of person who live together in an organized way, making decisions on how to do things and sharing the work that needs to be done.

The main issue at stakes in this work is to reflect on the question of the individual and the society in reference to John Stuart Mill⁴ and John Rawls.⁵ In other word, it is to carry out a comparative study between these two thinkers of the liberal tradition in regard to the question of the individual and the society. This is in view of determining if Rawls continues or discontinues with the thoughts of Mill. The main question that guides our research goes thus: can one defend the claimed incompatibility between John Stuart Mill and John Rawls in regards to the question of the individual and the society without taking into consideration an undeniable link that remain between them? Or better still, did Rawls in his political liberalism succeeded to rupture from the Millian comprehensive liberalism that which values autonomy and individuality⁶?

In order for us to respond to the above interrogation, it shall be necessary first of all to show with precision the opposing link that exist between John Stuart Mill and John Rawls in regards to the question of the individual and the society.

II. THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE SOCIETY: THE OPPOSITE DISTINCTION BETWEEN MILL AND RAWLS.

This question of the relation between the individual and the society that preoccupies thinkers in the history of ideas, constitute one of the fundamental question in the liberal philosophy of John Rawls and John Stuart Mill. This question is been situated within the field of philosophy of humanity and persons. Our main interest here is to show the controversies that exist between these two liberal thinkers face with the question at hand. It should be noted that the question of the valorization of individual over the society which constitute one of the fundamental preoccupation of modernity was been promoted within the liberal tradition that runs from John Locke to Mill.

The oppositive link between John Stuart Mill a modern utilitarian philosopher and John Rawls an influential contemporary political thinker is that the formal admits the primacy of the individual over the society while the latter rather reconsiders the balance between the two. This is seen where John Stuart Mill strongly defended the notion of individual freedom and liberty thereby detaching the individuals from the authority of the state or society. At the beginning of his fundamental work entitled *On Liberty* he affirms: “*the subject of this essay is not the so called liberty of the will so unfortunately oppose to the misnamed doctrine of philosophical necessity; but civil or social liberty: the nature and limit of the power which can be legitimately exercise by the society over the individuals*”⁷. In this perspective, he then argued and stood against the authority of the society

²Nicholas Bunnin and Jiyuan Yu, *The Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy*, Blackwell publishing press, Oxford, 2004, p.339.

³Kurt H. Wolff, *The Sociology of George Simmel*, New York, United states, 1950, p.30

⁴ John Stuart Mill was born in London in 1806 and educated privately by his father James Mill. In 1820 he study history, law and philosophy in France. His father moulded him into a future leader of the Benthamite movement, and from 1823 onwards he became a member of a small ‘utilitarian’ society which met at Bentham’s house. He took part in various other discussion groups, one of which included Macaulay, to explore the problems of political theory. He is best known for the brilliant essay *On Liberty* (1859), which argued for not only political freedom but social freedom. His defends of individuality of individual is known especially through this work. Cf: *Utilitarianism and On Liberty*, Second edition, edited with an introduction by Mary Warnock, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003.

⁵ JohnRawls is one of the most influential American political thinkers of the contemporary period. His career centers much on ideological distinct issues that relates to human life and values. It equally takes too into consideration human interest, aspirations that constitute solid base of human condition as a whole. Among these his crucial issues was the question of individual and society. Rawls wanted to ensure the realization of a well and orderly societies of individuals which will take into account the liberal aspects of individual’s reasons why he developed the notion of political liberalism.

⁶Cf: John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, Edited by Erin Kelly, London, Harvard University Press.2001, p.156.

⁷John S. Mill, *On Liberty*, England, Penguin Books Limited, 1859, P.5.

over the individuals' liberty and freedom. He thinks in this regard that the society or the state should not limit the liberty and freedom of the individuals that constitutes the society except in the case of preventing individual act from harming others.⁸ When an individual act seems dangerous to the welfare of others in the society, it is the only case in which societal authority is being permitted to interfere in her liberty and freedom for popular purpose. While John Rawls unlike his predecessor Mill rather proposes to reconcile or integrate the individual and the society in order to overcome the long classical dichotomy established between them. His conceptions opposes to the classical methodological individualism or the individualistic conception and methodological holism or collectivist conception. It could equally be illustrated that Rawls was not in favor of the valorization of the individual at the detriment of the society unlike John Stuart Mill, as well as the valorization of the whole at the detriment of the individual or parts like the case of middle age theologians and modern thinkers like Hegel. Michel Seymour in his comprehension of the philosophy of Rawls (matured Rawls) and in its conformity to his major work entitled *The Law of Peoples* 1999 concludes:

Rawls does not engage in an individualist point of view nor in the collectivist point of view but rather from the reasonable perspective we can attribute at the same time an anti-individualistic and an anti-collectivist point of view to Rawls. That is, a point of view that rejects at the same time the absolute primacy attributed to individual rights and the absolute primacy attributed to the collective rights. But rather Rawls wants to ensure an equilibrium position between the individual and the society. Rawls in this light neither engages in political individualism nor in political collectivism.⁹

Following the above assertion, it is clear evidence that John Rawls quest to reconcile the individual and the society in view of ensuring its inter-dependence was one of the essential aspects of his later philosophy that could be seen through most of his works like, *Political Liberalism*, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* and *A Brief Inquiry*. He embraces the views of sociologist like Norbert Elias, Mark Bevir his contemporaries as well as the views of modern thinkers like Hegel rather than Mill in regard to the notion of reconciliation. In *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, the author argues in line with Hegel that reconciliation is one of the fundamental roles of political philosophy.¹⁰ The concept of justice as fairness is one of the models put in place by John Rawls in order to ensure the relation between the individual and the society. This conception of justice as fairness helps to correct the weakness of *A Theory of Justice* so as to overcome the tension that exists between the individual and the society in favor of social unity between the two concepts. It was due to this conception that Jonathan Edward Mansfield affirms that: "In justice as fairness, Rawls has reconsidered the balance between individual concerns and community values in a new way. As a bearer of the liberal standard... this proposed balance between the individual and the society is a laudable aim..."¹¹ Taking in to consideration the above assertion one can derive or sort out the thesis of John Rawls in relation to the question of the individual and the society. The author's conception on the individual and the society are highlighted in the above affirmation of Mansfield is indeed (An action that deserves praise).

The affirmation of the superiority of the individual over the society is one of the fundamental ideas that characterize the philosophy of John Stuart Mill the predecessor of Rawls. He encourages the notion of self-protection of individuals and self-reliance as seen where he affirms that: "*the individual have absolute right over himself, over his own body and the individual is sovereign*"¹². The author again tried to affirm the human liberty of conscience, liberty of thought and feelings, absolute freedom of opinions and sentiment of all subject¹³. This implies that in any society where individual freedom and liberty are not guaranteed, it therefore follows that such a society is not free. The author of *On Liberty* in this perspective was against holistic thinkers who affirm the supremacy of the society over individuals in the world especially the ancient thinkers like Plato, Aristotle and the middle age theologians. He is situated within the confines of modern philosophy which is mostly based on the notion of individualism as will be stated clearly in this assertion of Jean Hugues Dechaux "*... la modernité recit une idée simple.. celle de la valorisation et de la promotion de l'individuel au détriment du group*"¹⁴. The author remarks that the state or society should not limit individuals from judging and equally

⁸ John Stuart Mill, Cited by Eamonn Butler, in, *Classical Liberalism: A Primer*, London, Lord North Street Westmister, 2015, P.118.

⁹ Michel Seymour, *Rawls et le Droit des Peuple*, (A paraître dans philosophiques), Département de philosophie, Université de Montréal, An article of Journal philosophiques, vol. 26, Issue 1, Printemps 1999, pp.109-137.

¹⁰ John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, op. cit., p.3.

¹¹ Jonathan Edward Mansfield, *John Rawls, The conception of a liberal self and the communitarian critic*, p. 109.

¹² *Ibid.*, P.12.

¹³ *Ibid.*, P.14.

¹⁴ Jean Hugues Dechaux, « *ce que l'individualisme n'est pas de comprendre : les cas de la famille esprit*, 2010/6june, p.94-11.001 :10.3917/ esprit. 1006.0094.

from expressing their thought. Individuals have the authority to discuss their own opinions without the interruption of state authority.

As argued by Mill, an act that tries to hinder individual freedom in general should therefore be considered as a form of nepotism or better still a monarchical system of government due to the fact that it does not take into account individual wishes and desires as seen in his affirmation that follows “*human being should be free to form opinions and to express their opinion without, men should be free to act upon their opinions without hindrances ...*”.¹⁵ Note should be taken that as earlier mentioned by John Rawls himself “*there is a need for a democratic society to secure the possibility of an over-lapping consensus on its fundamental political values*”.¹⁶ Based on this assertion, it could equally too be argued that there is a need to ensure an over-lapping consensus between the individual and the society since they are all fundamental political values. One of the fundamental political objectives is to defend the individual right and equally the societal right.

Rawls thus believes and defended the reconciliation between the individual and social justice in order to avoid falling in the trap of modern democratic individualism. Individualism is inseparable from the modern conception of liberty and autonomy of individual declared by thinkers like Benjamin Constant.¹⁷ This conception even though having impact on young Rawls, was being opposed by the matured Rawls. Principles of justice will therefore permit us to fight against individual self-interest so as to emphasize on the notion of reciprocity as recommended by justice as fairness. With this conception, it is clearly noted that the long controversy between the individual and the society could be tackled. It is important to equally note that individual enters into another individual and that is society. It is suitable to say that individual's makes society and society produces individuals. The individual and the society are not mutually exclusive therefore we can say that they are not a separable fact rather they are two sides of the same coin¹⁸ which justify the recent interaction between the individual and the social environment.¹⁹ The question of the individual and the society is being tackled well in one of the works of John Rawls: *A Brief Inquiry in to the Meaning of Sin and Faith* edited by thinkers like Thomas Nagel and Joshua Cohen. The ideas proposed in the works of matured Rawls faced with the question of the individual and the society within the liberal democratic context rhymes with the ideas proposed in the post publication like *A Brief Inquiry* (2009). In the same line with what he equally proposes in *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (2001). What he refers to in these two books mentioned above in regard to the individual and the society recalls us of what he termed in one of his works *Political Liberalism*, in an expanded edition (2005) the relation between persons²⁰ and the society.

In a nutshell, this is what Mill concerns himself with; bringing out the extent on the authority which society is to exercise over its individual members. It is in tackling this subject that he treats of issues like freedom of thought and discussion, freedom of action, the harm principle and the limits to the authority of society over the individual. It could equally be noted clearly that Mill following his views is one of the defenders of individuality at the expense of the society. He is being situated among the chief classical liberal thinkers who see the individual as more important than the collective.²¹ Mill strongly stood for the defense of free speech as seen where Butler held Mill thought that individuals should be free to follow their own desires so long as they do not harm others in the process.²² Alan Reynolds equally shares the same opinion as follows:

On Liberty is Mill's most influential contribution to political philosophy, where he lays out a defense of individual rights based on the ‘harm principle,’ or ‘Liberty Principle,’ which states, ‘the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others.’

Mill insisted on the liberation of the individual and on the importance of individuals in relation to the whole. He was one of the proponents of the defense of individual freedom. In this vein, K.C. Rourke points out

¹⁵ John S. Mill, *On Liberty*, *op. cit.*, P.52.

¹⁶ John Rawls., *Political Liberalism*: Expanded Edt, New York, Columbia University Press, 2005, p.90.

¹⁷ C. Audard and R. Boudon..., *individu et justice Sociale:author de John Rawls*, preface de Francois Terre, Paris, editions du Seuil, April 1988, p.80.

¹⁸ Shagutta Begum and Aneega Batool Awan, *Individual and the Society: A socio-philosophical account of Iqbal thought*, A research journal of south Asian studies, vol.29, No 1, January-July 2014, Pp.115-123.

¹⁹ Luc Passera and Jean-Paul Lachaud, *The individual and society*, Readings from the 19th international ethological conference, Paul Sabatier university, Toulouse, 1986, Pp.1-17.

²⁰ Note should be taken that John Rawls did not distinguish between the concept of person and that of individual. This could be seen clearly in his affirmation that follows: Cf: John Rawls: *A Brief Inquiry in to the Meaning of Sin and Faith* edited by thinkers like Thomas Nagel and Joshua Cohen, 2009, P.69.

“All persons are individuals, that is, separate and distinct units”.

²¹ Eamonn Butler, *Classical Liberalism: A Primer*, London, Lord North Street Westminster, 2015, P.4.

²² *Ibid.*, P.103.

that Mill began to attack in the 1830 all that was to hinder individual freedom for the sake of the individuals.²³ John Stuart Mill was an outstanding figure in the defense of individual freedom and liberty. He further affirms in this light that:

Mill was against societal conformity thereby strongly believed in the importance of the individuality. More over a firm commitment of the press and intellectual freedom in the society was prominent and at one point, Mill even indicates a willingness to condone violent revolution where such liberty is denied.²⁴

Mill as a libertarian was against every obstacles that might hinder the freedom and liberty of the individuals. He gave more priority to the individuals as opposed to the collectivity reason why he determined the limits of the powers of the society over those of the individuals. The right to liberty and freedom is grounded in the notion of individuality which consequently lied at the base of Mill's argument for freedom of thoughts and discussions. Mill was being inspired by the views of his father James Mill who equally stood for the defense of individual freedom of press in the Anglo-Saxon world during his period that was being marked by a lot of authoritarian systems that did not valued the individuals. As argued in *A Brief Inquiry* "the word individualism is used a number of times...always as something that Rawls is against. It is explicitly connected with sin and contrasted with communal thinking."²⁵ The question of the relation between the individual and the society is not recent in the liberal philosophy of John Rawls. As argued and illustrated by the two disciples of Rawls, Thomas Nagel and Joshua Cohen:

It seems fair to say, on the whole, that in his senior thesis Rawls values both individuality and community very highly, and the same is true of his matured writings, as is argued in the introduction to the present volume. In the thesis, and especially in the later theory of justice, themes of individuality and community are inter-woven in complex and subtle ways. If we are going to speak of Rawls as an "individualist" or a "communitarian" at all, I think it will be most accurate to use those terms in a sense in which he is both an individualist and a communitarian. That applies in similar thought not identical, ways to both his senior thesis and his later theories of justice and political liberalism.²⁶

Following the above affirmation of the editors of *A Brief Inquiry* (Thomas Nagel and Joshua Cohen), one can observe the progressive evolution of the question of the individual and the society within the thought pattern of John Rawls. Indeed the major preoccupation could nearly be traced from the genesis of the philosophy of the American liberal philosopher (John Rawls). In addition, from the enlightenment of the above assertion, one could draw out a remark that follows: the first remark is the fact that the question of the individual and the society is not recent and hidden within the thought system of the author. The second remark is the fact that the author is neither an individualist nor a collectivist while, the third remark lies on the fact that the author wants to ensure a balance or a concomitant relation between the individual and the society. This was in view of overcoming the long controversies that surrounds the main question as take. However, it will not be wrong for one to argue concerning the fact that the beginning point of the philosophy of Rawls (young Rawls) and the end (matured Rawls) are alike when it comes to his position concerning the question of establishing a correlation between persons or the individual and the society or the whole.

Following the preface of his senior thesis, Rawls declares: "I believe myself that the flavor of the times seems to point to a revival of "communal thinking" after centuries of individualism."²⁷ This view of the author shows that the notion of individualism is not recent in the history of humanity. As seen where to him, it cuts across centuries or ages. But following the author's thought, we should not only rely in promoting communal thinking but what is necessary is to see how we can inter-connect the concept of the individual (personality) and the society (communality). Rawls ambition was to combat this spirit of individuality that seems more and more dangerous to the entire humanity. Its effects are more renounce in many domains of human life. In this perspective he concluded as follows:

We must realize that an individual is not merely an individual, but a person and that a society is not a group of individuals but a community...there is no such thing as independent personality free of community...our solution to this problem is not a matter of finding the means between two extremes we should always be suspicious of such facile answer. Our solution is to examine and find out what community and personality really are...therefore the reconciliation between the person and community, between the individual and society, can be understood by analyzing the concepts themselves they are mutually inter dependent. One cannot exist without the other. The dichotomy between the individual and the society which recent western thoughts have puzzled over is really no dichotomy at

²³K.C. O'Rourke, *John Stuart Mill and Freedom of Expression*, London and New York, Routledge, 2001, P.3.

²⁴*Ibid.*, Pp.3-4.

²⁵John Rawls, *A Brief Inquiry*, *op. cit.*, p.68.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p.71.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 108.

all... Therefore, the chief problem of politics is to work out some scheme of social arrangement which can so harness human sin as to make the natural correlate of community and personality possible.²⁸

This assertion above concerning the quest for ensuring a balance between the individual and the society is the major task in Rawls social and political philosophy contrarily to his precursors like John Stuart Mill who rather valorizes the individual above the society. As argued by Rawls, this seems pertinent because:

Political philosophy may contribute to how people think of their political and social institution as a whole, and their basic aims and purposes as a society with a history- a nation- as oppose to their aims and purposes as individuals or as members of families and associations.²⁹

The author is proposing a need here to integrate the individual and the society or the individual interest and the social interest or furthermore, the individual right and the societal right. Principles of political justice have great impact in solving major problems like that of the individual or person and the society. It plays a vital role in ensuring a union that should exist between the two concepts as well as the complementarity that equally exist between the political conception of justice and the conception of person (individual) and the society. Realizing such a conception will lead us to the stage of satisfaction which the author of *A Theory of Justice* thinks it could only be possible when the complementarity between the good of the individual and the society or community is been realized.³⁰ The author in this aspect is requesting for a kind of “mutual recognition”³¹ of the individual and the society by conforming to the principles of justice. To further illustrate on the notion of individual supremacy in the Millian context, K.C. O'Rourke remarked that Mill concedes that freedom of discussion is only one factor that help people to achieved individuality thereby making it one of the most important factor³². The individual necessitates his or her freedom that can permits their proper progress and development. In this same perspective, Mill equally discourses on the equality of each and every individual. The minority for instance under democratic system should be given a higher place and take into consideration their wishes. Individual rights to quest for their own proper good should be recognized. These rights are not supposed to be alienated for they are paramount. These views are evident to justify the fact that the question of defending individual supremacy is at the center of Mill political and social thoughts. With this, one can abide with the view that Mill tirelessly defends his position of considering the individuality as the higher good.

III. BEYOND THE OPPOSING LINK BETWEEN JOHN STUART MILL AND JOHN RAWLS

The Our principal goal here is to show that despite the above opposing view between John Stuart Mill and John Rawls in regard to the question of establishing the link between the individual and the society, there is a need to go beyond those opposing views. This is in view of defending the continuity that exists between them. It follows from the previous analysis that Mill tries to defend and preserve the individual liberty, freedom and dignity from the social abuses as well as above the society. This is in line with the views of young Rawls of *A Theory of Justice*, who thinks that, there is a need to preserve basic individual rights like liberty, freedom and equality through the principle of justice. The individuals are not supposed to be deprived of these rights as he puts it that “each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override.”³³ We should recall that both thinkers are being situated within the liberal tradition and this is what marked their common believed.

Liberals be it classical like Mill, Kant and Locke or political liberals like Rawls are mostly concern first and foremost in defending the individual liberty and rights. These rights of individuals to them are and should remain inviolable. In this case, Rawls views are not excluded despite the fact that he tries to draw a demarcation between his liberalism and that of his predecessors like Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill as seen where he affirms:

The liberalism of Kant and Mill may lead to requirements designed to foster the values of autonomy and individuality as ideals to govern much if not all of life. But political liberalism has a difference aims and requires far less.³⁴

One could then argue in a nutshell that John Stuart Mill and John Rawls are all right-based liberals and remain two sides of the same coin no matter their slice difference. They all considered individuality as one among the essential elements of human wellbeing.

Their liberal ways of thinking present many challenges and hence remains problematic in so far as the reflection between the individual and society is concern. This difficulty in our present context is justify base on

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.127-128.

²⁹ John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, p.2.

³⁰ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice: A Revised Edt*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1999, p.461.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.50.

³² *Ibid.*, P.88.

³³ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice, op. cit.*, P.3.

³⁴ John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, p.156.

the view that many thinkers have stood to condemn and combat liberal tradition. Patrick Daneen one of the combatant of liberalism argues that “*liberalism needs not reform but retirement.*”³⁵ His argument is based on the ground that liberal point of focus is that of elevating the individual autonomy. This seems to be their error from the beginning since the classical period till today. As argued by Richard Dagger, in, *Individualism and Community*, Rawls is not an exception to the liberal rule in the same way like Mill and Tocqueville. They are all individualist who all abide to what characterized liberalism according to which “*individual is prior to society.*”³⁶ This assertion in the context of most liberals is based on the pretext of defending the basic rights of the individuals against the impose tyranny of the majority that might arise within the democratic system.

These above arguments and illustrations is to disprove the views of John Rawls who believed that he have rupture from the liberal views of his predecessors like John Stuart Mill. His inconsistent argument against the utilitarian’s where Mill belong shows clearly that we cannot totally separate these thinkers. This argument goes thus:

It is customary to think of utilitarianism as individualistic, and certainly there are good reasons for this.

The utilitarian’s were strong defenders of liberty and freedom of thought, and they held that the good society is constituted by the advantage enjoyed by individuals. Yet utilitarianism is not individualistic...³⁷

This affirmation illustrates the fact that Rawls did not discontinue from certain views that Mill ponder on like the notion of defending individual liberty and freedom. This is the reason why there are contradictions in his assertion above. Rawls was also much concern with the idea of priority of individual rights in the same line with Mill. He opens *Lecture V*, of *Political Liberalism*; by declaring that “*the idea of the priority of right is an essential element in what I have called “Political Liberalism”...*”³⁸ It will then be ironical to separate totally the two thinkers, due to the fact that they are all considered from their proper views as individualist philosophers or liberal philosophers. Liberal philosophy here could be understood as a system of thought that was been developed during the enlightenment period. This philosophy became the most powerful force during the enlightenment era. The aim of this philosophy was to fight against certain basic assumptions that manifested with the early systems of government like the *divine rights of kings* and *absolute monarchy* that affected individuals and societies of the time. John Rawls and John Stuart Mill philosophy is being considered as liberal because of their attachments to the tireless defense of individuality. This philosophical system also emphasizes on the rule of law so as to fight against absolutism. Two types of liberal philosophy that have dominated Western politics for the past half-century that can be remarked are: the socio-cultural liberalism of the left since the 1960s and the economic-political liberalism of the right since the 1980s. Both may have provided greater personal freedoms and individual opportunities, but both can now also be seen as arrogant, atomizing and authoritarian³⁹.

Following the influence of the renaissance period in regards to the views of individual, an individual was therefore considered first and equally above the society. political, moral and liberal thinkers today have not relent their efforts in the course of defending and securing human liberty, equality, and freedom which equally were the ambitions of Modern thinkers like Mill and contemporary like John Rawls. Their major inspiration came from the enlightenment liberals like John Locke whose conceptions of individual centers so much on the notion of liberty. Due to this, he defines liberty as: “*To be free from any superior powers on earth, and not to be under the will or legislative authority of man...the liberty of man in the society is not to be under any legislative power but that established by consent in the commonwealth, under the dominion of any will or restraint of any law.*”⁴⁰

Contemporary political philosophers like Rawls seeks to refine the basis of classical liberalism which could be trace from the works of John Locke and John Stuart Mill in regard to their views of excess liberty, equality and tolerance. The inadequate nature of classical liberal thoughts has been defended base on four fundamental problems highlighted as follows: “*The first is that it focuses on individuals, thus ignoring group identities and the values individuals obtain from them. The second is that liberalism’s conception of toleration does not encourage an appreciation of cultural difference. The third is that it’s ideal of equal citizenship undermines the ability of groups to determine themselves and to preserve what they value; and the fourth is that*

³⁵ Patrick Daneen, *Why Liberalism Failed*, Newhaven and London, Yale University Press, 2018,p.x.

³⁶ Richard Dagger, in, *Individualism and Community*, in, *Contemporary Debates in Political Philosophy*, edited by Thomas Christiano and John Christman, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, p.308.

³⁷ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice: A Revised Edition*, *op.cit*, p.26.

³⁸ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism: A Revised Edition*, *op.cit*, p.173.

³⁹ Michael. M, and Patrícia. V, *The Philosophical Salon: Speculations, Reflections, Interventions*, First edition published by Open Humanities Press, London, 2017, P.1.

⁴⁰ Locke, John, *Two treaties of Government*, a new edition corrected in ten volumes, London, printed for Thomas Tegg, Rod Hay, Mc Master university, 1823, p.114

liberal neutrality is illusionary. There is no such thing as a neutral liberal state."⁴¹ All these inadequate aspects of classical liberalism that GolamAzam is trying to illustrate and at the same time suggesting that it pushes a transition to political liberalism of John Rawls seems a misconception given that Rawls views are still rooted on the basis of classical liberalism.

The individual and the society are the major point of debates in the history of western philosophy as well as in African philosophy. From around the 17th to the 18th centuries the defense of individuals over the group or community emerged. It gradually became a life style in the western culture, which still had far reaching impacts today which manifest through the notion of private life which is been promoted by America, which poses a lot of threat to the world's harmonious living togetherness as well as to African communal life in particular. From this, one can therefore say that the causes of the defense of individuals over the society were so trivial as well as it effects today are far reaching. But the question that is still left unanswered is, how can the persistent tension between the individual and the society be overcome without falling into individualistic or collectivist positions?

IV. BEYOND THE LIBERAL CONCEPTIONS OF MILL AND RAWLS: TOWARD A NORMATIVE POLITICS OF TRANSFORMATION

In order to resolve the persistent tension that exists between the individual and the society in our present context, we need first of all to think beyond the liberal conceptions of Mill and Rawls. This is in view of proposing another alternative or perspective that will help to ensure a harmonious interdependent between the individual and the society. The main purpose of fighting against liberalism is because of its right-based ambitions which had promoted a kind of individualistic and subjective culture which had resulted to the major crisis of humanity. Liberal tradition had led to the destruction of individual social mentalities thereby attaching them to the individualistic culture of self-reliance and relativism of values. In this case, for us to establish the new basis of reconciling the individual and the social whole or society, there is need for moderate liberalism, the educational reformation of the new individual that will equally lead to the reformation of the new society. If truly John Dewey was right to think that:

Society must exist for the sake of individuals; or individuals must have their end and ways of living set for them by the society; or else the society and individuals are correlative, organic to one another, society requiring the service and subordination of individual and at the same time existing to serve them.⁴²

Taking into consideration the fact that the contemporary society is been marked and characterized by the up rise of neo-liberal and capitalist ideology which is an indirect form of liberalism, the need towards the new thinking of the relationship between the individual and the society is necessary.

We should be conscious of the fact that liberalism has open way for market economy which has encourage individualistic ambitions, which often contrasted from the social whole position ambitions. It should be noted that when looking at our actual context, it may well be known for its deformation in so far as the social life of humanity is concern. However, it has now-a-days masterminded our present institutions under the pretext of promoting individual liberty in so doing; it has contributed to the individual isolation from the mass. Western individualism that is been widely spread is been promoted by liberalism. The need to combat it had equally been made part and parcel of the United Nations' one of the major agenda of the year 2030 as noted by Andreas Spahn.⁴³ Based on this, we need to abide to the view of Sandra Harding that what we really need as a solution in this our global and liberal context is the development of *new philosophies* that will act as a path towards the realization of *new citizen, new society and new sciences*.⁴⁴ As professor of education and gender studies at the University of California, she was interested in the various problems that prevailed in the field of humanity and persons. Taking a critical look of our present situation where good and superior values are been reversed, emphasis then have to be laid much especially from the normative perspective. Our objective here is to emphasize on inter-personal ethics and to show its role in the realization of inter-individual relation. From every indication, it seems to conclude that humanity is experiencing a kind of transitional period where every

⁴¹ GolamAzam, *Classical liberalism and its Limits*, Philosophy and Progress: Vols. LV-LVI, January-June, July-December, 2014, ISSN 1607-2278 (Print), DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3329/pp.v55i1-2.26389>.

⁴² John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, New York, Hendry Holtan Company, 1920, p.187.

⁴³ In, "The First Generation to End Poverty and the Last to Save the Planet?", *Western Individualism, Human Rights and the Value of Nature in the Ethics of Global Sustainable Development*, Philosophy and Ethics of Technology, Department IE&IS, Eindhoven University of Technology, 5600 MB Eindhoven, The Netherlands; a.spahn@tue.nl, Received: 30 March 2018; Accepted: 26 May 2018; Published: 3 June 2018.

⁴⁴ Sandra Harding, *Objectivity and Diversity, Another Logic of Scientific Research*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 2015, p.1.

normative base seems individualistic. This base has led to the destruction of the harmonious relation between the individuals, and between the individual and the society. We are experiencing now a kind of “normative individualism”,⁴⁵ normative individualism implies that focus should be laid on individual human being.” To overcome this normative crisis and in order to lay new harmonious bases for the individual and the society, focus needs to be laid on inter-personal ethics whose base is no more individualistic but rather collective.⁴⁶ If truly philosophy is an exigency quest for a rational and normative, then philosophers should ensure what is known as genuine wisdom which happens to have been neglected. This wisdom will permit us to construct new foundations of individual relation based on “relational ethics”.⁴⁷ Inter-personal ethics or relational ethics as seen in the view of Igor Bahovec will help to eliminate the influential and dominated views of what is known as “methodological individualism.”⁴⁸ His analysis exposes the confrontation between the western individualism and Christian values that is from the dimension of Christian solidarity that which advocate for love, charity and the bearing of one another’s burden.

In this case, we need to lay more emphasis on the national and international *normative politics* which at the same time could be seen as the *politics of transformation* that will create awareness on state holders to insist on special and inclusive educational policies as well as on politico-judiciary aspects.⁴⁹ The aim is to reshape and reform the individual and the society that have been taken hostage by the liberal ideologies, in view of ensuring its harmony and systematic stability. In this same light, we shall recall that the most important thing is the stability of system where we need to invite political, social, economic and cultural actors to learn how to function in accordance with the system and not in opposition or contrarily to the system. We shall be in Accordance here in one way or the other with the reflection of an American educational philosopher, Garry Hornby, who thinks that special education is been characterized by “*individual assessment and planning special instruction, goal-directed instruction...*”⁵⁰ he added that inclusive education is been characterized by “*a philosophy of acceptance and belonging within a community...*”⁵¹ special inclusive education should not rather be seen as an end in itself, but as a mean to realize an end which is society.⁵² It will permit us to divert from our isolated ways of life. It seems a solution to our crisis of humanity that is been caused by our present prevailed neo-liberal context.

V. CONCLUSION

Finally, following our reflection on John Rawls and John Stuart Mill’s conceptions of the individual and the society, we have arrived at certain key remarks: the first is their opposing conceptions based on the fact that John Stuart Mill defends tirelessly the individuality of individual from the liberal and libertarian perspective. He defended the individual liberty and freedom of speech and will above the authority of the society and the state. While John Rawls on his path reconsiders the balance or interdependence between the two through the liberal conception of justice and social union models and in this case, he could be considers as contestor of Mill. But however, we have argued beyond this opposing link between the two liberal thinkers in other to prove an undeniable link that remains between them. Their particularities are being overcome at the level where both thinkers gives accordance to the individual autonomy and priority of rights, the dangers are severe to humanity given that it had rather contributed to the deformation of the individuals as well as societies and this is what makes Rawls to remain the disciple of Mill. Faced with this, we have proposed another alternative that will by-pass the liberal conceptions of Rawls and Mill, in view of ensuring a harmonious interdependence between the individual and the social whole. This proposition is an invitation to lay more emphasis on the national and international *normative politics* which at the same time could be seen as the *politics of transformation* that will create awareness on state holders, strong institutions and Tran-institutions to

⁴⁵ Thomas Pogge, *John Rawls: His Life and Theory of Justice*, p.44.

⁴⁶ Intre-personal ethics is equally known as relationship ethics. The essence and foundation of such ethics is genuine community relationship that is entirely based on love and trust for one another. The foundation of such ethics is not individualistic, neither is it based on human right that most liberals are defending, but rather, on relational understanding of human dignity, Cf: Igor Bahovec, *Christianity in Confrontation with Individualism*, 02/2015, p. 345.

⁴⁷ *Idem*.

⁴⁸ A doctrine according to which social structures and collective phenomenorms should only be explained from an individualistic perspective without taking into consideration the interaction between the individual and the social whole, Cf: Geoffrey M. Hodgson, *Institution and Individuals Interaction and Evolution*, organization studies, 2007, 28;95, p.97.

⁴⁹ That will emphasizes on the constitutional essentials as well as on the penalize aspects that will make individuals more conscious of the prescribed sense of inclusiveness and belongingness.

⁵⁰ Garry Hornby, *Inclusive Special Education*, London, New York, 2014, p.3.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p.4.

⁵² *Ibid*, p.35.

insist on special and inclusive educational policies as well as on politico-judiciary aspects that will help to rebuild the new basis of the individual and the collective relationship.

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