

Aristotelian Perspectives of Justice

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Received: 22 March 2026 / Accepted: 29 March 2026 / Published: 31 March 2026
Journal homepage: <https://anubodhan.org>

Abstract

When it comes to term Justice, it has one of the most important moral, social and political concepts. As it is a wide concept therefore different philosophers has different views about justice, but, for the most part, what they define or frame as justice involves ethical investigation and moral inquiry. Philosophers usually frame justice based on their ideas about morals, which in turn inform their ideas about political and social justice. Generally, justice is said to exist when an individual receives what they are entitled to, that is, the benefits and burdens that they are entitled to because of their unique characteristics and circumstances. Just because someone says a certain person or action is good, moral, or virtuous doesn't necessarily mean it is good.

While some philosophers have considered justice to be the entirety of ethics, most have considered ethical goodness or justice to be a subset of justice. Justice is typically understood to include at least four closely-related ethical terms: rights, justice, equality, and entitlement.

Philosophy of justice has primarily focused on answering two kinds of questions: metaethical (questions about the meaning of terms used in moral discourse, as well as rules of reason and/or ways of knowing which moral beliefs are true or false) and normative (questions about what people ought to do, as opposed to what they actually do). The most important metaethical questions about justice are: (a) what is the distinctive function of terms like just and right in moral discourse? (b) can judgments about justice or injustice in

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institutions or actions or relationships be rationalized? The most important normative ethical questions include: (a) how should we act in order to be just; (b) how should social institutions be designed to achieve justice?

Key Words: Moral, Justice, Virtue, Good, Social, Entitlement

Introduction

Since the beginning of human existence, when individuals began to think for themselves, there have been a number of concepts and terms in human discourse that have yet to have a definitive definition, and still remain open to interpretation. Justice is one such concept, and can be regarded as one of the most significant and influential aspects of political thought. Justice has been seen as the foundation of the social system, and is the foundation for the cohesive functioning of a society. It is associated with the observance of law, the prohibition of unreasonable conduct, and the establishment of a system of equal opportunities, equal privilege, and freedom for all. Justice is highly subjective. In some cases, what is just to one person may not be just to another person who is in a similar situation. The difficulty lies in the nature of justice, as there are no predetermined universal principles through which the term "justice" can be defined. Nevertheless, there are some fundamental principles that can be derived from justice, such as equality, fairness, impartiality, and trust.

For some justice is everything: "Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought."¹ And for many, it has not been achieved: "We do not live in a just world."²

The concept of justice encompasses the principles of justice, equality, ethical conduct, legality, and lawfulness. Justice seeks to resolve issues such as the question of what is owed to a person and the question of what constitutes a just punishment. Philosophers, politicians, and humanitarians are all interested in the concept of justice.

The Idea of Justice by Various Western Thinkers

Plato – For Plato, justice is both an aspect of human virtue and the connection that binds men together in society. It is a virtue that makes a man good and social. Justice is an order and responsibility of the parts of the soul; it is as important to the soul as health is to the body. According to Plato, justice is a moral concept rather than a legal one.

¹ John Rawls. *A Theory of Justice*, revised ed. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), 3

² Thomas Nagel, "The Problem of Global Justice." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 33 (2005): 113-147. 113.

Immanuel Kant- Immanuel Kant, one of the most influential figures in the modern West, focused on freedom when it came to justice. He believed that freedom was what gave us our dignity, and that it was our only natural right. He said that all laws should be made from the perspective of freedom, and that people shouldn't be allowed to violate someone else's freedom. Basically, he said that the only moral rules were laws that said that people should be free, equal and independent. But what about crimes and punishment? He said that punishment should be just and that revenge or hatred wasn't virtuous. He also said that if someone did something wrong, death was the only appropriate punishment. He devoted a lot of his writing to justice, and applied his theories to public, private and international law.

Rawls- John Rawls, in 1971, published his seminal book, "A Theory of Justice." It is widely regarded as one of the most influential books of the twentieth century. Rawls tried to define a just society by performing a thought experiment in which a group of individuals lived behind a "veil of ignorance," which concealed the differences between them. Without outside influence, people would not seek to favor one group over others. Ultimately, the group agreed on two fundamental principles. Rawls claimed that equal distribution of resources should be the preferred state of nature, rather than utilitarian philosophies. Every individual has an equal right to basic rights, according to his Theory of Justice, and they should have the same opportunities and chances as other people of similar skills.

Cephalus³ – He was a spokesperson of the bygone trading class's conventional morality, and he laid the foundation of the traditional theory of justice. According to him 'justice consists in speaking the truth and paying one's debt'. As a result, Cephalus associates justice with moral behavior.

Aquinas⁴ – He advocated for a justice system based on pro-rata mutuality. That is, each righteous person provides to others what they are owed in proportion to their responsibilities. This will not be the same for everyone, and your obligations to them will be founded on both civil and moral law.

For many, justice means fairness. But justice is not the same for everyone. Social justice is the idea that everyone should have the same economic, political and social opportunities regardless of their race, gender or religion. Distributive justice is the distribution of wealth in society. Environmental justice is the equal treatment of people with respect to environmental issues and benefits. Reconciliation or remediation justice seeks to heal those who have been wronged. Procedural justice is the implementation of legal decisions according

³ Cephalus who was a representative of traditional morality of the ancient trading class established the traditional theory of justice. According to him 'justice consists in speaking the truth and paying one's debt.

⁴ Thomas Aquinas; *Summa Theologiae* II-II, 58, 1.

to fair and unbiased procedures. Legal and political systems are desirable but they cannot achieve justice unless they achieve social justice. Judicial and political systems are one of the fundamental moral values.

Aristotle -All Greek political thought centers around the idea of justice. It's an abstract concept, and it's hard to define it because different thinkers look at it in different ways.. Justice is no less important to him, as he regards it as the very virtue of the state. It is justice that creates a state, gives it a vision, and, when combined with ethics, propels the state to the pinnacle of all ethical values.

The most basic principle of justice, one that has been accepted since its definition by Aristotle over two thousand years ago, is the principle that “all men are created equal, and they are to be treated equally”as Aristotle articulated in reference to Plato: “treat like cases as like”⁵ and in its modern form, it is sometimes expressed as “people should be treated equally unless they differ in a way that is relevant to the context in which they are employed.” For example, “if Tom and Tick do the same work and there are no significant differences between them or in the kind of work they do, then, in justice, they should be paid equal wages.” And if “Tom” is paid more than “Tick” simply because “Tom is a man” or “Tick is a black woman,” then “we have an injustice” because race and sex are irrelevant to normal work situations.

However, there are many distinctions that we recognize as just causes for differential treatment. For instance, we believe that it is just and proper for a parent to devote more time and attention to his or her children in his or her private life than he or she does to other people’s children; we believe it is just and just for someone who is the first in line at the theater to receive first choice of the tickets; we believe it’s just and proper for the government to give benefits to the poor that it doesn’t give to the rich; we believe that punishment for those who have done something wrong should not be extended to others who haven’t done anything wrong themselves; and we believe that those who work harder or contribute more to a project than others do should get more benefits from that project than those who don’t work as hard or as hard as others do. So, there are many criteria that we recognize as reasons for differential treatment (need, desertion, contribution, effort, etc.)

However, there are other criteria that we consider unfair. For example, in the realm of work, we generally believe that it is unfair to discriminate based on factors such as age, gender, race, religion, etc. For example, if the judge’s nephew gets a suspended sentence on armed robbery while another non-judgemental offender goes to prison for the same offense, or if the director of public works’ brother gets the \$5 million contract for sprinklers to be installed

⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, V.3. 1131a10–b15; *Politics*, III.9.1280 a8–15, III. 12. 1282b18–23

on the city's golf course despite other contractors' lower bids, we say it's unfair. Similarly, we believe it is unfair to punish someone for something they had no control over or to not compensate them for a harm they suffered.

According to Aristotle, justice comes in two forms: universal justice and Particular justice. Universal justice is about following the law and being virtuous. Particular justice, on the other hand, is about distributing goods and wealth to people according to their merit. However, he does not provide a comprehensive definition of general justice, as he only uses the word in the introductory lines of the Book V⁶(Nicomachean ethics). According to Aristotle, the term "just"⁷ has two distinct meanings: the first meaning of which is the basis for universal justice. The second meaning of the word "just" is the basis for making a rule of law, which is to act according to the "law"⁸. Therefore, according to Aristotle, there is no definitive distinction between that just and law⁹. In this context, it is clear that acts that are just are those that are lawful, but what is lawful? In response to this question, Aristotle suggests that the word "law" is used to describe a type of behavior that is intended to promote the collective interest of the entire society.¹⁰

In this sense, justice refers to a moral configuration that compels people to do the right things or actions. This is called the virtue of moral justice, which is nothing more or less than a moral imperative that is directed toward the good of others rather than self. If justice is disguised as justice in general, it can be said that justice in general is the supreme virtue of obedience to law. Because of the impossibility of applying universal justice throughout history, Aristotle proposed a different kind of justice: particular justice. In a world where there are no longer any possibilities to follow a general or universal framework of justice, Aristotle recognized that there may be some acts that are contrary to the law but still useful. This is why he developed the theory of particular justice. Particular justice upholds the state of fairness and equality, which is based on the idea of giving out money or goods in a fair way. For example, a wage is a wage that is in proportion to the work done by the worker. Fair is a state between too much and too little, while equal is a state between more and less, so a just law is the ideal balance between two extremes. The term "just" can be expressed in different ways, like particular justice, which means treating everyone equally and unequally with their own circumstances. It is noteworthy to note that, while Plato discussed general justice extensively, Aristotle did not.

⁶ Ross. W. D (Tr), Aristotle's The Nicomachean Ethics, Revised with an Introduction and Notes by Lesley Brown, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009

⁷ Ibid, p-82.

⁸ Ibid, p-83.

⁹ Ross. W. D (Tr), Aristotle's The Nicomachean Ethics, Revised with an Introduction and Notes by Lesley Brown, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009, p. 81 (1129b)

¹⁰ Ibid, p-81(1129b)

This is because, unlike Plato, Aristotle paid greater attention to particular justice. This is due to the fact that particular justice is associated with the justice of daily life, such as the allocation, exchange, and punishment of resources, as well as the intentional participation of rational individuals in social activities. General justice, on the other hand, is a type of supreme virtue that is held to be an ideal that must be attained by individuals, but is almost never achieved. Aristotle's general justice philosophy is an interesting one to contemplate. Concepts such as the rule of law, equal treatment before the law, and legality were considered to be in line with the mindset of individuals and states from antiquity to the present day. While some thinkers may disagree with this idea, the deviation from it was arbitrary, as it was implemented through morally and legally permissible policies and laws to nullify or diminish the effects of equality. As for particular justice, it is suggested that it is a morally permissible and desirable distribution of goods, disadvantages, and advantages among the general population. From this discussion, it can be concluded that particular justice is a set of norms distinct from the general justice, which involves the integration of the society as a whole. For this reason, Aristotle classified Particular justice into two types namely, Distributive justice and corrective justice.

According to Aristotle this form of justice i.e. **distributive justice** was the most powerful way to stop a revolution. Distributive justice challenges the notion that a fair distribution of goods should be distributed in an equal or unequal manner. It argues that treating an individual fairly and un-discriminatoryly implies that their rights, obligations and rewards should be proportional to their merit and contribution to society. Therefore, in this view of justice, the word “just” means “proportional” and “proportionate” are synonymous with each other. Distributive justice is also the intermediate status between too big and too small, or too much and too little. This justice focused on giving out offices, honors, goods, and services to people according to their status as citizens. It mainly focused on political privileges. He said that every political system should have its own form of justice, but he didn't accept democratic or oligarchic forms of justice. He said that only the most virtuous people should get the most important jobs, since there are so few of them.

Rectifactory or Corrective justice is all about making up for what someone has lost because of the unfairness of society. This type of justice is necessary when one individual engages in certain activities against another in a manner that results in the agent gaining and the victims suffering. Implementing the fundamental concept of this type of justice is the most effective way to resolve this unequal gains and losses. The gains of the agent must be returned to the victims, thus restoring equality. Therefore, corrective justice must not require or inquire into the status of the individual in the process of awarding penalty or compensation, but must instead consider the nature of the disadvantages

suffered by victims and the advantages of the agent. Consequently, the justice follows the principle of arithmetic proportion. It's a way of making sure that no one person has the right to take away another person's right. Aristotle argued that corrective justice concerns both voluntary and commercial activities, such as hiring, selling and providing security. These activities involve aggression against life, property, honour and liberty. In summary, corrective justice seeks to promote virtue and moral integrity of character, which is why it is referred to as corrective justice.

The utilization of a particular type of justice, social justice, is not simply a result of eliminating inequality in all aspects of society. Rather, it is the state and society that create certain norms or theories to guarantee the overall prosperity of the society, which is the ultimate objective of the state. This indicates that any norms are created following a philosophical inquiry into the nature of society, in which certain factors are being examined, such as the distribution of justice, the existence of equality and the absence of inequality, the distribution of social justice, social inclusion and the absence of exclusion, the distinction between equity and equality, the allocation of rights and laws, and the nature of being human. All of these factors are subject to philosophical inquiry. Aristotle's theory of justice was well-suited to his social and historical contexts. For example, a formula in Algebra will serve justice when we apply it to Algebra; however, when we apply this formula in Arithmetic it will not serve justice. This is because there are differences in nature. Similarly, determinants are relative. Therefore, my position is that the theory of justice must be formed by the method of confirmation in society by reference to its own social, cultural, and historical context where justice is required.

It is evident from the discussions of Aristotle's theory of justice that justice can manifest itself in any of the forms discussed, and in some cases in more than one, depending on the socioeconomic, geographical and historical contexts of the place in which the concept of justice is employed. Despite the variety of forms in the world, the common denominator among these variations of justice is the pursuit of the collective interest among individuals. For example, the central theme of Aristotle's discussion of justice was to demonstrate the path to the attainment of the welfare of the entire society in the form of social justice theory applied to the fundamental institutional structure of the modern liberal state.

Thus to conclude:- Justice is not a legal system, but rather a utopian vision or an ideal aspiration. It is a concept that develops over time. Justice, along with fairness, moral justice, and equality, have been widely used in popular culture as terms to describe the expectation of receiving what is due. It is difficult to define justice due to its nature. In a nutshell we can say that the concept of justice encompasses ethical principles based on moral rightness, rational

considerations, legal principles, natural law, religious principles, equity and justice, and the administration of law, which takes into account the inherent and inherent rights of all individuals and entities, including the right of all individuals to equality before the law in respect of their civil rights; without discrimination on grounds of race, sex, sexual preference, gender identity, nationality, color, or ethnicity; religion; disability; age; wealth; or any other characteristic; and is also considered to be an integral part of social justice. Or we can say that the basis for justice can be found in the principles of social solidarity, mutual reliance, and equality. So justice is at the heart of morality and should be taken into account in all our moral decisions. When assessing any moral action, we need to ask ourselves if we're treating everyone the same. If not, then we need to ask if the difference in treatment we're seeing is justifiable. Are the criteria we're applying relevant to the situation? But justice isn't the only principle to think about when making moral decisions. Sometimes justice needs to be set aside in favor of other types of moral claims, like rights or the well-being of society. But justice is an acknowledgement of our mutual respect for each other's dignity, and an acceptance that if we want to live in an interdependent society, we need to treat each other the same.

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