

Divine Justice and Social Inequality: A Theological Response from Islamic Tradition

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Abstract. This article examines the fundamental concept of divine justice ('Adl) through Islamic theological perspectives and its relevance for addressing current social inequalities. Modern societies encounter major economic disparities and systemic social neglect and injustice which demands new theological solutions to these crises. The research uses qualitative literature review methods to analyze classical and modern divine justice interpretations from Al-Ghazālī, Ibn Taymiyyah, Sayyid Qutb, Kamali, Esack, and Ramadan. The Findings shows divine justice functions beyond theoretical abstraction to establish normative guidelines which affect policy decisions, ethical principles, governance systems and human development programs. specifically, it reveals that Islamic theology provides a unified ethical system which addresses poverty reduction alongside gender equality and social justice promotion. The practical implication of this study is that Islamic theology serves as a transformative tool for ethical progress and societal change in modern times through its critical reinterpretation.

Kata Kunci: Divine Justice, Islamic Theology, Social Inequality

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INTRODUCTION

More astonishing than ever before is the social inequality gap in the contemporary world. Both in the developed and developing world, there is an ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor, where millions are denied basic and fundamental education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and active political participation (Piketty, 2020; UNDP, 2022). Such inequities deeply transcend economic

problems, reflecting the inadequacies of our civilization from moral and ethical perspectives that require consideration beyond the scope of policy debates regarding politics and economics. While secular approaches have thoroughly critiqued and provided important frameworks for reform, the transcendental and metaphysical aspects of justice tend to get ignored. In this sense, religious traditions, Islam in particular,

provide some powerful theological perspectives to help deal with inequality.

ʿAdl, or justice, is an important concept in Islamic theology. In the Qurʾan, God is said to be *Al-ʿAdl*, which translates to *The Just*. It has been established that divine justice is both perfect and part of the essence of the Creator. It is also portrayed in the verse: “Indeed, Allah commands justice, excellence, and giving to relatives...” (Qurʾan 16:90). Here, we see that justice as a social ethic does not suffice; instead, it emerges as a necessity of obligation. This statement forms the basis of Islam's legal (*fiqh*) and also theological and spiritual frameworks. Classical scholars like Al-Ghazālī and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah have emphasized that a just God bends His justice towards inflicting moral responsibilities on individuals and institutions (Al-Ghazālī, 2005; Ibn Qayyim, 2016). In contemporary Islamic discourse, thinkers such as Taha Abdurrahman and Fazlur Rahman have argued for the reformation of theology-centered ethics to address socio-political and economic inequities (Rahman, 2009; Abdurrahman, 2020).

Not only is theology concerned with verifying the Qurʾan; it is and must always be considered one of the fundamental obligations that a human being has to undertake. In this context, the Qurʾan states

in verse 4:135: “O you who believe, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives.” This command captures the reality as an uncompromising obligation that needs to be pursued aggressively and universally. However, a number of problems still remain: How is the concept of justice in Allah's system compatible with the global suffering and the disparity of people? In the light of Islamic teachings, is there a potential response to poverty, racial discrimination, or the oppression of women?

These problems pose a need for a more comprehensive Islamic understanding of the divine will, together with a study of human responsibility concerning politically motivated social injustice embedded within the system. The ongoing discussion between the Muʿtazilites and Ashʿarites on whether nature stands with predetermined and preset rules, or whether free will exists, has shaped enduring legacies in modern-day Islam—and the subject is still ongoing. Historically, these disputes educated people with a powerful interpretation rooted in reason, morality, and justice, as reflected in the Muʿtazilite school, which believed that God requires not only freedom but also takes no ethical action without justifiable reasoning. The alternative view, related to the Ashʿarite school,

dominated by rationalism and a theosophic explanation, relies on absolute power attributed to the divine force and discretion. Questions of great complexity continue to surround the world concerning ethics and accountability (Mohammad, 2020; Nasr, 2018).

This article examines the theological foundations of divine justice in Islam and assesses their use in addressing contemporary inequalities. The study utilizes a qualitative approach and analyzes classical primary literature and recent scholarship. It contends that divine justice in Islam is not merely a belief but rather an obligation, a wish, and an active desire that guides individual ethics to the extent that laws and policies are aligned with the will of the people. The intention is to reclaim Islamic theology as a constructive discourse for ethical debate and social activism in today's context.

This interdisciplinary framework provides new insight into the potential of religion as a catalyst for societal change. At the same time, it demonstrates that, if thoughtfully reinterpreted beyond the narrow scope of mere doctrine, many Islamic theological ideas—as intervening tools can be employed to tackle chronic societal outrages that haunt our world today (Esack, 2021; Kamali, 2019; Auda, 2019).

METHODS

The research methodology uses qualitative research through systematic literature review as its main approach. The research undertook an extensive desk-based investigation from January to June 2024 to study how classical and modern interpretations of Islamic divine justice through ‘adl (divine justice) can provide solutions for present-day social inequality.

The research obtained its data from primary and secondary sources. The main sources for this research include classical theological texts that feature works from Al-Ghazālī and Ibn Taymiyyah and the Mu‘tazilite and Ash‘arite school discussions. These historical texts establish the basis for understanding divine justice according to classical scholarship. The research uses modern works from Fazlur Rahman Taha Abdurrahman Jasser Auda and Farid Esack in addition to recent monographs and peer-reviewed journal articles and institutional reports that focus on theology and ethics and social justice.

The literature selection process relied on purposive sampling which focused on ‘adl and theodicy as well as their social equality consequences.

The analysis employed thematic content analysis as its main methodological approach. The texts underwent an initial

examination to discover repeated concepts and arguments regarding divine justice. Two main conceptual groups emerged from the analysis through which classical interpretations stood apart from modern reformist perspectives. The research established the development of theological justice concepts through the examination of both historical and contemporary thought streams. The research findings were analyzed in relation to secular justice theories which included John Rawls' justice as fairness and Amartya Sen's capability approach to develop a normative framework which unites Islamic theological concepts with worldwide ethical discourse.

The methodological framework employed in this study guarantees both thoroughness and strictness. The research achieves both descriptive analysis and practical relevance for addressing modern systemic inequality through its method of combining classical theological readings with contemporary scholarship and global justice theories.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Classical Islamic Theology and the Foundations of Divine Justice

Divine justice (‘Adl) in Islam, considered from a doctrinal perspective, is and has always been an astonishingly deep ethical, metaphysical, and legal principle

that defines the entire Islamic thought system. In the classical Islamic worldview, divine justice is an attribute of God, and morally, it must be performed by creation. The Qur’an states, *“Indeed, Allah does not wrong the people at all, but it is the people who wrong themselves”* (Qur’an 10:44); thus, it illustrates a clear commitment to equity, impartiality, and accountability. These insights provide an intellectual basis for Islam’s human reflections within responsibility, theodicy, and social ethics.

During the early years of Islamic intellectual history, Islam’s divinely revealed belief system (Islamic theology) focused on elaborate debates on divine justice. A prominent school in the 8th-century Middle East was the Mu‘tazilites, the first rationalistic Islamic school that systematized justice under the framework of divinities supporting logic. They postulated that justice is a self-evident rationale and that God has a responsibility to act justly by the law of His being. Hence, moral obligation becomes significant because humans have the capacity to exercise control over their actions.

On the other hand, the Ash‘arite school, initiated by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī, states that divine justice is beyond human measurement. In Ash‘arite theology, whatever God chooses to do is by definition just because a divine will cannot be limited by

anything outside it. This grants God absolute sovereignty but makes it difficult for humans to reason through the existence of evil, suffering, and injustice. Despite these fundamental differences, both schools sought to balance divine attributes, observable reality, and moral reasoning.

Later scholars such as Al-Ghazālī attempted a synthesis. While grounded in Ash‘arite metaphysics, he stressed that God’s justice envelops hidden wisdom (*hikmah*) that justifies even tragic events. He also highlighted personal responsibility and ethical behavior, demonstrating that divine justice demands both submissions to divine sovereignty and active moral responsibility. Similarly, Ibn Taymiyyah asserted that justice is the foundation of governance, even arguing that a non-Muslim society ruled justly is better than an unjustly ruled Muslim society. These perspectives illustrate that divine justice in Islam is not an abstract concept but a guiding framework for law, politics, and social order.

Reconstructing Theological Ethics for a Just Society: Contemporary Applications

Muslim scholars have started a new examination of theology through ‘adl because of the rising worldwide gap between wealthy and poor populations. Modern scholars agree that Islamic justice needs to advance past theoretical metaphysical

frameworks to establish practical social transformation guidelines. Each scholar's viewpoint should be analyzed as part of a unified pattern which demonstrates the transition from legal formalism to ethical intentionality using ‘adl as a normative framework for governance and economic systems and gender relations.

The unification of ideas emerges throughout various fields. The economic system utilizes zakāh along with ṣadaqah and ribā prohibition to enable wealth redistribution and fight against unfair financial systems. The feminist interpretation of Qur’anic justice requires equal value for men and women while dismissing patriarchal interpretations because they lack both ethical and theological validity. The fundamental Islamic concept that God supports just states regardless of their believers establishes justice as the fundamental basis for legitimate authority. These examples prove that ‘adl functions beyond personal virtue since it establishes fundamental principles for structuring social systems.

The worldwide importance of ‘adl becomes evident when examined alongside contemporary justice theories. The concept of justice as fairness from Rawls which focuses on equality together with benefits for disadvantaged groups matches the Quranic command in 4:135 to maintain unbiased

justice even when it conflicts with personal gain. The capability approach developed by Sen which measures justice through actual freedom to live with dignity matches Islam's requirement to remove obstacles including poverty and illiteracy and systemic exclusion. Through this analysis Islamic theological perspectives maintain inward focus but simultaneously establish valuable connections to general justice discussions.

The primary outcome of this research demonstrates that 'adl functions as an essential link uniting religious moral principles with secular theoretical justice frameworks. Through the process of theological reframing Islamic theology establishes 'adl as a twofold value which functions as divine duty for Muslims and an operational framework for worldwide discussions about equity and governance and human development. The analysis presents a fresh perspective which surpasses typical historical evaluations by demonstrating how Islamic theology continues to address contemporary social issues.

CONCLUSION

The research investigates Islamic theological concept of divine justice ('adl) as both metaphysical reality and moral obligation to solve present-day social inequalities. The research investigates classical Islamic theological debates

between Mu'tazilite rationalists and Ash'arite voluntarists along with the ideas of Al-Ghazālī and Ibn Taymiyyah to prove divine justice functions as an ethical principle which shapes human conduct and social organizations and governance systems.

The scholarly investigation of Taha Abdurrahman together with Farid Esack Jasser Auda and Fazlur Rahman extends the discourse through their presentation of 'adl as a normative framework which guides policy development as well as economic systems and gender equality and public responsibility. The scholars demonstrate through their work that Islamic theology becomes a dynamic force for ethical change and social development when critically reinterpreted.

The study establishes a connection between 'adl and secular theories which discuss justice. The concept of justice as fairness introduced by Rawls together with Sen's capability approach demonstrate strong parallels with the Qur'anic call for impartiality and dignity and empowerment. The analysis demonstrates that Islamic justice enhances both internal theological discussions and worldwide equity and human development conversations while maintaining accessibility for Muslim and non-Muslim audiences.

The research faces two main limitations because it depends on Sunni

sources and lacks empirical sociological analysis. The framework would benefit from incorporating Shi'i thought together with region-based case studies which show how theological ethics function in real-world situations.

The discourse about ethics in civilization must acknowledge the abundant heritage of Islamic theology because it forms an essential part of any such discussion. The principle of *tasfiyah al-ʿadl* persists as an eternal directive which defies temporal boundaries and cultural differences as well as ideological frameworks. Islamic theology presents a twofold approach through which it combines traditional beliefs and modern global theories to establish both divine justice requirements and practical methods for creating inclusive societies with compassion.

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