
THE CONCEPT OF JUSTICE IN THE ABRAHAMIC RELIGIONS

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

The concept of justice is one of the fundamental categories of the world outlook. This idea, which originated in the Old Testament, is still in the centre of attention of both philosophers and people interested in practical improvement of society. The article provides a comparative analysis of the concept of justice in Judaism, Orthodox Christianity and Islam. It also presents reasons to believe that Judaism is the law of justice, the main principles of which are formulated in the Torah. Apart from that, the article considers the Orthodox understanding of justice as truth developed in the Orthodox theological and philosophical tradition, as well as the Islamic understanding of justice. It is noted that understanding of justice as truth was formed based on the initial ideas of justice shared by East Slavs. As far as Islam is concerned, it contains a social aspect of understanding justice. At the same time, in all cases, justice remains an undifferentiated ethico-legal category.

Keywords: justice, Christianity, Orthodox, Islam, ethics

1. Introduction

Like their distant ancestors, modern people feel a lack of justice in the relationships both between certain individuals and at the socio-political level. The achievements of the Western civilization in terms of implementation of practical justice in reality are beyond doubt but they cannot be called absolute and all-encompassing since there is a significant disproportion between the leaders of civilizational development (the so-called developed countries) and a huge geopolitical segment.

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Since the worldview situation of the present time is marked with immanent pluralism, it is necessary to consider the possible ideological interaction between secular and religious values. This is what can ensure mutual understanding between adherents of different beliefs who still share the same aspirations for humaneness, solidarity and mutual understanding. The issue related to optimal usage of the humanistic potential of religions in socially meaningful activities also lies within this framework.

In this connection, research into the values and norms behind the religious and cultural traditions that are returning to modern society is gaining relevance. One of such normative concepts is justice.

The origins of the development of the problem of justice are rooted deep in history. According to Aristotle, it is natural for justice to distribute things properly, follow reasonable customs and traditions, and respect written laws. It is characterized by truthfulness in important issues and commitment to agreements. The philosopher believed that it is accompanied by respectfulness, honesty, trust and loathing for evil [1]. Injustice, on the contrary, is described by Aristotle as negligence towards customs, traditions and laws, untruthfulness, failure to follow the terms of deals, sneaking, boastfulness, superficial philanthropy, ill-naturedness, and craftiness [2, 3]. This interpretation truly implies an understanding of justice as an integral moral value.

Later the concept of justice was elaborated in the liberal theory of justice by J. Rawls [4], legal theories of justice by P. Ricouer [5] and H.L.A. Hart [6], research carried out by M. Walzer [7], M. Sandel [8] and J. Roemer [9], who consider different aspects of the theory of justice, mainly in the context of theoretical opposition of the paradigms of universalism and contextualism.

According to Sandel, the general meaning of the concept of justice comes down to the principle of morally and socially adequate giving and receiving one's due. Since along the moral aspect there is a strongly pronounced social side, justice calls for correspondence between actions and rewards, crime and punishment, people's virtues and their public recognition [10].

However, apart from fundamental research, recently, there has been an increasing number of works devoted to values and norms prevailing in various societies, including ones looking at the problems of justice in certain religions. This mainly refers to the works studying the Islamic understanding of justice [11-13] and analysing the concept of justice in the Christian tradition [14-16]. Researchers identify the dynamics of value-normative transformations and the specific features of the ideas of justice in certain societies. At the same time, the majority of publications only record particular prevailing ideas outside the scope of comparative analysis.

The hypothesis of this research is as follows: the concept of justice in different religious beliefs implies the development of a certain social order, normative regulation of which is not limited to positive law since people within such an order are united by an emotional connection rather than common interests or needs. The objective of this research is to carry out comparative analysis of the concept of justice in different religious beliefs.

In our opinion, to achieve this objective, the following tasks must be accomplished:

- to analyse the concept of justice as the law of justice in Judaism as the origin of all Abrahamic religions;
- to consider the concept of justice as truth in Orthodox Christianity, which, as the research shows, remains a significant aspect in everyday consciousness;
- to analyse the social meaning of the interpretation of justice in Islam to find out how these concepts determine the forms of social integration in society.

2. Methods

In the course of the study, the following research methods were applied: analysis of scientific literature on the problem of the idea of justice in philosophical and socio-political discourse, comparative analysis of the concept of justice in the Abrahamic religions.

The methodological basis of this research is represented by man-centred postulates of the just organization of life set forth in sacred texts, such as the Torah, the Old and New Testaments, the Quran, as well as in the theological works by Metropolitan Hilarion ('Sermon on Law and Grace' [https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/Illarion_Kievskij/slovo_o_zakone_i_blagodati/]), Maximus the Greek ('Sermon XXVII. Epistle to the Orthodox, to the rulers of the government and that they judge godly and mercifully together' [<https://religion.wikireading.ru/12428>]), Ibn Taymiyyah [<http://islamport.com/l/tym/>]).

3. Results

Considering the specific features of the concept of justice in religious ethics of different traditions, the following observations should be made. First, the vast majority of sacred texts of various religions are sensitive to this concept and attach primary importance to it [17]. Religions do not reduce the concept of justice to individual aspects of its interpretation (legal, political or ethical). Instead, they interpret it in a conceptual, Aristotelian, way, as an integral moral virtue.

Justice in religion acquires an ontological status since it is believed to originate from the will and wisdom of the Absolute God. As a principle of being, the main criterion of justice in Taoism is the Tao, in Confucianism - the generalized image of Heaven and in Abrahamic religions - the Creator God [18]. Even in Buddhism, where, at first sight, the image of the Absolute God is missing, there is still a concept of ontologically rooted justice and an anthropological criterion of its achievement - the absence of suffering (i.e. what corresponds with the concept of the common good in Abrahamic religions and with the concept of *құтты* (good) in the Kazakh tradition).

Associating the image of justice with God, the religious worldview is based on criteria comparable to the level of supernatural human behaviour. However, positioning a man as the image and likeness of God, religion still motivates a man to expand the horizons of the just organization of life.

Below we shall cite some sacred texts of different religions, each of which crystallizes the genuinely humanistic sense of the concept of justice and deserves to be implemented into life (Table 1).

Table 1. Characteristic extracts from sacred texts of different religions about the concept of justice.

No.	Text	Quote	Source
1.	Torah	“The Almighty requires the highest level of sanctity and eternal aspiration for justice of all those who have entered into covenant with Him. He is not indifferent to human actions, so any form of dishonesty does not remain unnoticed or unpunished, although the punishment is not always immediate, due to some reasons it is sometimes postponed until much later”.	[19]
2.	Old Testament	“When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself”.	Leviticus, 19.33-34 [20]
3.	New Testament	“Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, as it is written: “The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little”.	2 Corinthians 8.13–15 [20, p. 972]
4.	Quran	“O you who have believed, let not a people ridicule other people; perhaps they may be better than them; Nor shall you mock one another, or make fun of your names... You shall avoid any suspicion, for suspicion in some cases is sinful. You shall not spy one another, nor shall you backbite one another... We created you... that you may recognize one another.”	Surah Al-Hujurat 49:11-13 [21]

4. Discussion

4.1. Judaism as the law of justice

Judaism is a specific religious system, where the relationships between people and any manifestations of their attitude to the world and God are interpreted based on a formulated principle of justice. While Judaism requires its believers to develop the main virtues described in the Decalogue and other moral codes, at the same time, this religion establishes a strict principle of ethical retribution. Teaching its followers to be virtuous and sincere, this religion also encourages them to be intolerant of evil and ensure proper punishment for the wrongdoer. Therefore, the theme of Yahweh who judges and punishes is extremely typical of this religion and its ethics [22].

In the commentaries to the Torah, we read that we are talking about a jealous attitude as a result of which any smallest violation of established agreements or relationships entails anger and subsequent execution [18]. Thus, the motif of fear of God, which can be interpreted in theological teachings in various ways, is one of the leading themes in the semantic structure of Judaism.

Perception of God as a person leads to the assumption that God can be offended by human negligence. Therefore, as one of the researchers of Judaism P. Johnson notes, “compensation [for harm from human injustice - our commentary] is also required by God himself, and this is connected with severe punishment” [23].

Realizing the historically limited nature of the motivation of justice through fear, at the same time, we note the presence in these semantic structures also of the idea of God as an entity that uniquely endures and empathizes with humanity. And even if the reaction to the inconsistency of God’s hopes regarding human virtues, including justice, is a harsh punishment (as it really happened in those historically distant times in society), nevertheless, here we can state the idea of ontological sanctioning of the absoluteness of good and the limited forces of evil, which in the historical perspective will be rethought and personally interpreted in Christianity on the new principles of the ethics of love and grace.

The ethics of justice in Judaism is visually represented by the sacred text through a system of parables and legends, which requires the believer not only to assimilate certain norms of behaviour, but also to adopt a kind of prayer and mental attitude. The person is motivated to accept norms through getting used to life and ethical collisions of characters, being empathic with the moral dichotomy of the heroes of sacred legends in order to realize in their own soul and consciousness their moral duality and imperfection.

Immersion in this world of emotionally coloured experiences is designed to activate in the soul of the believer an increasing attraction to communion with God, in the acts of which the ethical hope would be given for the ability to overcome the negative aspects of one’s own self, gain support and blessings.

It is also characteristic that, according to many researchers, it was Judaism and the Old Testament monotheistic tradition that articulated the idea of soteriological significance of faith as a conscious life instruction. In the Old Testament, one’s righteousness (fairness) is defined as complying with divine law (Deuteronomy 6.25: “And if we are careful to obey all this law before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness”). At the same time, it should be noted that in the Old Testament righteousness acts not only as a legal and ethical concept but also as a connection with God, a certain state in which a person following God’s commandments resides. A lot of Old Testament stories describe people being established in faith and program the matrix of the general Abrahamic paradigm that implies the guiding role of faith in respect of people’s actions. As opposed to pagan religions, where one’s religiousness is predominantly determined by their participation in mythologically-ritualized actions, monotheistic Judaism also requires believers to make constant individual efforts to open up their souls to divine grace [24].

The idea of God as the Absolute encourages believers to consider even an ethical and conceptual dissonance incomprehensible by the power of reason as arranged by God and sanctified by supreme justice that cannot be comprehended by earthly means. The biblical story of the righteous Job is illustrative here. The

keynote of this story is the following: in spite of injustices in life obvious from the perspective of common sense, a man should not abjure one's faith and break their spiritual connection with God. Therefore, although Job was not ethically perfect, due to his faith, which entailed a special dialog with God, who was recognized as the only foundation of personal existence and on whose justness (and, in this case, also mercy) all hopes rested, he received God's forgiveness and thus was able to return to a righteous life and a certain state of justice.

4.2. Justice as truth in Orthodox Christianity

The concept of truth as justice received the most developed theoretical substantiation primarily in theological literature (in terms of divine truth) but it was also considered in works by representatives of religious philosophy [23, 24]. This concept has influenced and still has a significant impact on social practices in many societies whose value-normative sphere has been shaped under the influence of Orthodox Christianity, which remains a normative benchmark that determines everyday activities of people in these countries.

The concept of truth (righteousness, verity, essence) reflects the initial Slavic ideas of justice. Understanding a negative action aimed at a certain person or social community (clan or family) as disrupting the world order as a whole is also characteristic of these ideas. In this respect, truth is not only justice and law (it is no coincidence that the first legal code of Rus 'Russian Truth' created by Yaroslav the Wise contained the word 'truth' in its name) but also verity (the universal genuine order that unites all existing things) [25].

It can be assumed that the special role of the concepts of truth, righteousness, and justice as truth in Eastern Christian societies is connected with the lesser impact of Roman law on these societies compared with Western European countries. The major role in the development of the concept of justice and the value-normative sphere of Eastern Christian societies in general was played by biblical legal culture rather than Roman law. In the Book of Psalms - according to researchers, the only Old Testament book that was fully absorbed by Christian philosophy - the idea of law, which is fundamental for the Old Testament tradition, is expressed through the concept of *dikaïos*, which corresponds to the word *truth* in the Russian Book of Psalms [26].

The theme of righteousness as a special connection with God is reinforced in the New Testament (2 Corinthians 5.21: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"), and the world of righteousness appears to be more consistently opposed to the earthly everyday world ruled by law. Thereby, justice as truth is predominantly a way of achieving salvation rather than equality, which is the centre of the paradigm of justice developed in the ancient philosophical tradition.

The concept of justice as truth based on the New Testament tradition, which is found in the Orthodox theological and socio-philosophical thought, combines both the legal concept of law and the concept of justice. It is noteworthy that the latter acts not only as a gnoseological concept but also as an

existential one since, in this case, it refers not only to objective law but also about the transformation of the very essence of man when he obeys divine law.

One of the manifestations of this search for the truth can be found in one of the first philosophico-theological, but, at the same time, political, works - 'Sermon on law and grace' by Metropolitan Hilarion, who opposed two worlds - the world of everyday life and the world of 'grace and truth'. Similarly, in the instructive works by Maximus the Greek justice is conveyed with the word 'righteous'. In particular, he writes that God 'governs the world using very righteous measures' (the righteousness of which is also proved by the fact that the theologian refers to the understanding of justice as proportional equality, similar to the ancient interpretation of this concept, and by the fact that God 'pays back to everyone according to their works') and represents 'truth itself' [17]. Maximus the Greek differentiates between legitimacy, verity and truth, which have the same meaning as righteousness. The focus on truth allows one to accept the injustice of this world to be rewarded in the genuine world - in the heavenly kingdom "where only truth and holiness exist" [27].

The concept of justice as truth is intertwined with the idea of genuine social being, which was represented in both Eastern and Western Christianity by the community of believers, i.e. the Church. The understanding of Church formed in Eastern Christian theology is closer to Saint Augustine's *ordo amoris* than to Saint Thomas Aquinas' *ordo potestas*. Both Saint Augustine and theologians of Eastern Christianity viewed the Church as the unity of faith and love, which, according to the specific vision of the Eastern branch of Christianity, cannot be reduced to the earthly aspect of being of Church.

The empirical implementation of this specific feature was a peasant community that for a long time performed a double role: as a Church unit and a socio-political institution. Asynchronous social processes that explain the differences in the mentality and forms of social organization in Western and Eastern Europe encouraged the preservation of the institution of communities as the basis of social order in the European part of the Russian Empire for a much longer time than in Western Europe.

It was only in the 19th century when the transformation of the religious social order (i.e. community) started in Russia, where justice as truth was opposed to earthly justice implemented in positive law as the foundation of state-building. However, by and large, this opposition between people's customary law and positive law has still not been overcome in modern Russian society.

4.3. Islam as 'the religion of justice'

Muslim polemicists have considered the correlation between three Abrahamic religions: 1) Judaism as the law of justice (*shari'ah al-'adl*), 2) Christianity as the law of mercy, mercifulness (*shari'ah al-fadl*), 3) Islam as the law combining the features of the first two religions - justice and mercifulness (*shari'ah al-'adl va al-fadl*) [28].

While Christianity is predominantly called the religion of love, Islam is known as “the religion of justice” [29]. This statement is also proved by the extreme significance attached to law in Islam. For instance, the revolutionary events that took place in the second half of the 20th century and led to religion-oriented leaders coming to power in some countries of the Middle East (in the first place, in Iran) to a large extent represented a fight for justice (including social justice). In particular, according to the Iranian Islamic ideologist Ali Khamenei, Islam and justice are two sides of the same coin, and the purpose of Islam as religion is flourishing of society based on social justice. Meanwhile, it is pointed out in the Quran itself that the teachings of Islam have been sent through Prophet Muhammad to mankind as God’s mercifulness and His guidance on finding the right path and acquiring God’s grace in both worlds.

This interpretation of justice is similar to the Kazakh concept *құтты* based on viewing grace, well-being, and justice as the foundation and the first step towards happy society, which should be the focus of human aspirations.

The Arabic word *Adl*, which means ‘justice’, originally meant ‘to stand straight’, ‘be level-headed’ and was used to characterize people. However, the Islamic understanding of justice implies viewing it not only as a personal virtue but also as a principle of organization of believers’ community and state system. *Adl* should be distinguished from *Qist* - the word which is also translated as ‘justice’ but denotes the way of interaction between Muslims (here justice comes across as honesty) and human-God relations rather than the balanced approach to all things denoted by *Adl*.

In the New Testament God urges believers to let Him establish the justice. In the Old Testament God demands an exterminatory war only in respect of certain tribes under certain circumstances. The Quran qualifies establishment of divine justice as general responsibility of the Ummah (community), which bears some similarity with the religious community-based understanding of justice in Orthodox Christianity.

One of the symbols of justice in the Quran is a balance scale (Surah Ar-Rahman 55:7–9) reflecting the requirement for a weighted, balanced, i.e. impartial, equal (*al-Nasaf* principle) attitude to all things in compliance of the order established by God.

According to S.F. Khairulloev, who researches Sharia law, one of the basic provisions of this law states that “observing justice means coordinating one’s actions with the requirements of the natural order of things” [30]. This order (in a way it can be characterized as ‘the order of justice’) suggests general harmony and balance. A Muslim should observe this order, among other things, by way of achieving social unity in the Ummah (community), the boundaries of which coincide with the boundaries of the Islamic world. Hence the expressed social focus of the idea of justice (*Qist*) that distinguishes Islam from Christianity. It should be remembered that the teachings on justice formed only in the 20th century under the influence of a few social revolutions, which stirred up the society. As far as Islam is concerned, it has from the very start

emphasized the necessity of just organization of society according to the norms established by God.

Muslim theologian Ibn Taymiyyah even claims that Christianity does not advocate for the law of justice since the laws of Church regulate one's internal life and the laws introduced by rulers are not divine laws. Therefore, Ibn Taymiyyah concludes that the Christian principles of forgiveness leave criminals unpunished. The theologian develops his thought and argues that the law of justice deserves to be attributed to Allah more than the law of mercy, "anyone can order to do good and forgive but only a few know what justice is and can judge justly between people, so it is more probable that Allah initiated it" [31, p. 16-17].

Like in Christianity, in Islam, there are ideas of mercy and kindness, which are opposed to justice. This refers to *ihsan* (sincerity, internal religiousness) - the third component of Islam along with the religious doctrine (*iman*) and religious practice (*islam*). At the same time, in this case mercy rather helps to do justice rather than takes it to a new level as it happens in Christianity - both in the Western and Orthodox traditions.

5. Conclusions

To summarize this research, the following conclusions can be made.

The concept of justice as law and as truth, as well as the understanding of justice, implies in Islam the development of a certain social order (certain supreme social reality as compared with everyday reality). Its normative regulation is not limited to positive law since people within such an order are united by an emotional connection rather than common interests or needs (therefore, justice acts as an undifferentiated ethico-legal category). Thus, the hypothesis of this research can be considered to have been proved.

Social functionality and viability are retained by those religious models of justice that promote a single way of personal development, communicative and value solidarity between individuals and communities. Such models of justice, without selectivity in terms of the criterion of confession, should be popularized within religious and theological education and upbringing.

Although the concept under consideration continues to determine everyday social practices, the role of justice in the religious social order should remain in the focus of researchers who analyse value-normative transformations taking place in modern society.

In this connection, a potential direction of further research can be thorough analysis of the Kazakh concept *құтты*, which is close to the concept of justice and is based on viewing grace, well-being, and justice as the foundation and the first step towards happy society.

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