



## Social Justice and Its Interrelated Concepts: A Multidimensional Theoretical Analysis of Equality, Freedom, Development, and Human Rights in Contemporary Societies

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### Abstract

Social justice is a fundamental concept in contemporary social thought, occupying a central position in social and human studies as a key determinant in organizing social life, ensuring stability, and promoting social cohesion at all levels. It refers to a set of principles and standards that aim to achieve fairness and equality among individuals in society regarding the distribution of resources, opportunities, rights, and obligations without discrimination based on gender, social class, origin, or cultural affiliation. Furthermore, social justice encompasses not only formal legal equality, but also economic, social, and cultural dimensions, addressing the structural imbalances that produce social inequalities. In Arab societies, including Algerian society, this concept takes on special significance amid economic and social transformations. Consequently, social justice has become a focal point in social and political discussions, giving rise to interrelated concepts such as the relationship between social justice and equality, freedom, development, human rights, and social services. Thus, it is evident that the concept of social justice is multidimensional and interconnected; it cannot be reduced to a single approach. Rather, achieving sustainable development and building a balanced society based on dignity, humanity, and social equity requires integration between economic, social, and legal frameworks.

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### Introduction

It is natural for any community to have justice prevail among its members so that it can live in peace, security and stability. Justice is considered one of the fundamental components of human, economic and social existence. Justice is a fundamental pillar that enables societies to fulfil their various roles in maintaining existential continuity. Therefore, it is necessary to define the concept of justice, which has multiple definitions resulting from the nature of each society, as well as its various intellectual perceptions, doctrines and sources of knowledge.

There is general agreement on an initial definition: broadly, justice is the granting and ensuring of each person's rights, i.e. an attempt to achieve balance, fairness and equal opportunities within a community. This concept has evolved throughout history, becoming more prominent during the Christian and Islamic periods when the notion of social justice emerged due to overlapping interests, increasing conflicts and complex issues within societies. The emergence of this concept was therefore

necessary as it represents the human endeavour throughout historical epochs. Social justice became the vibrant flame representing the main and essential issue, and the catalyst for all revolutions, transformations and major social changes. This research paper will address the following topics:

- The essence of social justice
- The foundations, dimensions and approaches to social justice.
- Some theories of social justice
- Concepts related to social justice, such as social justice and equality, social justice and freedom, social justice and development, social justice and human rights, and social services and human rights.

The principle of social justice appears to be a cornerstone of the fundamental principles enshrined in the Algerian constitution. It is included in the constitution's preamble, where it is described as a principle that enshrines independence, sovereignty, and the rule of the people. This principle is complemented by others, such as public liberties, human rights, social services and citizenship.

The Algerian constitution also incorporates economic and social principles relating to social justice, with the aim of achieving comprehensive, integrated and balanced development that preserves human dignity.

However, sociologists disagree, particularly on the definition of social justice. Some approach it from an Islamic perspective, considered the most accurate, while others view it from a capitalist or socialist standpoint. So, what does social justice actually mean?

First: The Essence of Social Justice:

### **1. Social Justice:**

The term 'social justice' emerged in the late 19th century and is generally associated with social and political movements demanding rights for the poor and oppressed. The concept flourished alongside the success of these movements and declined with their decline. Consequently, the theories that emerged over the decades were shaped by their relationship with this social struggle. Some sought to justify social inequality among citizens, while others searched for ways to eliminate this disparity without negating the various degrees in either direction (Matar, 2018, p. 135). (Matar, 2018, p. 135).

Specialists have different definitions of justice, which stems from the varying nature of disciplines and each field's attempt to link justice to its specific realm. Some suggest that justice is accurately appreciating and fully recognising each individual's rights and merits, and respecting them. Others define it as a virtue and moral quality that motivates fairness and respect for the rights of others. Some indicate that justice is about giving each person their due. Some argue that justice involves practising virtue and upright behaviour in our relationships with others. (Matar, 2018, p. 135).

In linguistic terms, social justice means mediating in a matter without excess or deficiency; justice is the opposite of injustice, and correcting something means adjusting it.

Justice is considered one of the most sacred and widespread topics in social behaviour. It can manifest in very conflicting ways within a single community. Wherever people want something and resources are to be distributed, justice will be a key factor in decision-making. Justice holds supremacy over related concepts such as freedom and equality because it is not limited by specific boundaries. People may demand more freedom, but they are suddenly compelled to stop at a certain point to prevent it from turning into its opposite. However, individuals cannot cease their attempts to be just, and no society can reach a level of satisfaction in achieving justice because justice has no ultimate limit. In this sense, justice is the common good that can organise the relationship between freedom and equality, ensuring a balance between the two. (Matar, 2018, p. 136).

Social justice is an ethical and philosophical concept that aims to eliminate disparities between social classes, striving for equality in rights and opportunities for all. It emphasises the principles of equality, solidarity and human rights to promote social progress by improving societal conditions. The concept of social justice is derived from the word 'justice', one of the most important goals in human life. Justice aims to give each person their due without infringing on the rights of others. However, definitions of justice vary from one society to another due to their unique characteristics, leading to differences within the same society over time. Nevertheless, the essence of justice remains consistent within each society, and societies can be evaluated based on the extent to which justice is realised within them, indicating progress or regression. (Matar, 2018, p. 137).

### **2. Justice as a Multifaceted Concept:**

Justice is an ambiguous concept, with some viewing it as an abstraction with no means of application in reality. They argue that what has been applied in terms of social, political and economic justice is merely an attempt to preserve the rights established by natural and moral law. In contrast, others are more optimistic, suggesting that human nature has progressed throughout history, leading to a form of self-regulation that compels individuals to treat others as they wish to be treated themselves, thus fostering an internal sense of fairness. (Matar, 2018, pp. 137-138).

Some adopt a more relative stance, claiming that justice is merely the manifestation of the influence of the powerful at any given time. The more powerful individuals become and the more successful they are in achieving profits and maintaining their status, the more they convince themselves and others that their means are not only acceptable, but also morally desirable and just.

Therefore, looking at justice from various philosophical and social perspectives reveals:

- justice based on the idea of rights; and
- justice based on the idea of the good. If the realisation of this concept involves giving everyone their due, based on the idea that everyone is entitled to their rights simply by being human, then it is termed 'natural justice'.

Conversely, if a person's entitlement to their rights is based on a general rule accepted by their society, it is called conventional justice. If rights are based on rules that hold individuals accountable for violations before a public authority, this is termed legal justice.

Exchange justice refers to contractual relationships that require each individual to grant others their full rights regardless of personal value or social status. (Matar, 2018, p. 138).

Distributive justice pertains to the distribution of rewards and the assignment of punishments, determining an individual's entitlement to either.

Political justice is manifested in the presence of a constitution that ensures the distribution of political freedom, social equality and natural rights.

Economic justice is achieved when the economic system involves everyone in economic life and distributes wealth among them in proportion to their labour and contribution to overall production.

The aim of criminal justice is to defend society against crime while also rehabilitating offenders who have deviated from societal norms.

Inherent justice refers to a child's belief in the early years of life that things have an inherent nature.

Following this discussion, it is evident that the various types of justice and their guarantees are rooted in contradictions, problems and disputes concerning the nature, essence and forms of justice, whether in public discourse or psychological processes. It could be argued that the motive for justice has taken four forms that have persisted throughout human history.

**A. Justice of Needs (Marxist Justice):** Under this framework, resources are distributed among individuals based on meeting their most pressing needs, regardless of performance and without adhering to the principle of equal opportunities. For example, adult members of a family distribute the resources they earn to others based on need rather than input.

**B. Justice of equivalence:** This type of justice is evident among individuals belonging to a particular group who perceive themselves as a single unit. Everyone shares the outputs equally, with the individual existing for the group and the group existing for the individual.

**C. Justice of Fairness:** This arises in situations of mutual dependence, such as in the marketplace, where an individual seeks to achieve equivalence between their outputs and investments.

**D. Justice of Law:** This means that justice is whatever is determined by the legal authorities of a society. The foundations upon which the previous three forms of justice are based can be utilised in the development, assessment and amendment of laws. However, once a law is enacted, it becomes the sole determinant of an individual's entitlements in a given situation, regardless of their needs, investments or opinions (Matar, 2018, p. 140). (Matar, 2018, p. 140).

'Social justice' can thus be defined as 'providing fair treatment and a participatory share of community experiences, as well as striving to empower citizens to protect their humanity and ensuring a minimum standard of economic and living sufficiency. It also means respecting the self-existence of various capable social formations.' Experts believe that, in order to develop a theory of social justice that can deliver happiness, prosperity and progress, we should adhere to the Islamic theory of social justice in all its dimensions, forms and areas.

The most important pillars of social justice are equality, the equitable distribution of wealth, and respect for human rights. Social justice is considered a central theme in thought and culture. In healthy conditions, the individual becomes a conscious part of society, capable of communication, production, building and advancement, because they now enjoy the right to citizenship, equality before the law and equal opportunities based solely on competence, not favouritism or nepotism.

Therefore, social justice involves providing each individual with what they deserve, distributing material benefits within the community and ensuring equal access to basic necessities. It also signifies equality of opportunity, meaning that each individual has the chance to progress socially. Providing a minimum level of social justice is widely accepted as one of the essential pillars upon which all human societies are built. However, the importance of this minimum level varies, as do the means of achieving it and the justifications that underpin it. Social justice is an important dimension of social development, requiring communities to share development-generated resources fairly and equitably, for example by ensuring equal access to various social welfare services such as education, healthcare and housing. (Matar, 2018, p. 142).

### 3. Foundations for Achieving Social Justice:

The means and methods employed by countries worldwide to achieve balance and social justice vary, whether between different regions of a single country, between rural and urban areas, or among neighbourhoods within the same city. Naturally, these methods differ from country to country, as achieving social justice depends on a wide array of variables that must be considered when formulating the overall development strategy. These variables include the nature of contradictions between city neighbourhoods, the level of economic and productive development, and the dynamics of small neighbourhoods. It is

also important to consider the characteristics of larger neighbourhoods and their locations in relation to city centres, areas of population concentration, and other demographic attraction zones.

#### **4. Dimensions and Forms of Social Justice:**

Undoubtedly, the prevalence of individualism and materialism in this age, alongside the complexities of social life, economic conflicts and the spread of selfishness in societies, suggests that the world today is not concerned with neighbourly rights and compassion. Instead, the idea of survival of the fittest has emerged, suggesting that the weak should make way for the strong and capable. This situation necessitates a commitment from social service practitioners to prioritise and protect human rights, whether related to legal, social or distributive justice, and to address deprivation while focusing on vulnerable population groups in light of their dignity and humanity.

Theories explaining social justice include the following forms:

- A. Legal justice: This form focuses on individuals' duties to society, including punishment in exchange for reward.
- B. Communicative justice: Also referred to by some as social justice, this form emphasises individuals' duties to one another within the community and is connected to issues of equality among individuals.
- C. Distributive Justice: This focuses on society's obligations to individuals and could be a hidden cause of inequality in legal and communicative forms. Decisions related to resources such as food, clothing and housing are required by distributive justice. (Matar, 2018, p. 151).

#### **5. Approaches to achieving social justice:**

Social justice is a phenomenon with temporal and spatial specificity, the spatial aspect of which is often more pronounced than the temporal aspect. The concept of social justice is linked to values, traditions and deeply rooted beliefs that are difficult to change over time. Furthermore, it is difficult for societies that adhere to a single religion and share similar traditions to reach a consensus on the concept of social justice. Islamic communities, for example, largely agree on their understanding of social justice because the concept originates from the Holy Quran and the Prophetic Sunnah. Furthermore, as long as they hold on to divine beliefs and societal customs, it is unlikely that the concept of social justice in these communities will differ across historical epochs. There are four approaches to achieving social justice in the history of social services, as outlined below:

##### **A. Entitlement as an Approach to Achieving Social Justice**

Entitlement in social care involves distinguishing between those who deserve assistance and those who do not, with the aim of stabilising their economic conditions. The same applies to those in need of therapeutic assistance, which can have a positive impact on their situation and lead to consistent improvement. Two types can be distinguished: selective entitlement and entitlement based on exceptional circumstances.

##### **B. Assessing Social Needs as an Approach to Achieving Social Justice**

Assessing social needs helps to clarify and define societal goals. A community needs assessment is a practical tool for identifying needs that are and are not being met in the local community. However, the challenge in community needs assessment lies in the difficulty of reaching a conclusive definition of need, which can be categorised into three types: specific consumer goods, essential services and the right to participate.

##### **C. Social Solidarity as an Approach to Achieving Social Justice**

Social solidarity means that every member of a community recognises their responsibilities towards that community and fulfils them. Failure to fulfil these obligations could lead to the collapse of the social structure for oneself and others. Individuals have rights in this society that must be granted to everyone without discrimination or neglect. Social solidarity encompasses various types, including moral, political, defensive, criminal, economic, worshipful and living solidarity, and not only involves providing housing, clothing and food for the needy.

##### **D. Justice in Financing Social Services**

Providing social care services, particularly healthcare, efficiently requires balancing the distribution of resources across the various inputs used to deliver health services. Without adequate facilities, proper construction, equipment and supplies, employing a large number of doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers would be futile. (Matar, 2018, pp. 152-156).

Second: Some Theories of Social Justice.

##### **2.1 The Theory of Justice by John Rawls:**

In the 1950s, political philosophers closely followed John Rawls' contributions to the theory of justice, which began with an article he published in a philosophical journal. He later published his famous book on the subject. The key hypotheses underlying this theory revolve around the concepts of the 'original position' or 'original situation'. Ultimately, John Rawls's theory of social justice can be summarised as follows:

1. Everyone is free and has an equal right to an expanded system of basic liberties.
2. This expanded system of liberties will naturally produce vast social and economic disparities among people, provided these disparities are organised in the following manner:

They must benefit the most disadvantaged people, i.e. the victims of the capitalist system.

They must stem from the principle of equal opportunity.

However, five theories of social justice have been identified, which we will summarise below:

### **2.2 Theory of Entitlement:**

This theory emphasises that justice is inherent in the individual's freedom to acquire and use their property and resources as they see fit. People are entitled to what they own as long as they have acquired it through just means. This suggests that people are born with an aspiration for justice and strive for it throughout their lives, as justice is an integral part of the freedom to own and use property without harming others. The theory asserts that justice cannot exist without individuals who understand its meaning and are capable of exercising it; these individuals are entitled to benefit from it.

### **2.3 Theory of Equality:**

This theory is based on the idea that all people have equal value and should be treated equally. Equality focuses on procedural equality, emphasising equal opportunities for every individual to access care regardless of personal characteristics such as age, gender, religion, income or type of insurance coverage and whether one resides in the city or suburbs.

### **2.4 Contractual Theory:**

Contractual theory focuses on the debate concerning what rational individuals would decide if they were asked to derive a fair set of principles for distributing community goods. This theory is based on the assumption that these individuals might find themselves in a position within society where these principles apply to them, including the least advantaged in terms of social and economic status. This theory relies on a set of principles, such as:

1. Organising the rights of everyone in harmony with a system of freedom for all.
2. Ensuring fair equality of opportunity for individuals with similar abilities and skills.
3. Promoting fair equality of opportunity in different regions and areas of society.
4. Focusing on guaranteeing the rights of those who have less access to social care services and emphasising the benefit to those in poorer conditions.

### **2.5 Theory of Needs:**

This theory emphasises the necessity for public and social welfare policies to adopt plans, programmes and projects that guarantee the fair distribution of social welfare services (such as health, education and housing) through short- and long-term plans to achieve sustainable community development.

### **2.6 Utilitarian Theory:**

This theory is fundamentally relational or goal-oriented, evaluating the value of any activity or decision based on its outcomes ('the end justifies the means'). The primary goal is to maximise utility and provide the greatest benefit to the largest number of people. Even decision-making based on cost and market-directed policies is rooted in a utilitarian perspective (Matar, 2018, pp. 192-194). (Matar, 2018, pp. 192-194).

## **3. The concept of social justice and its relationship to other concepts (equality, freedom, development, human rights, social work in relation to human rights).**

### **3.1 The Relationship Between Social Justice and Equality:**

Despite its prevalence in religions, cultures and numerous academic works and literature from international institutions, the concept of equality is one of the most ambiguous ideas in the social sciences. In the simplest terms, it suggests a state of numerical parity or equivalence linked to a common measurement standard.

At the same time, it may imply a state of social privilege granted to citizens based on principles of citizenship and non-discrimination, regardless of religion, ethnicity, gender or any other discriminatory criteria.

Thus, the term 'equality' carries two meanings: a descriptive meaning that describes the relationship between homogeneous entities, such as citizens, social institutions, states and groups; and a normative meaning that relies on the unity of human origin. This ultimately leads to the adoption of policies and standards of measurement based on this principle.

To avoid ambiguity, some studies define equality negatively, focusing on inequalities. One such study is the sociological literature discussing two concepts: inequality in the distribution of wealth and equality at the systems level. These studies regard inequality as a collection of social pathways, mechanisms and collective and individual experiences that compel us to address outright inequalities, especially unjust ones. (Zdam, 2018, p. 4).

It is important to note that social justice does not mean complete or absolute equality, despite these two concepts often being conflated and treated as synonyms. For instance, it does not imply that everyone in society should have an equal share of income or wealth. It is entirely possible for disparities to exist in these shares, as they correspond to individual differences in areas such as the effort exerted in various tasks, the skills and educational qualifications required, and disparities related to age and health (Al-Hadidi, 2019, p. 13). (Al-Hadidi, 2019, p. 13).

### **3.2 The Relationship Between Social Justice and Freedom:**

Many thinkers, including the American John Rawls, consider freedom to be one of the main components of social justice. It is a basic human right, without which social justice cannot be realised. Comprehensive social justice cannot exist if members of society are deprived of freedom, even if they possess some social benefits. Therefore, the idea that freedom contradicts social justice is incorrect; it is more accurate to say that the two concepts complement each other. (Rashed, 2018, p. 21).

The relationship between social justice and freedom is a longstanding debate in political thought, as the implementation of social justice can potentially conflict with the concept of freedom. Some thinkers, particularly on the liberal right, argue that social justice requires the redistribution of wealth, which could infringe private property rights — a fundamental pillar of freedom. Thus, they suggest that these two concepts are in conflict with each other.

Conversely, some left-leaning liberals, led by John Rawls, assert that the two concepts are not in conflict. They argue that social justice aims to restore rights to the poor and vulnerable after they have been taken from them. What freedom do they possess if they cannot meet their basic needs, which form the basis of all other freedoms and ideals?

A third perspective, from a socialist viewpoint, posits that the contradiction primarily arises due to a misunderstanding of the concept of freedom from a liberal standpoint. In a socialist context, freedom means liberation from life's burdens and the ability to be creative after work. Consequently, there is no contradiction between social justice and individuals enjoying their freedoms. (Al-Hadidi, 2019, p. 14).

### 3.3 The Relationship Between Social Justice and Development:

For a state to implement social justice, comprehensive development in all political, economic and social aspects is essential. Political development requires the establishment of institutions capable of accommodating changes within the state, as well as mobilising public opinion and formal and informal state institutions to maximise efforts to implement social justice. The same applies to economic development: the intention to establish social justice must be accompanied by an economic development process capable of providing for the needs of the various social classes, especially the lower ones, in terms of support and similar issues. Community development is a fundamental condition for the success of social justice, enabling social classes to absorb upcoming waves of change. (Al-Hadidi, 2019, p. 15).

### 3.4 The Relationship Between Social Justice and Human Rights:

The idea of social justice is inseparable from the concept of human rights. Many thinkers and social science researchers view social justice as a fundamental entitlement for individuals, stemming from their worth as human beings and their right to enjoy social, economic and political rights. These rights are an integral part of the human experience and are emphasised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and numerous international treaties and agreements.

Therefore, social justice is tied to ensuring that each individual receives what they deserve, distributing material benefits within the community, and guaranteeing the equal provision of basic necessities. It also implies equality of opportunity, meaning that every individual has the chance for social mobility without interference from the state or any civil society institution (Rashed, 2018, p. 44). (Rashed, 2018, p. 44).

### 4.4. The relationship between social justice, social work and human rights: (Social Work and Achieving Social Justice for the Community)

The primary goal of social work is to develop communities by identifying the various forces and factors that hinder social growth and progress. These include deprivation, unemployment, illness and poor living conditions, which are beyond the capacity of those experiencing them and contribute to their misery. Social work also seeks to identify the underlying causes of social issues in order to confront and combat these problems, selecting the most suitable and effective means within the community to eliminate or minimise their harmful effects.

The philosophy of social work is essentially a social and ethical philosophy with religious and humanitarian roots. The philosophy of social work derives from divine religions, humanitarian movements, the social and natural sciences, and the professional experience of social workers. Therefore, it can be said that the philosophy of social work predates the emergence of the profession itself.

The philosophy of social work is based on a set of principles, including:

- belief in the value and dignity of the individual;
- Belief in individual differences among people and communities.
- The right of individuals to exercise their freedom within the limits of social values.
- The right to self-determination without harming the rights of others.
- Advocacy for social justice among different genders and religions.

A commitment to love and tolerance. (Al-Maghribi, 2014, p. 3).

One of the main objectives of social work is to promote positive values such as social justice, security, respect for work and respect for time to drive development. (Al-Maghribi, 2014, p. 4).

In terms of its relationship with human rights and social justice, it is important to recognise that the history of human rights is an ongoing battle against the exploitation of one person or group by another. Human rights are based on the recognition of human value, dignity, equality, social justice, freedom and peace. (Al-Maghribi, 2014, p. 227).

Thus, social justice and social work are closely connected, as social work emphasises human rights, all of which emphasise the right to dignity, equality, justice, freedom, development, social security and everything related to preserving humanity.

### 5. Conclusion:

From the above, it is clear that each community has its own perspective on social justice, based on specific and general references and backgrounds. Despite the intertwining factors surrounding social justice, it remains the ultimate goal for all

these communities as it is the only path to economic, political and social development, leading to prosperity, well-being and peace.

For this reason, despite their differing political, social and economic systems, as well as their varied values and orientations, all international charters and constitutions across the world emphasise social justice and its objectives. This is evidenced by Article One of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, which affirms equality and social justice for all. Everyone has the right to enjoy all rights and freedoms without discrimination based on gender, colour, language, religion, or any other factor, thereby ensuring stability, security, and freedom within society.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study is theoretical and analytical in nature and is based exclusively on the critical examination of existing scholarly literature, legal texts, and conceptual frameworks related to social justice and its associated concepts. It does not involve human participants, personal data, interviews, surveys, or experimental procedures. Consequently, ethical approval was not required. The research was conducted in accordance with established academic standards of integrity, objectivity, and respect for intellectual property.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest related to the publication of this article. The research was conducted independently, and the views expressed are solely those of the author.

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