

Justice in the Islamic and Western Traditions

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Introduction

This chapter provides responses to the following fundamental questions of justice: What is justice and how is it established? What role does the State play in the establishment of justice? What are the foundations of justice and what are the barriers to its realization? This chapter asserts that justice – ‘Adl – is a concept that has an intimate relationship with man’s responsibilities and obligations – Amanat – to Allah, oneself, fellow humans (parents, spouse, children, relatives, neighbors and society) and the environment. The chapter is divided into seven sections. Section one defines justice. Section two is on upholding justice. Section three describes the critical requirements for the establishment of justice. Section four describes the political conception of justice according John Rawls. Section five is on the economic conception of justice. Section six is on the role of the State in the establishment of justice. Section seven describes some of the barriers to justice.

Meaning of Justice

Justice is a polysemic concept, that is, a concept with multiple meanings. It means, among others, giving each of the following what they deserve:

- a) Allah.
- b) The self.
- c) Other humans.
- d) Animals.
- e) The natural environment.

Justice is about respecting the following rights:

- a) Divine Rights – the rights that Allah has ascribed to Himself such as the right to be worshipped Alone without being associated with anything else. Narrated Mu’adh bin Jabal (may Allah be pleased with him): The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon) said, “O Mu’adh! Do you know what Allah’s Right upon His slaves is?” I said, “Allah and His Messenger know best.” The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon) said, “To worship Him (Allah) Alone and to join none in worship with Him (Allah). Do you know what their right upon Him is?” I replied, “Allah and His Messenger know best.” The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon) said, “Not to punish them (if they do so).” (Sahih al-Bukhari 7373).
- b) Human rights – the rights that Allah has bestowed upon humans such as the right to life, dignity, privacy, ownership, etc.
- c) Animal rights – the rights that Allah has bestowed upon animals.
- d) Environmental rights – the rights that Allah has bestowed upon the natural environment, namely to be protected from destruction and to be kept clean.

It is worth noting that every right comes with an obligation which also means that every obligation implies a right; the two are correlated, they go hand in hand.