



Research Paper

Justice as Divine Order: A Comparative Analysis of Ibn Miskawayh and Thomas Aquinas

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Abstract

In an era where theories of justice are increasingly restricted to secular and contractualist frameworks, revisiting classical perspectives becomes essential for a fuller understanding of this foundational virtue. Using an analytical-comparative method and drawing on Majid Fakhry's interpretation, this paper examines how Ibn Miskawayh and Thomas Aquinas—despite historical and theological differences—formulate "justice" as a reflection of divine and cosmic order. The study shows that both thinkers regard justice not as a human convention but as a manifestation of transcendent reality. Ibn Miskawayh presents justice as harmony among the soul's faculties and a mirror of universal order, while Aquinas anchors it in human rational participation in God's eternal law through natural law. Their convergence stems from shared Platonic-Aristotelian roots transmitted to the Christian West via Muslim scholars. Yet major theological differences emerge: Miskawayh's Neoplatonic monism contrasts with Aquinas's Creator-creature distinction and his emphasis on divine grace. Overall, the comparative approach illuminates how Islamic and Christian thought together offer a multi-dimensional formulation of justice.

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Modern political philosophy often confines justice to secular, contractarian, or utilitarian frameworks, treating it as a human agreement or an instrument of distribution detached from its ontological foundations. Contemporary ethical crises, however, highlight the need to revisit classical traditions for a deeper understanding of this virtue. This study compares Ibn Miskawayh and Thomas Aquinas—two major figures of Islamic and Christian intellectual history—to explore how they conceptualize justice as an expression of divine and cosmic order. The research underscores how pre-modern traditions fuse ethics with metaphysics, grounding human justice in its relation to the Divine. Special attention is given to Majid Fakhry's interpretation, which positions justice as a rational mediator between Greek virtue ethics and Islamic revelation, enabling dialogue between intellectual traditions.

2. Method

Employing an analytical-comparative method within Majid Fakhry's interpretive framework, this study re-examines primary texts, including Ibn Miskawayh's *Tahdhīb al-Akhlaq* and Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*. It compares Miskawayh's ontological structure and threefold hierarchy of justice with Aquinas's fourfold system of law. Their shared metaphysical idea of justice as cosmic order and their theological differences are critically analyzed.

3. Results

Both thinkers attribute a dual character—metaphysical and ethical-social—to justice, grounding it in transcendental truth, though their formulations differ

significantly. Ibn Miskawayh views justice as intrinsic to the structure of existence. Influenced by Pythagorean and Platonic thought, he identifies three levels: immutable Divine Justice, Natural Justice governing physical order, and Human/Positive Justice shaped by context. Psychologically, justice arises from moderation (*i'tidāl*) and harmony among the appetitive, irascible, and rational faculties. As a synthesis of wisdom, courage, and temperance, justice perfects the virtues. He distinguishes between the Just (acting strictly by equality) and the Benevolent (acting beyond necessity in imitation of the Divine). Evil, for him, is privation, while justice coincides with being.

Aquinas constructs justice within the framework of Law. For him, justice is humanity's rational participation in God's Eternal Law, accessed through Natural Law. His definition—“the constant and perpetual will to render to each his due”—reflects his juridical orientation. Justice serves as the criterion for evaluating human laws; any law contradicting Natural Law becomes corruption. Whereas Miskawayh's account is harmony-centered and rooted in existential unity, Aquinas's is rights- and law-centered. Both affirm reason's capacity to grasp general principles of justice, yet Aquinas stresses the necessity of divine grace for ultimate felicity, unlike Miskawayh, who emphasizes purification of the soul.

4. Conclusion

Despite significant theological and cultural differences, both thinkers converge on the principle that justice reflects Divine Order, a view starkly opposed to modern relativist and contractarian accounts. For Ibn Miskawayh, human justice mediates



between cosmic and social realms through inner equilibrium, making the human a microcosm of the universal macrocosm. For Aquinas, justice situates the human being within a hierarchy of laws, uniting rational and divine obedience. Re-reading these theories offers a religious, virtue-oriented alternative to contemporary views, presenting justice as a path toward self-perfection and ontological harmony. This comparison also enables inter-traditional dialogue, allowing Islamic and Christian thought to complement one another on issues like distributive justice and human rights. However, the study

stresses the need for critical re-reading responsive to contemporary concerns—such as gender and structural critiques—so these frameworks do not reinforce unjust hierarchies. Ultimately, both traditions agree that perfect justice entails transcending the self and aligning with Absolute Truth, through psychological balance (Miskawayh) or participation in Divine Law (Aquinas).

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Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest declared.