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## THE IDEA OF JUSTICE IN PLATO'S REPUBLIC: A HISTORICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS AND ITS IMPACT ON WESTERN POLITICAL THOUGHT

**Manuilo H. S.**

*PhD student at the Y. B. Shad Department of Theoretical  
and Practical Philosophy  
V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University  
Kharkiv, Ukraine*

The concept of justice, as developed by Plato in his work *The Republic*, remains profoundly influential in contemporary political philosophy, particularly in discussions regarding the principles of social justice and the distribution of resources in modern societies. Plato's conception of justice, as expressed through his vision of the ideal state, has had a lasting impact on the development of Western political thought, shaping not only ancient

Greek philosophy but also influencing key political theories and discussions about governance, equality, and the role of the individual in society.

In Plato's theory, justice in a society is achieved through the correct distribution of roles among its members, with each class (rulers, warriors, and workers) fulfilling a specific role. This class structure is designed to prevent conflict and ensure that society functions harmoniously. Justice, for Plato, is not about equality in the modern sense but about everyone performing the role that is most suited to their nature. This ideal of social harmony, achieved by individuals fulfilling roles based on their abilities and dispositions, directly influenced subsequent political philosophers, particularly those in the Western tradition.

The impact of Plato's ideas on Western political thought can be seen in the works of many philosophers who followed, such as Aristotle, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas, as well as in the foundations of modern political theory. For example, Aristotle's *Politics* builds on Plato's idea of the role of the state in promoting virtue, although Aristotle critiqued the rigid class structure in Plato's ideal city. Augustine, in his *City of God*, adopts and adapts Platonic ideas about justice and the ideal state, emphasizing the moral responsibility of rulers. Furthermore, the Neoplatonists of the Renaissance, such as Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, also drew upon Plato's conceptions to discuss justice in both political and spiritual contexts [1].

Plato's influence on political thought reaches even into the modern era. The social contract theories of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, though not directly derivative of Plato, echo his concerns with the proper structure of society and the distribution of justice. For example, the social contract theory, particularly in Rousseau's *The Social Contract*, shares Plato's concern for the harmony of society and the importance of collective well-being over individual desires [3]. In this context, Plato's ideas were a precursor to the modern emphasis on collective responsibility and the moral obligations of both rulers and citizens.

The most direct influence on contemporary discussions of justice, however, comes from John Rawls' theory of justice in the 20th century. In his work *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls revives and modernizes ideas of justice, fairness, and the ideal state. Rawls' "difference principle" – which allows for social and economic inequalities only if they benefit the least advantaged members of society – draws upon a broader Platonic tradition of justice as a social good that must be carefully balanced with the needs of all citizens [2]. The idea that justice should ensure harmony in society by focusing on the welfare of the most vulnerable is a clear link to Plato's own thinking on justice, even though Rawls' approach is rooted in liberal democracy rather than the idealism of Plato's philosopher-kings.

The ongoing relevance of Plato's Republic is further evident in modern political discussions surrounding economic inequality, the role of the state, and individual rights. The global rise in social inequality and the demand for fairer resource distribution are contemporary challenges that resonate with the themes Plato addresses. Plato's critique of wealth and its corrupting influence on justice is mirrored in modern debates over economic systems that prioritize profit over human welfare. In this light, the ideal of justice as a societal harmony, where each individual is placed in the position best suited to their abilities, offers valuable insights into the structuring of fairer and more just societies.

For example, in the context of contemporary global issues such as economic inequality, climate change, and political corruption, Plato's model of justice suggests the need for a more equitable distribution of resources, one that avoids the concentration of power and wealth in the hands of a few. This is especially relevant in modern democratic societies where the tension between the rights of individuals and the collective good is often at the forefront of political debate. Plato's influence on ideas about education, merit, and the role of the individual in achieving societal well-being continues to shape policies and social justice frameworks today.

Plato's ideas are also reflected in the philosophy of human rights, which emphasizes the dignity and worth of the individual. By advocating for an ideal state in which rulers are philosopher-kings who act in the best interest of the people, Plato laid the groundwork for later theories that promote justice as not only a political and social ideal but as a moral imperative. As nations around the world work to address issues like poverty, inequality, and human rights, the philosophical underpinnings that Plato set forth remain a touchstone for understanding the ethical foundations of a just society.

The continued relevance of Plato's concept of justice demonstrates that ancient philosophical ideas have lasting value in addressing contemporary challenges. To build just societies today, policymakers can draw from Plato's emphasis on social harmony and fairness, ensuring that the distribution of resources prioritizes the well-being of the most vulnerable in society. Modern democratic societies should consider reforming their systems to achieve a more equitable distribution of wealth, improve educational access, and provide universal healthcare, which would help to reduce social inequality and ensure that every individual is afforded the opportunity to contribute to society in meaningful ways.

Given Plato's emphasis on education as essential for the development of justice, one concrete recommendation is the further development of educational reforms that provide equal opportunities for all, regardless of socio-economic background. Additionally, strengthening political

participation and ensuring that the voices of marginalized groups are heard can contribute to a more just and inclusive society, reflective of Plato's idea of a harmonious, well-ordered state.

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## **THE POLITICAL THOUGHT AND PHILOSOPHY OF NICCOLO MACHIAVELLI**

### **ПОЛІТИЧНА ДУМКА ТА ФІЛОСОФІЯ НІККОЛО МАКІАВЕЛЛІ**

#### **Pupik Andrej**

*Magister, Internal doctoral student  
Alexander Dubček University of Trenčín*

#### **Пупік Андрій**

*магістр, докторант внутрішньої  
форми навчання  
Тренчинський університет  
Олександра Дубчека*

#### **Janas Karol**

*Doctor of Philosophical Sciences,  
Associate Professor,  
Associate Professor at the Department  
of Political Science, Head of the  
Department of Political Science  
Alexander Dubček University of Trenčín  
Trenčín, Slovakia*

#### **Янас Кароль**

*доктор філософських наук, доцент,  
доцент кафедри політології,  
завідувач кафедри політології  
Тренчинський університет  
Олександра Дубчека  
Тренчин, Словаччина*