

Study on the philosophical aspects of social justice and equality in modern society

Estudio sobre los aspectos filosóficos de la justicia social y la igualdad en la sociedad moderna

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ABSTRACT


The study is dedicated to the pressing issue of understanding the philosophical foundations of social justice and equality in the context of the challenges posed by the modern globalised world. The purpose of the study is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of philosophical concepts of justice, identify key problems in ensuring equal opportunities and overcoming discrimination, and examine the impact of globalisation on social inequality. The study applied axiological


and comparative methods, structural-functional, critical, and systems analyses. Based on a comparative examination of the theories of justice by J. Rawls, A. Sen, and A. Honneth, their conceptual advantages and limitations were identified, and the need for integrating the distributive paradigm while considering the expansion of real opportunities for people and ensuring full recognition was substantiated. The ambivalent impact of globalisation on social inequality was disclosed, and strategies for overcoming it on the principles of inclusivity and democratic

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participation were determined. The study emphasises the crucial role of collaboration between the state and civil society in advancing the values of social justice and implementing its principles in practice. The study contributes substantially to the development of philosophical discourse on the nature and principles of social justice, offering a comprehensive vision relevant

to the challenges of the 21st-century pluralistic and globalised world.

KEY WORDS

Discrimination, vulnerable groups, marginalised communities, human rights, social welfare state.

RESUMEN

Este estudio está dedicado al problema apremiante de entender los fundamentos filosóficos de la justicia social y la igualdad en el contexto de los retos planteados por el mundo globalizado moderno. El propósito de este estudio es realizar un análisis comprensivo de la evolución de los conceptos filosóficos de justicia; identificar problemas clave al asegurar oportunidades iguales y superar la discriminación, y examinar el impacto de la globalización en la desigualdad social. Para ello, se aplican métodos axiológicos y comparativos, así como análisis estructurales-funcionales, críticos y sistemáticos. A partir de un examen comparativo de las teorías de la justicia de J. Rawls, A. Sen y A. Honneth, se identifican las ventajas y limitaciones conceptuales de cada una de ellas, así como la necesidad de integrar el paradigma distributivo considerando la expansión de oportunidades reales para las personas

y asegurando que el reconocimiento total sea comprobado. Se expone el impacto ambivalente de la globalización en la desigualdad social y se determinaron estrategias para afrontarlo, sobre los principios de inclusividad y participación democrática. Además, se enfatiza el rol crucial de la colaboración entre el estado y la sociedad civil en el avance de los valores de la justicia social y en la implementación de sus principios en la práctica. Este estudio contribuye de forma sustancial al desarrollo de la discusión filosófica sobre la naturaleza y los principios de la justicia social, ofreciendo una revisión comprensiva y relevante para los retos del mundo pluralista y globalizado del siglo XXI.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Discriminación, grupos vulnerables, comunidades marginadas, derechos humanos, estado social de derecho.

1. Introduction

Social justice and equality are among the most pressing problems of modern society. They acquire special importance in the context of globalisation, economic crises, and social transformations, as their resolution depends on the stability and development of individual states and the global community. Philosophical analysis of these issues allows for a deeper understanding their core aspects, identification of the causes of their emergence, and proposal of possible ways to overcome them.

The problem of the study lies in the fact that, despite progress in the development of democratic institutions and the rule of law, social inequality and injustice remain acute and relevant. Income disparity between the rich and poor continues to grow; access to education, healthcare, and other social goods often depends on one's financial status. In addition, manifestations of discrimination based on race, gender, age, religious beliefs, are observed in many countries. All of this leads to social tension, conflicts, and instability in society. Research on the philosophical aspects of social justice and equality is important for understanding the roots of these problems and seeking effective ways to address them. Philosophical analysis helps to identify the deep-seated causes of social inequality, which often lie in human beings' very nature, needs, and desires. In addition to that, philosophy offers ethical and moral principles upon which a just and equitable society can be built.

The level of development of the issue of social justice and equality in philosophical literature is quite high. These issues have been the subject of reflection by many eminent philosophers of the past, such as Plato, Aristotle, T. Hobbes, J. Locke, J. Rousseau, and I. Kant. In contemporary philosophy, this problem is elaborated in the works of J. Rawls, R. Dworkin, A. Sen, M. Nussbaum. However, the dynamic changes in the modern world pose new challenges to society and require constant rethinking and updating of philosophical concepts of justice and equality. Among the sources considered, the book by Brown *et al.* (2020), which offers a comprehensive analysis of the concept of social equality in the field of public administration, deserves special attention. The authors examine the government's responsibility for ensuring equality in the development and implementation of public policies and programmes, focusing on various dimensions of inequality and policy areas. The study by Hafandi and Helmy (2021) presents an interesting perspective on the potential of religious institutions to ensure social

justice. Drawing on the ideas of Islamic thinker al-Maududi, the authors demonstrate how obligatory charity (zakat) can perform the functions of modern social security systems and reduce inequality.

The book by Capeheart and Milovanovic (2020) offers an updated edition of an influential work that provides a comprehensive introduction to social justice issues. The authors present theories of social justice in an accessible form, encouraging readers to reflect on the principles of a just society critically. Therewith, they analyse specific problems, illustrating them with historical examples of struggles for justice. On the other hand, Lynch *et al.* (2021) emphasise the need for greater attention to the affective dimension of social justice. They propose supplementing Fraser's influential theory of justice with a fourth dimension – relational justice, which considers the ethical character of care, love, and solidarity relationships. The book by Weale (2023) makes a substantial contribution to the philosophical understanding of the principle of equality and its implications for social policy. Distinguishing between procedural and substantive equality allows the author to better understand the challenges of implementing this principle in various domains.

The book by Davids and Waghid (2021) addresses the role of academia in the fight for social justice. The researchers argue that the ideas and knowledge produced by academia should be embodied in concrete actions for transforming society, particularly through pedagogical practices. Hutton and Heath (2020) developed the issue of social justice in a marketing context. In their study, they propose a paradigm shift in approaches to exploring social justice in marketing. Their emancipatory praxis framework calls on researchers to rethink power relations, democratise the research process, and focus on social change in collaboration with participants and communities. McArthur (2016) explores the potential of assessment for advancing social justice and the development of students' traits and abilities that will enable them to make a positive contribution to society. Drawing on Honneth's theory of recognition, the author proposes assessment practices that foster students' self-esteem. The philosophical analysis of equality and social justice underlying it was conducted by Pellegrini-Masini *et al.* (2020). The authors trace the roots of the concept of energy justice to the ideas of formal and substantive equality and argue that equality is a common denominator for various definitions of energy justice.

Supiot (2020) analysed the issue of social justice in the context of neoliberal policies and market relations. The author refers to the “Philadelphia Declaration” of the International Labour Organisation of 1944, which proclaimed a wide range of social rights in the spirit of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s policies. Author asserts that, even in the dominance of neoliberal ideology, this declaration remains an important basis for ensuring social justice, even after economic crises. The researcher criticises the tendency to subordinate social relations to market values and calls for the reorganisation of the legal system to affirm social values and the spirit of solidarity. Despite the diversity of disciplinary perspectives and methodological approaches, the study discussed share a common desire to comprehend the nature and origins of social injustice and to propose ways to overcome it. They demonstrate the importance of interdisciplinary dialogue and the combination of conceptual inquiries with attention to practical experience and the voices of vulnerable groups. These studies lay a solid foundation for further exploration of the philosophical aspects of social justice and equality, considering the complexity of these phenomena in modern society and aiming for real change. The purpose of the study is to conduct a philosophical analysis of the essence and principles of social justice and equality in modern society.

Objectives of the study:

1. Analyse the main philosophical concepts of justice and identify their advantages and disadvantages in the context of contemporary social challenges.
2. Investigate the problem of ensuring equal opportunities and overcoming discrimination in the conditions of social inequality and globalisation.
3. Determine the role of the state and civil society in shaping and implementing the principles of social justice and equality.

2. Materials and Methods

To achieve the set purpose and solve the research objectives, the following methods of scientific cognition were utilised. Axiological method, the application of which allowed the identification of the value foundations of concepts of justice and equality, their rootedness in certain ethical systems and ideological orientations. This method

analysed the connection between conceptions of a just social order and fundamental values of European culture (humanism, freedom, democracy), highlighting their significance for the moral justification of social-political decisions and programmes. Comparative method, which enabled a comparative analysis of different concepts of social justice – both in synchronous (comparison of theories existing in the same historical period) and diachronic (comparison of approaches characteristic of different epochs) aspects. Based on this method, typologically related theories and principled differences between liberal, socialist, conservative, and communitarian interpretations of the phenomena under investigation were identified.

Structural-functional analysis aimed to investigate justice and equality as complex organised systems containing a series of interconnected structural elements (values, principles, norms, institutions), each performing certain functions. Through this method, key components of the philosophical discourse regarding the mentioned concepts, their roles, and interrelationships were identified. In particular, the relationship between formal and substantive aspects of justice, the connection between distributive and procedural justice, and the functions of different types of equality (equality before the law, equality of opportunities, equality of outcomes) in ensuring the stability and development of society were analysed. Attention was also paid to mechanisms of harmonising and balancing individual dimensions of justice and equality in the integrated system of social interaction.

The critical analysis method is widely used in this study. It enabled the identification of the advantages and disadvantages, strengths and weaknesses of the main philosophical concepts of justice and equality. With this method, a critical assessment of the theoretical foundation, logical consistency, and practical relevance of various doctrines from ancient to modern was conducted. The authors' arguments in favour of specific interpretations of justice or models of social order were analysed, and internal contradictions and gaps in these justifications were identified. The value and ideological foundations of philosophical teachings and their socio-political implications were also critically considered. Based on such analysis, the heuristic potential and limits of applicability of each of the researched concepts were determined, along with the possibilities of their use for understanding and solving current issues. A critical approach enabled outlining promising areas

for further development of the theory of justice, considering the latest challenges and trends in societal life.

The systems analysis method was used to comprehensively analyse the phenomena of justice and equality in their ontological, epistemological, axiological, and praxeological dimensions. These concepts were considered not only as theoretical constructs, but also as real forms of social existence embodied in various social practices and institutions. Through a systemic approach, multiple interrelations were identified between philosophical concepts of justice and equality, on one hand, and political-legal, economic, and socio-cultural subsystems of society, on the other. Mechanisms of the influence of ideological beliefs on legitimisation and delegitimization of inequalities, justification of redistributive practices, formation of citizens' legal consciousness were analysed. Therewith, the reverse influence of socio-economic and political factors on philosophical reflection regarding justice and equality was examined. Systems analysis revealed the dialectical relationship between ideal and real dimensions of the researched problem and presented concepts of a just society as both a reflection and a factor of transformation of the existing social order.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The evolution of philosophical concepts of justice from antiquity to the present

The problem of social justice and equality has a long history of philosophical inquiry dating back to antiquity. Ancient Greek thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle laid the conceptual foundation for further discussions by offering their own visions of a just societal order. For Plato, justice lay in the harmonious functioning of the three classes of an ideal state (philosopher rulers, guardian warriors, and craftsmen) according to their natural virtues (Sfetcu, 2022). On the other hand, Aristotle developed a more complex concept of justice, distinguishing between its distributive and corrective forms and emphasising the importance of rewarding individuals according to their merits in the construction of the political community (Aguayo Westwood, 2021).

The issue of justice took on new importance in the modern era with the emergence of modern political philosophy. Thinkers such as T. Hobbes, J. Locke, and J. Rousseau contemplated it through the lens of

social contract theory. For Hobbes, justice consisted of adhering to the contractual obligations of the sovereign and subjects, which were meant to ensure peace and guarantee the inviolability of life and property in conditions of “war of all against all”. Locke justified the justice of state power by its ability to protect individuals’ natural rights to life, liberty, and private property. Rousseau viewed the social contract as an act of establishing popular sovereignty and alienating individual rights in favour of the common will, which alone legitimised laws and ensured the equality of citizens (Peterson, 2021). Kant made a substantial contribution to the development of the philosophical concept of justice. Unlike his predecessors, Kant grounded justice not in contractual relations but based on the universal moral principle of the categorical imperative. He posited that only maxims capable of universalisation into laws applicable to all rational beings are considered just. This implies treating each person as an end in themselves, not merely as a means, and respecting the autonomy and dignity of all members of the “kingdom of ends”. Despite its formalism and certain limitations, Kant’s ethics laid the conceptual groundwork for the deontological theory of justice and human rights (Goldmann, 2011).

In the 20th century, discussions on the nature of justice reached a qualitatively new level due to the development of analytical philosophy and rational choice theory. One of the noteworthy stages of these debates was the publication of J. Rawls’ “A theory of justice” in 1971. J. Rawls proposed a procedure for justifying principles of justice that combined elements of social contract theory with the concepts of the “original position” and the “veil of ignorance”. According to J. Rawls, justice lies in ensuring equal basic liberties for all citizens and allowing only those socio-economic inequalities that benefit the least advantaged members of society and are linked to positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity (Sarafa and Oyewole, 2021). J. Rawls’ concept sparked lively debates and criticism from influential thinkers such as R. Dworkin, R. Nozick, A. MacIntyre, and M. Sandel. R. Dworkin developed an alternative theory of liberal equality, emphasising the importance of ensuring equal resources for all while considering individual responsibility for their decisions and actions (Sypnowich, 2020). R. Nozick argued for a libertarian concept of justice based on the adherence to principles of voluntary transfer of property rights and rejected the legitimacy of state redistribution (Shahzad, 2021). A. MacIntyre criticised J. Rawls’ abstract universalism from a communitarian perspective, defending the importance of communal

traditions in defining concepts of good and justice (Haghighat, 2020). M. Sandel also drew attention to the notions of identity implicit in J. Rawls' concept, calling for a more contextual understanding of identity and values (Staruski, 2020). Meanwhile, A. Sen developed his own original approach to the problem of equality and justice, known as the capabilities approach (Blunden, 2021). In contrast to J. Rawls, A. Sen focused not on the distribution of primary goods but on people's real freedom to achieve valuable functionings and lead a full life (Kjosavik, 2021). This concept had a considerable impact not only on academic debates but also on the practice of assessing quality of life and human development in international organisations' activities. A. Sen's approach was further developed and complemented in the work of Robeyns (2021).

Finally, an important new perspective on understanding social justice was introduced by the theory of recognition developed by A. Honneth and other representatives of the third generation of the Frankfurt School (Schmitz, 2021). Unlike distributive theories, A. Honneth considers full intersubjective recognition of individuals' identities as a key prerequisite for their self-fulfilment and social justice. In this framework, injustice arises from a denial of recognition, which generates negative experiences of disrespect, humiliation, and exclusion. This concept has opened new perspectives for analysing many contemporary social movements and identity conflicts. Thus, philosophical reflection on issues of justice and equality has a rich tradition that was significantly enriched in the second half of the 20th century. J. Rawls, A. Sen, and A. Honneth's theories represent three influential and original approaches to understanding these issues. They simultaneously reflect key developments in contemporary political philosophy. J. Rawls developed a deontological concept of justice within the framework of social contract theory. A. Sen shifted the focus from the distribution of goods to the expansion of basic freedoms in the spirit of developmental liberalism. A. Honneth brought the issue of identity recognition and the intersubjective constitution of autonomy to the centre of discussion.

These three concepts are vivid examples of different methodological strategies for justifying principles of justice and reflect a shift in the research perspective from procedural universalism to contextual sensitivity, from a focus on distribution to issues of agency and recognition. Despite considerable differences, J. Rawls', A. Sen's, and A. Honneth's theories share a common commitment to the values of autonomy, equality, and inclusion. Therefore, an in-depth examination

of their conceptual foundations and normative conclusions is a necessary precondition for the development of a comprehensive philosophical conception of social justice that responds to the challenges of a pluralistic society and the global world.

3.2. Comparative analysis of the theories of justice by J. Rawls, A. Sen, and A. Honneth

J. Rawls, A. Sen, and A. Honneth have proposed original and influential approaches to justifying principles of social justice, reflecting key trends in the development of political philosophy from the late 20th to the early 21st century. Despite substantial conceptual and methodological differences, these theories share a common aspiration to find convincing principles for evaluating and legitimising social institutions in conditions of value pluralism and social inequality.

For J. Rawls, the starting point is the imaginary experiment of the “original position,” in which rational individuals, behind a “veil of ignorance,” choose the basic principles of a just society based on considerations of mutual advantage and impartiality (Sarafa and Oyewole, 2021). A. Sen, on the other hand, departs from the criticism of the informational constraints of social choice theories and emphasises the need to shift the focus from the distribution of primary goods to the expansion of people’s real capabilities (Blunden, 2021). A. Honneth, in turn, turns to Hegelian dialectics of struggle for recognition and argues for the genesis of moral principles from the negative experience of injustice (Schmitz, 2021). Despite these differences in the starting point, all three authors centre their theories on the concepts of autonomy and human development. For J. Rawls, justice as fairness should guarantee all individuals the necessary social goods for the realisation of their rational life plans. A. Sen considers the expansion of basic freedoms as the key goal and criterion of social development. A. Honneth interpreted full self-fulfilment as the empirical telos of historical progress, unfolding through adequate recognition of identity in three key spheres – love, rights, and solidarity.

Furthermore, each author brought their own accents to the interpretation of social justice. J. Rawls emphasised the procedural aspect – justice should primarily be an attribute of the basic structure of society, which determines the distribution of rights, duties, and benefits of social cooperation. His two principles of justice as fairness (equality of basic

liberties and the permissibility of only those inequalities that benefit the least advantaged) form a distributive paradigm that legitimises a certain range of material inequality under conditions of fair equality of opportunity. A. Sen significantly expands the subject field of theories of justice by overcoming the opposition between procedural and consequentialist approaches. His capabilities approach shifts the focus from the possession of goods to the real freedom of individuals to achieve states and actions that they value rightly. According to A. Sen, justice should consider not only patterns of resource distribution but also the entire spectrum of factors – from individual differences to social and institutional conditions – that determine people's ability to convert means into valuable ends. Hence, distributive reasoning needs to be complemented with attention to the expansion of positive freedoms, removal of deprivations, and equalisation of basic capabilities. A. Honneth, on the other hand, entirely rejects the distributive paradigm in favour of the theory of recognition. In his view, the key dimension of social justice is not the distribution of material goods but the elimination of institutionalised forms of disrespect and humiliation that hinder individuals' self-fulfilment. Moral progress occurs through social conflicts in which different groups struggle to expand and deepen relations of mutual recognition (Abril, 2025a). In this perspective, a just society emerges not as a certain ideal structure but as an open space for the discursive formation of personal and collective identity.

In interpreting the nature of contemporary social movements and conflicts, J. Rawls, A. Sen, and A. Honneth demonstrate both points of convergence and divergence. All three acknowledge the inadequacy of the opposition between material and cultural dimensions of emancipation. However, while J. Rawls focuses on developing abstract principles of just social cooperation, A. Sen and A. Honneth pay more attention to the concrete experience of injustice and the public articulation of the subjective demands of the dispossessed and marginalised. A. Sen operates on the capability principle and seeks procedural criteria for evaluating well-being, whereas A. Honneth appeals to historically contingent standards of moral legitimacy that are substantively defined by social struggle. The differences between the discussed authors become particularly evident when applied to the global dimension of justice. A. Sen's cosmopolitan position calls for expanding the informational basis of theories of justice and considering the consequences of national policies for people's interests and freedoms regardless of state borders. A. Honneth, on the other hand, advocates

for the gradual universalisation of recognition principles through the transnationalization of public spheres and solidarity, cautioning against the risks of premature institutionalisation and abstraction from specific life contexts. The Rawlsian perspective of “The law of peoples” remains within the framework of liberal internationalism, offering a version of “two-level” contractualism: first among individuals within states and then among peoples as collective subjects of global justice.

Despite these differences, the theories of J. Rawls, A. Sen, and A. Honneth should not be seen as alternatives that exclude each other. On the contrary, they can serve as complementary elements of a comprehensive justice model for the modern world. Rawlsian principles establish the basic institutional structure embodying fundamental respect for individual autonomy and the fairness of social cooperation. A. Sen’s concept complements this perspective by focusing on the substantive dimensions of freedom and the development of human capabilities. A. Honneth, on the other hand, adds sensitivity to the moral dynamics of recognition, which reveals the emancipatory potential of social conflicts and movements. The productive synthesis and further development of these theories constitute a fertile research programme for political philosophy, capable of offering ideological foundations for ensuring justice, inclusiveness, and sustainable human development in a globalised world. Considering the objectives of this study, a comprehensive and multidimensional understanding of social justice should incorporate key insights from the discussed concepts (Table 1). J. Rawls’s theory lays the foundation in the form of principles of fair distribution of rights, freedoms, and socio-economic advantages. A. Sen’s concept significantly expands the understanding of the distribution object, including people’s real capabilities and emphasising the role of conversion factors. Finally, A. Honneth’s theory of recognition draws attention to the intersubjective dimension of justice and emphasises the importance of full self-fulfilment in the emotional, legal, and social spheres.

Table 1. Comparison of theories of justice
by J. Rawls, A. Sen, and A. Honneth

Criteria	J. Rawls	A. Sen	A. Honneth
Methodological strategy	Veil of ignorance	Comparative removal of injustice through public discussion	Formal concept based on universal needs of self-fulfilment
Subject focus	Fair distribution of rights, freedoms, and socio-economic goods	Real capabilities to achieve valuable functioning	Intersubjective conditions of self-fulfilment through full recognition
Attitude to utilitarianism	Rejects reducing justice to maximising utility	Rejects aggregation of advantages without considering individual capabilities	Opposes utilitarianism to un-reduced needs of human identity
Universal principles	Two principles of justice (equal liberties, fair equality of opportunity)	Rejects a single transcendental principle in favour of a comparative approach	Formal concept of "ethical life" as a condition of self-fulfilment for all
Key criterion	Fair distribution of primary benefits	Expanding real opportunities and freedoms	Full recognition of the individual in the emotional, legal, and social spheres
Limitations of the distribution paradigm	Focuses on the distribution of goods as the basis of justice	Criticises neglect of conversion factors affecting the use of goods	Emphasises intersubjective conditions of autonomy beyond the distribution of goods
Subjective dimension	Abstracts from empirical concepts of the good, focusing on fair procedures	Considers the individual ability to convert resources into valuable forms of life	Comes from moral experiences of injustice and the desire for recognition

Source: compiled by the authors.

Thus, the integral theory of justice should combine J. Rawls's distributive paradigm with A. Sen's capability approach and A. Honneth's theory of recognition. This will allow for a comprehensive understanding of the complex nature of social justice and the development of effective institutional mechanisms to ensure it in the conditions of modern society.

3.3. The problem of ensuring equal opportunities and overcoming discrimination

Despite progress in human rights protection, discrimination remains one of the most pressing issues in contemporary society. It manifests itself in unjust differential treatment, limited opportunities, or outright hostility towards certain individuals or groups based on their belonging to a particular category. Such treatment is based on negative stereotypes, prejudices, and historically formed power hierarchies that reproduce relations of domination and oppression between different social groups.

The most common forms of discrimination include racial, ethnic, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, and religious discrimination. Racial and ethnic discrimination occurs both at the interpersonal and institutional levels, creating structural barriers in education, employment, healthcare, and political representation (Abril, 2025b). Gender discrimination limits women's access to education, professional fulfilment, and political participation, reinforcing their subordinate status through gender stereotypes and patriarchal norms (Ryskaliyev et al., 2019; Khamzina et al., 2020). Age discrimination (ageism) is manifested in paternalistic attitudes towards young people and the marginalisation of the elderly. People with disabilities face physical and informational barriers in public spaces, dominance of the medical model of disability, and limitations in employment. The lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community still suffers from systemic restrictions on civil rights, discrimination, and violence based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Religious discrimination threatens members of religious minorities and undermines the principle of the secular state. Cases of intersectional or multiple discrimination, where individuals experience oppression based on multiple characteristics simultaneously, are particularly complex. Different forms of discrimination reinforce each other, creating a qualitatively different level of marginalisation and vulnerability. Therefore, it is important to consider the intersectionality of inequalities in anti-discrimination policies.

The key problem in combating discrimination and inequality lies in the fact that law and state policies alone are not capable of eradicating deeply ingrained prejudices and practices underlying oppression and injustice. Even with a perfect legal framework and institutional mechanisms, their implementation faces unconscious and indirect resistance, inertia, and manipulation from holders of prejudices and beneficiaries of inequalities. Therefore, effective anti-discrimination policy requires legal and institutional tools and a lasting cultural and values transformation of societal consciousness. Such transformation should be based on principles of respect for human dignity, diversity, and inclusion, the development of empathy and critical thinking, the formation of a culture of tolerance and civic responsibility. An important component of these changes is the direct involvement and empowerment of representatives of discriminated groups, providing space for articulating their experiences, needs, and interests. It is their voices and leadership that should shape the agenda of anti-discrimination policy. Building an inclusive society free from discrimination is a complex and long-term process that requires concerted efforts from the state, educational institutions, media, business, civil society, and all citizens (Table 2). Only through dialogue, interaction, and continuous efforts to broaden one's understanding can we move closer to realising the egalitarian ideal.

Table 2. Strategies and tools for overcoming discrimination in modern society

Level	Strategies	Tools and activities
Legal	Improvement of anti-discrimination legislation	Adoption and implementation of laws prohibiting discrimination
	Ensuring effective mechanisms of legal protection	Creation of specialised anti-discrimination bodies
	Harmonisation of national legislation with international standards	Ratification and implementation of international human rights conventions

Level	Strategies	Tools and activities
Institutional	Integration of the principles of non-discrimination into the activities of all state bodies	Implementation of anti-discrimination policies and action plans
	Creation of inclusive and representative institutions	Ensuring diversity and representation of minorities in government, education, and the media
	Development of cross-sectoral cooperation in overcoming discrimination	Establishing partnership between the state, civil society, and business
Educational	Inclusion of equality and non-discrimination topics in educational programmes	Development of inclusive curricula and materials
	Preparation of teachers to work in conditions of diversity	Conducting trainings on cross-cultural communication and non-discrimination for teachers
	Development of an inclusive educational environment	Ensuring architectural, informational, and social accessibility of educational institutions
Cultural	Raising awareness of discrimination and its consequences	Conducting information and educational campaigns
	Formation of a culture of diversity and inclusion	Support for cross-cultural dialogue and interaction
	Countering hate speech and stereotypes in public discourse	Implementation of ethical standards and self-regulation for media and internet platforms
Economic	Ensuring equal access to economic resources and opportunities	Development of economic empowerment programmes for vulnerable groups
	Creation of an inclusive labour market	Implementation of reasonable adaptation and non-discrimination policies in the workplace
	Promoting diversity and inclusivity in the business sector	Development of corporate policies and practices of diversity

Level	Strategies	Tools and activities
Emancipatory	Empowering discriminated groups	Support for self-organisation and leadership in communities
	Provision of conditions for equal participation in public and political life	Development of mechanisms of public participation and consultation
	Building solidarity and mutual support between groups	Promotion of the creation of alliances and coalitions for the protection of human rights

Source: compiled by the authors.

As seen from the Table 2, effective combating of discrimination requires a comprehensive and multi-level approach, which combines legal, institutional, educational, cultural, economic, and emancipatory strategies. At the legal level, key instruments include improving anti-discrimination legislation, ensuring effective legal protection, and aligning national norms with international standards in the field of human rights. The institutional dimension involves integrating non-discrimination principles into the work of all government bodies, creating inclusive and representative institutions, and fostering cross-sectoral cooperation. Educational efforts should focus on integrating equality issues into educational curricula, preparing educators to work in diverse environments, and developing inclusive educational environments (Smanova et al., 2024; Orazalieva et al., 2020). In the cultural sphere, it is important to raise awareness of the issue of discrimination, promote a culture of diversity, and counter hate speech and stereotypes. The economic dimension of anti-discrimination strategies involves ensuring equal access to resources and opportunities, creating an inclusive labour market, and promoting diversity in the business sector. Finally, emancipatory approaches aim to expand the opportunities and empowerment of the discriminated groups themselves, ensuring their equal participation in social life and building solidarity and mutual support.

Combining all these strategies and instruments can ensure systemic and sustainable changes towards overcoming discrimination and creating an inclusive society where every person has equal opportunities for self-fulfilment and full participation regardless of their belonging or identity.

3.4. Impact of globalisation on social inequality

Economic, political, and cultural globalisation have ambivalent consequences for social equality. On the one hand, globalisation contributes to the spread of human rights ideas, knowledge exchange, and resource sharing, shaping a global civil society. Global South countries have gained access to new markets, technologies, and investments, which has often led to economic growth and poverty reduction.

Critics note that, in practice, the benefits of globalisation are primarily enjoyed by wealthy countries, transnational corporations, and local elites, while marginalised groups are disadvantaged (Manimala, 2022). Trade liberalisation and financial flows restrict the ability of national governments to pursue independent socio-economic policies and protect vulnerable populations. Global competition for investment and jobs often leads to lower social standards, labour rights restrictions, and cuts to social welfare programmes (Khamzina *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, the increasing mobility of capital and the development of information technologies allow transnational corporations to avoid taxation and shift social costs onto the shoulders of states and citizens (Cammack, 2022; Chigubu and Legwaila, 2021). Globalisation intensifies economic interdependence between countries and increases their vulnerability to exogenous shocks, such as financial crises, sudden fluctuations in commodity prices, natural disasters (Anbumozhi *et al.*, 2020). These shocks disproportionately affect the poorest countries and social groups, which lack sufficient resilience and institutional adaptation mechanisms. The result is increased precarity, social alienation, and economic vulnerability for a substantial portion of the population.

The asymmetric distribution of the benefits and risks of globalisation leads to deepening inequality both within individual countries and on a global scale. An increasingly large share of global wealth and income is concentrated in the hands of the global elite, while the situation of the lower and middle classes deteriorates in many countries (Wade, 2004). This trend undermines social cohesion, delegitimises traditional political institutions, and creates a breeding ground for populist reactions. Globalisation has particularly negative consequences for indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, and other marginalised communities. The expansion of the global market is often accompanied by land expropriation, the destruction of traditional ways of life, and cultural

homogenisation. Despite formal guarantees of minority rights, these groups face systemic barriers to accessing education, healthcare, legal protection, and political representation (Chi and Hong, 2021). As a result, they are side-lined in the processes of global development and bear a disproportionate burden of the social and environmental costs of liberalisation. The exacerbation of social inequality due to globalisation is the subject of active debates both in the academic community and the public sphere. Critical theory and the alter-globalisation movement emphasise the need for a more equitable redistribution of societal wealth, strengthening democratic control over transnational flows of capital and resources, and ensuring social and economic rights for all citizens regardless of their origin or status (Flesher Fominaya, 2020).

Other researchers call for the exploration of new forms of global governance and coordination that would allow for the correction of the negative effects of economic integration through mechanisms of redistribution, social protection, and enforcement of environmental and labour standards (Ülgen, 2022). This entails creating a global system of progressive taxation, introducing a universal basic income, expanding the powers of international organisations in the field of human rights protection and environmental preservation. However, it is evident that merely correcting the negative consequences of globalisation is not enough. The structural transformation of the globalisation model itself is a fundamental prerequisite for ensuring social justice and sustainable development on a global scale. It should be based not on the ideology of free markets and deregulation but on the values of inclusivity, solidarity, and democratic participation. Global rules of the game need to be revised to provide more opportunities and resources to developing countries, protect the rights and interests of marginalised groups, and limit the power of transnational corporations and the global elite.

This requires reforming existing global governance institutions, such as the United Nations (UN), the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank, and building a fundamentally new global institutional architecture based on democratic and human rights principles. The key role in this process should be played by global civil society and transnational social movements capable of mobilising collective action and exerting pressure on national governments and international organisations. The academic community also has a crucial role to play in these transformations by developing critical knowledge about the nature and consequences of global inequality, formulating

alternative models and development strategies, and monitoring and evaluating global policies and institutions (Table 3). Particularly important is the establishment of a productive dialogue between theoretical developments and the practical experience of emancipatory movements and grassroots initiatives that experiment with new forms of economic organisation, social interaction, and political participation.

Table 3. Impact of globalisation on social inequality:
main trends and dimensions

Aspects of globalisation	Positive consequences	Negative consequences	Particularly vulnerable groups
Economic integration	Economic growth and poverty reduction in some regions	Reduction of social standards and labour rights as a result of global competition	Low-skilled workers
	Access to new markets, technologies, and investments for the countries of the Global South	Reduction of social welfare programmes	Workers in traditional industries
		Limiting the possibilities of independent socio-economic policies of governments	Residents of depressed regions
Financial liberalisation	Attraction of foreign investments and loans	Increased economic instability and vulnerability to financial crises	Recipients of social benefits and services
	Expansion of access to global financial markets	Increase in government debt and dependence on external financing	Small property owners and farmers
		Tax evasion by TNCs and shifting of social costs onto society	Individuals with fixed incomes
Cultural globalisation	Dissemination of human rights and diversity values	Cultural homogenisation and Westernisation	Indigenous peoples
	Formation of a global civil society	Erosion of traditional values, identities, and ways of life	Ethnic and religious minorities
	Development of cosmopolitan culture and global ethics	Dissemination of consumerism and mass culture	Bearers of traditional knowledge and practices

Political globalisation	Strengthening of global institutions and regimes (UN, ECHR)	Lack of democratic legitimacy for global governance	Citizens of countries with limited sovereignty
	Development of international law and standards	Lack of accountability mechanisms for global actors (TNCs, IFIs)	Representatives of anti-systemic movements
	Coordination of efforts in solving global problems	Erosion of national governments' autonomy and democratic control	Proponents of alternative models of globalisation

Note: TNCs – transnational corporations; IFIs – international financial organisations; ECHR – European Court of Human Rights.

Source: compiled by the authors.

As the Table 3 demonstrates, the impact of globalisation on social inequality is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that requires systematic understanding and practical response. Globalisation generates new forms of social exclusion and concentration of wealth and power, exacerbating existing lines of division and conflict. Moreover, it offers new opportunities for transnational solidarity, experience exchange, and coordination of efforts in the struggle for global justice. It is crucial for progressive forces to propose a reconstruction of the global order that overcomes inequality, guarantees fundamental rights for every individual, and ensures long-term sustainable development in the interests of all humanity and future generations.

3.5. The role of the state and civil society in shaping principles of social justice and equality in the context of globalisation

Ensuring equal opportunities in these conditions requires comprehensive strategies from both the state and civil society. The state must combat discrimination in all spheres, level the playing field through access to quality education, create an inclusive labour market, and address excessive wealth and power concentration. These efforts should be complemented by policies recognising cultural diversity and expanding participation opportunities for all groups.

In a broader perspective, the state is called upon to guarantee basic rights and freedoms for all citizens, ensure fair distribution of social goods,

level the playing field, correct market failures, and distribute societal wealth for the common good. It must act as an arbiter in conflicts and promote inclusive dialogue among all stakeholders. Implementing these functions faces challenges in the context of globalisation but is necessary for the legitimacy of democratic governance. Civil society, on the other hand, plays a crucial role in defending human rights, combating discrimination, and promoting equality. Human rights, women's, environmental, labour, and other civil society movements articulate the demands of vulnerable groups, fight structural inequality, and develop alternative interaction practices. Despite the diversity of strategies, they are united by a commitment to the values of justice and inclusion. Overcoming global inequality requires a structural transformation of the very model of globalisation based on inclusivity, solidarity, and democratic participation (Turkebayeva et al., 2022). The key agents of these changes should be global civil society and progressive transnational movements in cooperation with national governments and international organisations. The academic community is also called upon to develop critical knowledge about the origins of inequality and propose fair development alternatives.

Effective cooperation between the state and civil society is a prerequisite for advancing principles of justice. The state should create favourable conditions for the activities of civil organisations and involve them as partners in the development and implementation of programs to address inequality (Buribayev et al., 2015). Civil organisations should utilise all channels of influence and develop constructive interaction with government bodies while maintaining their autonomy. Particularly advantageous is a partnership in combating corruption and human rights abuses. Facing the challenges of globalisation, the state and civil society bear joint responsibility for shaping a fair and inclusive world. Only through productive cooperation and ongoing dialogue among all social partners can sensitive and accountable institutions be built to embody high principles of justice in everyday life. The state and civil society must also collaborate to combat corruption, abuse of power, and human rights violations. Civil organisations, media, and activists play a crucial role in exposing such practices, mobilising public pressure, and holding perpetrators accountable (Spytska, 2024). However, systemic changes also require effective state anti-corruption bodies, an independent judiciary, and efficient mechanisms for civil oversight. The synergy of "watchdog" democracy and strong rule of law institutions is the key to eradicating corruption and strengthening the integrity of governance.

Finally, ensuring social justice and sustainable development in a globalised world requires concerted action by national governments and the global civil society at the international level. Wide coalitions of states and non-governmental organizations can advance ambitious initiatives for reforming global governance, combating climate change, regulating the activities of transnational corporations, ensuring the rights of migrants and refugees, and more. Without active participation from networked civil society, international organisations risk becoming closed bureaucratic structures detached from ordinary people's interests and needs. It is obvious that productive cooperation between the state and civil society is a complex and nonlinear process that encounters numerous difficulties and risks – both objective and created by the participants themselves. However, the awareness of shared responsibility for ensuring a better and more just future for all should encourage both sides to seek new forms of cooperation and synergy. Only through partnership and constant dialogue is it possible to develop inclusive and accountable institutions capable of embodying principles of justice in life.

3.6. Analysis of research results in the context of contemporary philosophical discourse on justice

This study is devoted to the analysis of the evolution of philosophical concepts of justice from antiquity to the present, including the theories of J. Rawls, A. Sen, and A. Honneth. It also examines issues related to ensuring equal opportunities, overcoming discrimination, and the impact of globalisation on social inequality.

In the course of the study, it was found that the obtained results largely coincide with the conclusions of other researchers working in this field. In particular, the thorough analysis by Kozera (2022) of A. Sen's theory of justice in the context of philosophy of law also emphasises the close relationship between justice and improving the quality of life by reducing poverty and inequality. However, while the researcher focuses primarily on the legal aspect, within the framework of this study, A. Sen's theory is considered in a broader philosophical context, allowing for the identification of its connections with other conceptual approaches.

A valuable contribution to the development of the raised issue is the study by Zygmunt (2007), which focuses on the issue of gender equality in the field of employment. Although the author also relies on

the theoretical principles of justice developed by J. Rawls, her analysis demonstrates how these principles can be applied to solving specific social problems. Thus, the researcher's study complements and enriches the conclusions of this paper, providing them with greater practical relevance.

The study by Stübinger (2023) offers new horizons in understanding the issue of justice, focusing on its connections with alternative economic approaches. The author convincingly argues that the dominant neoliberal paradigm, which relies on principles of the free market and minimisation of the state's role, is incapable of ensuring a fair distribution of social goods and opportunities. Instead, the researcher argues for the need to search for economic models that would incorporate ethical principles and be oriented towards ensuring real equality of opportunities for all members of society. This conclusion resonates clearly with one of the key propositions of this study, namely the requirement to reconsider the principles of justice in the face of the challenges of the contemporary globalised world with its numerous forms of inequality. Therefore, the researcher's arguments in favour of alternative economic approaches appear not just relevant but extremely important in the context of this paper.

On the other hand, Folkerts (2024) enriches the discourse on justice by placing it in the context of discussions about the nature and functions of the social state. Drawing on the theoretical legacy of G. Hegel, the author argues for an understanding of justice as a comprehensive principle that should determine the basic structure of society and the functioning of all its institutions. In this view, justice is interpreted not only as formal equality of rights but as a substantive ideal that requires ensuring real opportunities for self-fulfilment and participation in community life for every individual. Accordingly, the task of the social state should not be merely compensating for the most glaring manifestations of inequality but rather creating institutional conditions for real equality and inclusion at all levels. Many of the researcher considerations resonate with the conclusions of this study, particularly with the assertion of the need to broaden the concept of justice and fill it with more substantive content. Equally resonant is the emphasis on the role of the state and social institutions in embodying the ideal of justice as equality of opportunities.

In turn, Gasda (2023) makes a substantial contribution to the discussion by substantiating, from a theological perspective, the inseparability

between social justice, human rights, and the recognition of the dignity of every individual. Despite the differences in starting positions, this approach finds clear parallels with the conclusions of this study, especially regarding the advocacy for combining redistributive policies with policies of recognition. Therefore, in normative terms, a deep kinship can be traced despite the disciplinary differences between these studies.

The study by Alencar (2021) is dedicated to a thorough analysis of the idea of normative reconstruction, which occupies a central place in the theory of justice of the prominent German philosopher A. Honneth. Drawing on a wide array of primary sources and critical literature, the author convincingly demonstrates that the concept of normative reconstruction plays a cornerstone role, allowing the integration of normative principles with social reality and outlining paths for realising justice under specific socio-historical conditions. According to A. Honneth, principles of justice cannot be derived from any abstract formula or a priori rational consensus; instead, they are always the result of a dynamic process of interpretation and updating of normative principles in light of new social challenges and experiences of struggle for recognition. Thus, normative reconstruction emerges as a reflexive mechanism that ensures the adaptability of the theory of justice to historical changes and its rootedness in living social reality. These considerations by the researcher resonate clearly with one of the central lines of argumentation developed in this study – namely, the thesis of the principled historicity and contextual nature of conceptions of justice. Just like the Brazilian researcher, in this study, the content of the concept of justice is not static and cannot be established once and for all; instead, it constantly evolves, responding to the real needs and aspirations of social subjects. Accordingly, the development of an adequate theory of justice requires careful attention to the historical dynamics of social norms and sensitivity to the concrete experience of injustice and struggles for recognition.

A highly valuable contribution to the discussion on justice is the research by Gomes and Gonçalves (2021), which focuses on the problem of the relationship between J. Rawls' theory of justice and the challenges of sustainable development. The authors rightly note that most classical theories of justice, including J. Rawls's influential concept, consider the distribution of goods and burdens from a synchronous, intra-generational perspective. However, the exacerbation of the ecological

crisis and the realisation of the extent of humanity's current impact on the well-being of future generations have sharply raised questions about intergenerational, diachronic justice. The researchers convincingly argue that considering the imperatives of sustainable development and ensuring dignified living conditions for future generations must become an integral component of any relevant theory of justice today. They also emphasise the urgency of developing effective institutional mechanisms for integrating sustainability principles into formulating and adopting political decisions. Even though this study primarily focuses on the synchronous dimension of social justice, the arguments of the researchers seem not just appropriate but extremely important. The lack of attention to the intergenerational aspect of justice and ecological factors threatens to undermine all efforts to overcome inequality and build an inclusive society in the face of climate catastrophe. Moreover, the inability to ensure a fair distribution of goods and burdens among representatives of different generations is a form of injustice and discrimination. Considering this, these authors' conclusions can be regarded as a very valuable addition to an expansion of the perspective of this study. Even though the issue of sustainability is not at the forefront of our analysis, it undoubtedly should be considered in any comprehensive reflection on the phenomenon of justice.

In turn, Rodríguez García (2022) proposes an innovative view on the issue of justice, emphasising the crucial importance of the ecological dimension. Unlike many classical approaches, which interpret justice exclusively in terms of the distribution of socio-economic resources and opportunities, the author argues for the need to incorporate ecological goods – such as clean air and water, fertile soils, biodiversity, and so on – into the theory of justice. In this regard, the researcher pays particular attention to the injustice in the distribution of ecological risks and negative externalities of economic activity, which disproportionately threaten the most vulnerable and marginalised population groups. Drawing on a careful analysis of empirical data and specific cases of environmental injustice, she demonstrates the inseparable connection between environmental degradation and deepening social exclusion. These arguments are an extremely valuable contribution to the development of a holistic and relevant understanding of justice in response to contemporary challenges. The conclusions and conceptual innovations of the researcher clearly align with the demand articulated in this study for considering intersectionality – the multiple, heterogeneous dimensions of injustice and discrimination that mutually reinforce and

deepen each other. Integrating environmental issues into the theory of justice reveals yet another crucial aspect of this intersectionality, emphasising the complex intertwining of economic, racial, gender, and other forms of exclusion with uneven distribution of ecological harm and vulnerability. Thus, despite differences in subject focus, the Spanish researcher's approach and the methodological principles of this paper share a profound kinship and mutual complementarity.

A comparative analysis of the concepts of justice by J. Rawls and M. Nussbaum, thoroughly conducted by Bracho Fuenmayor (2023), allows identifying nuances of meanings and differences in interpretations even within the framework of a single liberal paradigm. Nussbaum's emphasis on the importance of considering individual particularities and differences is particularly valuable and relevant to this study. This thesis not only echoes one of the conclusions of this study but also provides it with additional conceptual grounding, legitimising the principle of recognition of differences as an integral component of justice.

In summary, the examined studies mostly confirm and complement the results of this paper. Despite differences in methodological approaches and subject emphases, they all point to the need for a more holistic understanding of justice, sensitive to social context and individual differences. Together, these studies outline a perspective of justice capable of addressing the challenges of inequality and exclusion in the globalised world of the 21st century.

4. Conclusions

During the investigation of the philosophical aspects of social justice and equality in contemporary society, several important results were obtained. The analysis of the main philosophical concepts of justice, presented by the theories of J. Rawls, A. Sen, and A. Honneth, revealed their conceptual advantages and limitations in the context of current societal challenges. Despite methodological differences, these approaches share a desire to find convincing principles for evaluating and legitimising social institutions amidst value pluralism and deepening inequality. Moreover, the need for integration of their key achievements into a comprehensive model of justice becomes evident, one that combines attention to fair distribution of social goods and burdens, expansion of real opportunities for people, and ensuring full recognition of their dignity and identity.

The study also confirmed the acute relevance and multidimensionality of the problem of ensuring equal opportunities and overcoming discrimination. In the conditions of deepening social inequality and the asymmetric impact of globalisation, vulnerable and marginalised groups face systemic constraints in accessing basic social goods and resources. This necessitates the development and implementation of a comprehensive anti-discrimination policy that combines legal, institutional, educational-cultural, and emancipatory strategies based on an intersectional approach and the empowerment of disadvantaged communities. The analysis underscored the crucial role of productive interaction between the state and civil society in shaping and implementing principles of social justice. The state is tasked with creating inclusive institutions and policies aimed at levelling opportunities, overcoming the most acute forms of deprivation, and ensuring a dignified life for all citizens. Civil society, in turn, must act as a defender of the interests of vulnerable groups, foster a culture of tolerance, and actively engage in shaping public policy. In modern conditions, the most promising aspect is the synergy of efforts between the state and communities to build a just social order.

In this regard, it is evident that the issues raised are inexhaustible and require further interdisciplinary examination. The promising areas for further examination include a deeper analysis of the connection between ecological and social justice, intergenerational aspects of equality, and local practices of combating discrimination and exclusion. Equally important is the practical implementation of the recommendations put forward in specific institutional and political contexts. Only through the synthesis of conceptual developments and empirical experience can a comprehensive vision of social justice be developed that addresses the challenges of the 21st-century globalised and pluralistic world. Therefore, further efforts should be directed towards deepening the theoretical understanding of the phenomenon of justice considering contemporary transformations and developing effective mechanisms for implementing its principles in social practice.

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