

24th Annual Meeting of the *Collegium Politicum*

Thursday and Friday, April 24 and 25, Turkish-German University, Istanbul, Beykoz

Organized by Enes Bayraklı (Turkish-German University), Christoph Horn (Universität Bonn) & Manuel Knoll (Universität München, LMU)

Call for Abstracts

Rethinking Justice: Ancient Foundations and Contemporary Theories

In *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls asserts that Aristotle “has a conception of social justice” and that his own conception of justice as fairness is not at odds with the “traditional notion” of justice (§ 2). However, Rawls’s claims are problematic for several reasons. First, the term “social justice” – which, in the modern welfare state, is understood as the redistribution of goods to the needy based on their needs – is a distinctly modern concept. Therefore, like Plato, Aristotle cannot be said to have a conception of social justice. Second, like most contemporary thinkers, Rawls equates “social justice” with “distributive justice” (cf. Fleischacker 2004, Hayek 2013, Miller 2003).

However, this equation is rooted in modern thought and fails to capture the meaning of “distributive justice” in the traditions of Plato and Aristotle. For these two ancient political thinkers, distributive justice was primarily a political form of justice. For them, a just distribution of political power and recognition should be based on merit or desert, which could be measured by moral and intellectual virtues. This leads to the third issue of Rawls’ interpretation: his claim that his own conception of distributive justice aligns with ancient thought. Rawls devotes a whole section of *A Theory of Justice* to explaining why justice as fairness rejects “the notion of distribution according to virtue” and the view that “moral desert” or “moral worth” should play a role in determining distributive shares (§ 48). These points demonstrate that the concept of distributive justice, and its history, is far more nuanced and complex than most contemporary scholars recognize.

Considering the different understandings and difficulties related to the concepts of “distributive justice”, “social justice”, and “political justice”, this conference will examine both contemporary theories of justice and their ancient foundations. Keeping such different understandings and difficulties in mind, this conference welcomes papers on topics related to questions and themes such as:

- What is the relationship between ancient and contemporary theories of justice?
- To what degree do contemporary theories of justice have foundations in ancient Greek or Roman political thought?
- What are main differences between ancient and contemporary theories of justice?
- Do theories of justice developed by Islamic philosophers, e.g. Al-Farabi, have strong foundations in ancient Greek or Roman political thought?
- Does John Rawls’ theory of justice align with ancient thought?

- Is Michael Walzer's theory of justice, according to which there are different "spheres of justice", inspired by Aristotle's distinctions between universal and particular justice, and between the different forms of particular justice?
- How persuasive is Martha Nussbaum's interpretation of Aristotle's conception of distributive justice?
- A distribution of goods and benefits according to need to the needy is the central principle of the modern welfare state. Are there any traces of the "needs principle" in ancient thought?
- Several conceptions of justice developed by ancient and contemporary political thinkers – e.g. Plato, Aristotle, Michael Walzer, and David Miller – ask for a distribution of certain goods according to merit or desert. How do such conceptions exactly understand their key concept of "merit" or "desert"? Are there differences between the modern concept of "merit" or "desert" and the ancient concept of "axia"?
- Does Amartya Sen's theory of justice align with ancient thought?
- To which extent can we find a theory of fundamental rights in ancient thought? Is there any equivalent for a concept of socioeconomic rights?

Submissions:

Please note that we have a limited number of places available for this two-day conference. We therefore ask you to send a summary of 300 to 400 words by email to Christoph Horn (chorn@uni-bonn.de) and Manuel Knoll (Manuel.Knoll@lrz.uni-muenchen.de) by **January 15, 2025** at the latest. Decisions on acceptance of proposals will be communicated by **January 31, 2025** at the latest.

Additional information:

Speakers will have 30 minutes for the presentation, followed by 15 minutes of discussion. We ask the colleagues who are not planning to present a paper and are nevertheless willing to participate in the meeting to confirm their attendance by **March 31, 2025**. Unfortunately we can only cover costs for accommodation of those who will be selected to give a talk. For further practical information and updates, please consult www.collegiumpolicum.org.