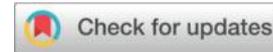


**Title: From Civil Society to the State: The Philosophical Foundations of Political Organization in Hegel**



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**Abstract:**

The topic of civil society is considered one of the most important political subjects worthy of scientific study, due to several considerations, most notably its re-emergence as a fundamental cause in changing political systems, and its prominence as an important factor in political transformations at the practical level, which have become a basic demand at the level of both authority and society alike. In addition, it constitutes a factor that greatly contributes to achieving national and international stability. Philosophers, thinkers, and sociologists have been concerned with this topic since ancient times. Through this research, we aim to study civil society and its relationship to the state according to the German philosopher Hegel, who presented a political philosophy that considered civil society a stage among the stages of the state, as he separated civil society from the state so that the latter became an end in itself. He placed it above society and called on individuals to sacrifice themselves for the survival and continuity of the state.

**Keywords:** Civil society, State, Family, Contract, Rationality.

## **Introduction:**

Hegel's philosophy is considered one of the most important intellectual systems that profoundly influenced Western political and social philosophy, especially in understanding the relationship between individuals and the state. Among the most prominent concepts addressed by Hegel in his philosophical work are the state and civil society, where he presents his own conception of this relationship, which is considered central to the development of both the individual and society alike. For Hegel, the state is not merely a political apparatus or executive authority, but rather the entity that embodies the true freedom of the individual within an organizational framework that encompasses all aspects of social and political life. According to Hegel's vision, the state forms an organizational unity aimed at embodying the general spirit that represents the development of the human being as a social and moral being. In contrast, civil society represents the sphere in which individuals live, where they seek to achieve their private interests within a network of economic and social relations. Although civil society provides a field for achieving individual freedom, it simultaneously suffers from contradictions and conflicts resulting from social and economic inequalities among individuals and classes. These tensions, as Hegel يرى, can only be resolved through the intervention of the state, which represents the only means of achieving social balance and resolving conflicts. Hegel's vision of the relationship between the state and civil society goes beyond their being merely organizational structures; rather, it is an expression of a deeper concept of freedom that cannot be fully realized except through the continuous interaction between individuals and the state. For Hegel, individual freedom cannot be realized in isolation from the group or society; rather, the state is the entity that enables the individual to attain his true freedom within a comprehensive social order. This research seeks to study and analyze Hegel's concepts of the state and civil society, in order to understand how they are connected to one another and how Hegel addresses the conflicts that arise in civil society. It also examines the extent of their suitability in confronting the social and political challenges witnessed in the world today. How can the interaction between the state, civil society, and individuals be interpreted in Hegelian philosophy? Does Hegel's vision offer a way out for resolving the contradictions between individual freedom and the public interest in the context of the development of humanity and society?

### **1- Ethical Life:**

The state and civil society, according to Hegel, fall within what he calls social ethics, which he considers the synthesis between abstract right – the objective aspect – and individual morality – the subjective aspect. Social ethics in Hegel is divided into three parts: the family, civil society, and the state, and they represent the three elements of the comprehensive Idea: the

universal, the particular, and the individual. The essence of the family is universality, while civil society expresses the moment of particularity, where its members pursue their private ends, whereas the state represents the moment of individuality, which is the synthesis of universality and particularity.

The family, civil society, and the state constitute three fundamental circles in Hegel's understanding of social and ethical relations, and each represents a different stage in the development of the ethical life of the individual and society. He connects these circles and explains how ethical life is realized through them across stages of rational development. Hegel used ethical life to express a broad meaning of morality that includes the family, custom, habits, and traditions, etc. Ethical life is synonymous with social life. Ethical life expresses the idea of freedom, which has become, on the one hand, a living good – a good endowed in its self-consciousness with knowledge and will, and realized through this self-consciousness. On the other hand, self-consciousness finds in the ethical world its absolute foundation and the end that moves its effort. Thus, ethical life expresses the conception of freedom as it develops in the existing world, and it also expresses the nature of self-consciousness.

#### 1.1- **The Family:**

The family is the first immediate aspect of ethical life, and it is the social institution upon which the rest of the institutions depend. Upon this institution depend civil society and the state, since there can be no society or state without the family. The family is completed, according to Hegel, through three situations:

A- Marriage: It is a duty imposed by reason and not merely a matter dependent on inclinations; its essence is a social bond and it is a necessary positioning of reason and of the universal will. Marriage, according to Hegel, is not limited to biological instinct, nor is it considered merely a civil contract, because this would be subject to dissolution at any time like any contract between two parties. Nor is love alone the foundation of marriage. For him, marriage means union with the other such that I am not in selfish isolation, but I obtain my self-consciousness by renouncing my particular independence and recognizing myself as a unity of myself with the other, and a unity of the other with me. Hence, marriage is an ethical act in which each person relinquishes his independence to the other.

B- Family Property and Income: Since the husband is responsible for the family, he has the privilege of supervising it; thus, he is the one who strives outside to obtain its demands and needs and what guarantees its life, but the property is shared among the members of the family.

C- Education of Children and the Dissolution of the Family: Hegel considers that the basis of educating children is raising them from the level of natural instinct to the level of self-subsistent

existence, meaning independent existence and free personality, which is the level that makes them independent in order to build a new family.

The family is a substance, and its members are accidents of this substance, but this substantiality is not external or visible; rather, it depends solely on the consciousness of its members, and the bond of unity in the family, or its essence, is love. Love, for Hegel, is reason in its immediacy, that is, it is the immature form of reason. Here we do not find a clear distinction between substance and accident; the unity exists, and the family members do not know that the unity here is a unity of different elements.

## **1.2. Civil Society:**

The idea of civil society depends on the dissolution of the family.

Educating children means bringing them to the level of independent free personality. Thus, they feel themselves as persons before the law and as capable of possessing private property and establishing a new family in which sons become heads of that family and daughters become wives within it, and the old families recede to become the basis and source of this new family. Thus, independent individuals appear as socially independent atoms. They become individual personalities striving to achieve their private ends; each person depends on others as means to achieve his ends, so each becomes dependent on the other, and this is what Hegel calls civil society.

Hegel says: “The concrete person who is himself the subject of his particular ends and, as a totality of needs, and a mixture of arbitrariness and physical necessity, is the first principle in civil society; but this particular person is necessarily connected with other particular persons, so that each realizes and satisfies himself through the others, and this is the second principle in this society.”

For Hegel, civil society is the sphere in which the individual separates from the family and begins to interact with the external world based on his personal interests. In this domain, individuals are free to pursue the realization of their private goals, whether in trade, economy, education, or culture. Individuals in civil society do not interact only on the basis of emotions and family ties, but enter into legal and regulatory relations based on mutual interests. At this stage, difference appears clearly, as the substance or spirit of the nation appears in particulars rising above love, and attention becomes centered on private ends.

After the individual in the family was a universal end because he did not struggle for his personal interest but for the family, he becomes in civil society a social atom and regards himself merely as an end. Thus, universality disappears and is replaced by particularity, that is, the pursuit of personal interests, and the ethical dimension that existed in the family appears to

have disappeared in civil society. Yet it represents a moment of abstraction that is sublated in the state, for the individual's self-interest is itself a common principle of the public.

Moreover, the universal cannot be reduced to merely the sum of individual interests; rather, it refers to the unity of individuals within a legal and ethical framework that guarantees social peace and justice. In Hegel's philosophy, the interaction between the particular and the universal in civil society constitutes a field of conflicts and contradictions, where individuals seek to achieve their private interests, while the need for the state lies in achieving the public interest. Civil society is the stage of the particular that reflects the diversity of interests, but the state is the entity that gathers these interests within the framework of the universal, represented in justice and public freedom that achieve unity among individuals in society.

Civil society consists of three moments:

The system of needs: meaning the mediation of need and its satisfaction by the individual through his work and through satisfying the needs of all others, and this is what he called the system of needs.

The administration of justice: meaning the actual realization of the universal principle of freedom contained in this system, which is the protection of property through the exercise of justice.

The police and the corporation: represented in precaution against the contingent aspects still latent in the system of needs and the administration of justice, and the care of particular interests as if they were a common interest through the police and the corporation.

Accordingly, civil society is characterized by egoism among individuals who seek to satisfy their needs, and this is the element of particularity in them. On the other hand, this satisfaction cannot occur except through association with other individuals who have the same orientation. Thus, civil society is first defined as a social formation in which private needs are realized through the needs of all others. Modern society alone is characterized by this realization of private needs through universal needs. Individuals in modern society become increasingly dependent on collective economic production. The individual can no longer satisfy his needs by himself, although modern man is more individualistic and egoistic in his behavior than the individual in previous eras. Hence, classes appeared in civil society, namely:

The substantial or immediate class:

The reflective or formal class:

The universal class.

The first class is the class of landowners whose wealth is the product of the land and the nature they cultivate. It is substantial because the emergence of agriculture and marriage is the true and first beginning of the establishment of states.

The second class is the industrial class that transforms natural products. It depends on work and thought and includes the class of craftsmen, manufacturers, and merchants. The individual in this class depends on himself and is connected with what the legal state requires. It is centered in cities and is subject to order and freedom, unlike the class of farmers, which is linked to passive acceptance and is more prepared for submission.

The universal class assumes the general interests of society. It should be exempted from direct labor for satisfying its needs, either through its private wealth or through the state, which employs the activity of this class that assumes regulatory and administrative matters.

What makes the individual belong to a particular class is disposition, birth, and circumstances, but the final and essential abstraction lies in subjective opinion and personal freedom.

Hegel denies every claim that demands equality among people in society, because that contradicts not only the order of nature but also the undeniable differences among people in talents and intellectual capacities.

The idea of absolute equality among people contradicts the nature of human reality, which is characterized by differences in abilities and talents. This difference is not only natural, but also necessary for understanding the development of society and its history. The true equality that Hegel calls for is the equality that recognizes these differences and works to organize society according to a deeper and more realistic rationality.

### **1.3. The State:**

Hegel sees that the state is the ethical substance that has reached self-consciousness. It brings together within it both the family and civil society. The unity present in the family in the form of the feeling of love is the substance of the state. It is the substance that is known and becomes an effective law in itself, in which the form of universality conscious of itself is sublated. The state is the foundation of civil society; it is first, and society is second, because only within the bosom of the state can the family transform into civil society.

The state in Hegel's philosophy represents a synthesis between the two previous stages, namely the family and civil society. The substantial spirit of the nation is realized in the state, where it rises to the level of self-consciousness in the minds of citizens. It is embodied in rational laws and institutions that represent the essential nature of the state. Unlike the family and civil society, the state is not merely a phenomenon that reflects this essence; rather, it is the differentiation and specification of this essence, that is, it takes a concrete and distinct form

from other elements. On the other hand, the state becomes a reality in the minds of citizens who live within its framework. The legal and administrative institutions of the state, as a harmonious unity, are not confined to an entity separated from the consciousness of individuals, but constitute part of the will of citizens who organize their actions and decisions according to common rational ends and submit to these institutions consciously and willingly. The members of the family had sought an ethical end under the influence of feeling alone, whereas the members of civil society were intelligent but sought a universal end under the guise of a merely particular end. Hence, the state alone is the place in which the complete form of subjectivity is realized, and this subjectivity is infinite because it relates to itself and acquires complete self-consciousness. In contrast, Hegel compares the state in his conception with despotism in the East, which represents a substance that has absolute power over its individuals, remains alien to them, and does not reflect individual freedom. The state for Hegel is not a vague substance; rather, it is the embodiment of individual freedom through institutions in which collective values and goals are represented and that allow individuals to express their will within the framework of self-consciousness and shared rational development.

For Hegel, the state represents: “the actuality of the ethical Idea; it is the ethical spirit as the substantial will which reveals itself, manifests itself, knows itself, thinks itself, and accomplishes what it knows insofar as it knows, and the state exists immediately in custom and law, and mediately in the self-consciousness of the individual, in his knowledge and activity; while self-consciousness, by virtue of its disposition toward the state, finds in it, as its essence and the end of its activity and its result, its substantial freedom. The state is absolutely rational insofar as it is the actualization of the substantial will that it possesses in its particular self-consciousness, once this self-consciousness rises to the stage of consciousness of its universality; this substantial unity is an end in itself, absolute and fixed, in which freedom attains its highest right and highest value; and on the other hand, this final end has a higher right than the individual, for the highest duty of the individual is to be a member of the state.”

On this basis, the state for him is an Idea of an absolute rational subjective nature; it is the ethical spirit. But this Idea has an actual existential and real realization. Human awareness of his freedom has led him to actual ethical existence realized in society and the state, and this is the realized morality that appears as an Idea, that is, as a concept of the free will in its widest extent, realized in the greatest possible measure of universality. The elements of actual human existence are: universality, particularity, and individuality. The state plays the fundamental role for Hegel after it has absorbed civil society within it as a dialectical negation, as one of its stages and as an abstraction among the abstractions that are composed in the sample of the modern

state that includes all the gains of civil society and negates its defects. The relationship between society and the state here is not merely a relation of abstract negation and affirmation; rather, it is a relationship in which each of its two sides transforms into a composite component of the other side.

In traditional philosophical contexts, the relationship between the state and society may be conceived as a kind of conflict or contradiction, where the state seeks to impose order and laws, while society seeks to achieve the interests and rights of its individuals. This relationship may be reduced to negation and affirmation, where the state seeks to negate any chaos that may arise in society through imposing its authority, while society affirms itself through practicing individual freedom and expressing its interests. However, Hegel does not see it as a mere conflictual relation, but as a dialectical relation, meaning that each side of the relationship does not remain fixed or separate, but transforms and acquires elements from the other side. In other words, the state does not merely impose order; rather, it is a composite that includes within it elements of society and its needs. At the same time, society does not act as a separate entity or one opposed to the state; rather, it is formed and structured through the state as a general framework that provides protection, justice, and organization. Thus, the relationship between the state and society is not fixed or unilateral, but interactive and dynamic. In this relationship, the state takes into account social interests and individual rights advocated by society. For its part, society cannot be formed or remain in existence except within the framework of the laws and institutions of the state. Consequently, each of the two sides changes and transforms based on the influence of the other.

Hegel addresses the state in three sections. First, the internal structure of the state, or what he calls the constitution: it is what organizes the state internally and determines how authority is organized and the relations of individuals. The constitution is an expression of ethical freedom that is realized through the organization of relations within the state. It is the framework that determines how authority is exercised and how rights and duties are distributed among individuals and institutions.

Second: the relation of the state, as a particular state, to other states, which he calls international law. Hegel believes that the state is not an isolated entity, but rather part of a network of international relations formed through international law. However, this international law does not merely mean laws between states; rather, it is an expression of ethical relations between states at a global level.

Third: the development of reason in the world, which is the development in which each particular state becomes merely a stage, and this is what Hegel calls universal history, where

human history constitutes a struggle for the realization of freedom at a global level, and the state is considered part of this universal process that represents the development of the human spirit toward ethical perfection. Hegel sees that every particular state is a stage in the development of human reason at the level of universal history, where complete freedom is realized with the development of states in the context of world history.

Commentary:

Hegel acknowledges a temporary contradiction between the state and the individual, but he denies its permanence. Hence his dual judgments in different places; for example, he says that every state that ignores freedom of conscience is an incomplete state, and he sees that it is the duty of the modern state, which represents morality, to overcome passions and inclinations by force. But he also affirms that every state that does not recognize individual inclinations is incomplete, as it still remains at the stage of the undifferentiated unified substance, that is, the stage of ancient history. Al-'Arwi affirms that Hegel acknowledges the existence of a temporary contradiction between the state and the individual, but denies that this contradiction is permanent. The state represents morality and the community, while the individual continues to seek personal freedom. But Hegel indicates that this contradiction is not final; true freedom is realized only when the interest of the individual unites with the interest of the state.

The state in itself is not built upon the interest of the individual, nor is its goal to defend civil society, yet it does not oppose that interest; it embraces organizations charged with safeguarding it. What is the relation of the first to the second? Hegel answers: "The state represents, with regard to the family and civil society, an external necessity and a higher power to which their laws and interests are adapted to its nature; but at the same time, it represents the end of both together, and its strength lies in the unity of the end with private interests. The symbol of this unity is that the family and society bear duties toward the state in proportion to the rights they enjoy. If the sphere of private interests separates from the general end, the existing state collapses because it no longer corresponds to its concept." From here we reach the true concept of freedom. Hegel says: "The principle of political science is that freedom is attainable only where the people enjoy legal unity within a state."

Herbert Marcuse sees that civil society must ultimately generate a system based on authority, a change that arises from the economic foundations of society itself, and that is used to preserve its framework. It is assumed that the change in form should save the content threatened with danger. Let us recall here that Hegel had defined the features of a system based on authority when he spoke of a government of strict order, and this form of government did not mean a new system, but was limited to imposing a method on the prevailing individual system. Likewise,

when Hegel makes the state here—the society—proceed according to the same method, he gives the state a higher status because he realizes the inevitable effects of contradictions within modern society, since competing individual interests are incapable of generating a system that guarantees the continuation of the whole. Hence, it was necessary for an unquestionable authority to be imposed upon them. He removes the relation between government and the people from the sphere of contract and makes it an original substantial unity. The individual is primarily bound to the state by a relation of duty, and his right is subject to this relation. The sovereign state is defined as a state of strict order; thus, the people must become a material part of the power of the state. In sum, Hegel does not see strict government as a new system, but merely as a means to impose order on individuals. The state represents a higher power than civil society, and the individual must remain subject to the authority of the state. Thus, the role of the state is not limited to protecting the rights of individuals; it must ensure the unity of private interests with public interests. It represents the embodiment of morality and true freedom, but this freedom is realized only through the complete integration of individual interests within the framework of the state.

The aim of the state for Hegel is the absolute realization of spirit in the world, and beyond this realization nothing higher can be conceived. In this sense, one can speak of the aim of the state by saying that the state is in itself an end. From this angle, the aim of the state can be described as an end in itself, because it represents the realization of freedom and spirit in the objective and real world.

### **Conclusion:**

In Hegel's philosophy, civil society and the state are considered essential concepts that contribute to explaining the relationship between the individual and society, and they are regarded as two vital stages in the development of human freedom. These concepts are not understood separately from one another; rather, they are interconnected and intertwined within Hegel's philosophical system, which aims to achieve unity between individuals and society within a comprehensive rational and ethical framework.

In this philosophy, civil society is viewed as a stage in the development of the individual and society, through which individuals realize their personal interests and achieve their relative independence in relation to other social institutions. It is the sphere in which individuals exercise individual freedom at the level of economic and social life. However, civil society faces contradictions and conflicts resulting from class disparities, economic differences, and the increasing egoism among individuals. These contradictions make civil society incapable of providing true justice or collective freedom.

As for the state in Hegel's philosophy, it is the supreme entity that realizes the true freedom of individuals. It is not merely a political or administrative structure, but the embodiment of the objective spirit that unites reason and morality within an integrated institutional framework. In the state, the concept of freedom is translated from individual freedom, which is governed by private interests in civil society, into public freedom, which aims to achieve justice and equality for all individuals through the legal order that reflects the general will of society. The state, in this sense, is the instrument that ensures that individual interests do not conflict with the public interest, but are integrated so that social justice is achieved.

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