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## REASON AND STATE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF WILHELM FRIEDRICH HEGEL

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**Abstract:** With this article we intend to demonstrate the relationship between the State and Reason in the view of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. To do this, we will address the Hegelian conception of the State and the interaction of this institution with the individual and civil society. Added to this, we will try to observe how the State, interpreted by Hegel, adjusts to the particular aspects of each nation and, especially, to the rationality that it incorporates. We will deal with Hegel's conception of the individual and his existence within a rational State and how individual freedoms are recognized and manifested (that is, the role of the individual in this institution, including the rights and duties of the citizen). This study is essentially bibliographic and, for this, we focus on his relevant Hegelian works *Philosophy of History* (1999) and *Hegel's Principles of the Philosophy of Law* (1997).

**Keywords:** Hegelian Thought; Rational State; Individual Freedoms; Philosophy of History; Objective Morality.

## INTRODUCTION

The PWe intend to show the relationship between the State and Reason from the perspective of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. We will highlight (i) the Hegelian proposition of the State, (ii) its prerogatives (rights) and duties, (iii) its relationship with the individual and civil society, (iv) the way it adapts in relation to the particular aspects of each people (culture, customs, traditions, etc.) and, mainly, (v) the rationality present in them. Furthermore, we will deal with (i) how Hegel conceives the individual and his existence within a rational State, (ii) how individual freedoms are identified/found and (iii) his role within this institution (the rights and duties of the citizen).

To achieve this objective, one must ask: how, in Hegel, is Reason present in both the State and the individual? Why are people

without a State considered people without history? How do the horrors produced by the French Revolution and the implications this has on the idea of a rational State (orderer of social life) present themselves in Hegelian thought?

And yet, what makes some aspects of religion an effective problem in the State's actions and in the realization of Reason? We know that these questions are fragile points, but asking them is necessary and, here, we will seek to at least problematize them.

Our study uses an essentially bibliographical methodology and, in terms of references, it has some weaknesses. It was necessary to resort to multiple sources to, at certain moments, grasp terminologies or expressions used by Hegel that were too new to us (for example, the notion of "in and for itself" presented by the philosopher and widely used by him in his texts). Therefore, we turned to Michael Inwood's *Hegel Dictionary* (1997), from the "Philosophers' Dictionaries" collection. To better understand the notion of Reason and State, we turn to the *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences in Epitome Volume III* (1969), by Felix Meiner Verlag. To analyze the notion of spirit, people without history and universal history, we turn to the work *Philosophy of History* (1999) by Hegel himself. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the work most used to carry out this article was Hegel's *Principles of the Philosophy of Right* (1997) where, in its third part called "Objective Morality", in the third section entitled "The State", the thinker will discuss issues too closely aligned with the scope of our investigations.

## REASON AND STATUS

The State is constituted, in Hegel, as an entity that rationally organizes society; in this direction, he must act by establishing a harmony between the particular and the universal: “Considered abstractly, the rationality [of the State] essentially consists in the intimate unity of the universal and the individual” (HEGEL, p. 217, 1997). Thus, guided by some principles, he will act to encompass the whole, however, without harming what is particular, the individual. The State’s mode of rational action is given by an intimate relationship with the citizen type, conceived by Hegel, immersed in civil society. For Hegel, the individual and the State are rational, both are aware of their rights and duties and this is fundamental, after all, it contributes to what is collective, or universal:

Hence it follows that neither the universal has value and is carried out without particular interest, conscience and will, nor do individuals live as private people solely guided by their interest and without relationship with the universal will; of this end they are conscious in their individual activity (HEGEL, p. 225, 1997).

But why are the State and the individual rational, possessing Reason? This question must be answered promptly, after all, in every text and in the Hegelian bibliography consulted, the rationality perspective of both categories will be present. So that this is not exposed as something given, we will try to explain how Hegel works with this issue, without losing the perspective of the discussion proposed here, Reason and the State for Hegel.

1. To better understand the spirit and its universal dimension in history: “Initially, we have to observe that our objective, universal history, is located in the spiritual field”, later, “the spirit and the path of its development are the substantial. Here we do not have to consider nature as it is in itself, a system of Reason, realized in a special and singular element, but only in relation to the spirit. It is, however, in the theater of universal history that the spirit reaches its most concrete reality” (HEGEL, p. 23, 1999).
2. “Truth in itself for itself, which constitutes Reason, is the simple identity of the subjectivity of the concept and its objectivity and universality. The universality of Reason therefore has the meaning of the object only given in consciousness as such, but which is now also universal and encompasses and embraces the self; and that of the pure self, of the pure form that surpasses the object and encompasses it in itself, has equality” (VERLAG, p. 60, 1969) (Emphasis added).

Historical progress is evidenced by the spirit and this permeates this entire process<sup>1</sup>, and with the help of Reason<sup>2</sup> increasingly developed, is that history advances, being understood more and more and imbued with rationality:

Do not think, however, that universal history is the simple judgment of force, that is, of the abstract and irrational necessity of a blind destiny; rather, being in itself and for itself Reason, and as its being for itself is in the spirit a knowledge, history is, according to the concept of its freedom, the necessary development of the moments of Reason, of the self-consciousness of freedom of the spirit, the interpretation and realization of the universal (HEGEL, p. 307, 1997).

Reason is too important for the freedom of the spirit; it is the understanding and concretization of historical reality. It is present in the universal, it comprises the whole, it permeates the existence of individuals, the State, Universal History.

[...] it is infinite content, the entire essence and truth [...] [it] feeds on itself, it is its own presupposition, and its objective is the absolute final objective. Thus, it itself fulfills its purpose and makes it pass from the inside to the outside, not only in the natural universe, but also in the spiritual universe – in universal history (HEGEL, p. 17, 1999).

Dialectically, Reason permeates the universal, unfolding towards the individual and the State becomes a constituent part of this process.

The rational individual is aware of belonging to the State; This is fundamental because the awareness of participation must carry highly ethical and moral values; These

values and this awareness of participation will only be found if the individual is in effective contact with the State: “If the State is the objective spirit, then only as a member does the individual have objectivity, truth and morality” (HEGEL, p. 217, 1997). This way, the participation of each citizen must aim at a collective contribution, especially because individuals do not live solely guided by their particular objectives and interests, these are in constant relationship with the will of the whole, the universal. The contribution of the particular to the universal is given by the association of the civil citizen with the State:

Association as such is the true content and the true end, and the destiny of individuals is to participate in a collective life; any other satisfactions, activities or types of behavior have their starting point and their result in this substantial and universal act. (HEGEL, p. 217, 1997)

In the same way, the State does not exist only for itself, it must protect the autonomy of the individual:

In the face of private law and private interest, of the family and civil society, the State is, on the one hand, an external necessity and the highest power; the laws and interests of those domains are subordinate to it but, on the other hand, it is a universal aim for them and the individual's particular interests; this unity is expressed in those domains having duties towards the State to the extent that they also have rights (HEGEL, p. 226, 1997).

There is thus, in this relationship, a two-way street: the State ensures the rights of individuals; acts to this end – and individuals carry out their duties with the aim of facilitating or ensuring the actions and rights of the State. For Hegel, the existence of the rational State that regulates social life is not distant from the idea of individual freedom. It seems difficult

3. From Edmund Burke's perspective, we have an exemplification of what the French Revolution represented which, certainly, is in line with Hegel's fears: “The most surprising results occurred and, in more than one case, they were produced by the most ridiculous and absurd means, in the most ridiculous, and, apparently, by the vilest instruments. Everything seems out of the ordinary in this strange chaos of levity and ferocity, where every crime appears alongside every madness. Faced with the

to think of freedom as subject to a certain type of structure superior to the individual, however, for the philosopher, it is in the civic man's performance as a participant in the State and in his ability to make decisions that his freedom is assured: “the individual, obtains its substantial freedom by connecting to the State as its essence, as the end and product of its activity” (HEGEL, p. 216, 1997). But it is with another quote that we best highlight the Hegelian ideas of the citizen's political stance, their participation, their freedom, their power of rationality and understanding; that is, a civic-individual attitude that not only targets the particular, but also universal determinations. Speaking about patriotism, Hegel states:

This feeling is above all one of trust (which may turn out to be a more or less cultivated understanding) and the certainty that my particular interest and substantial interest are preserved and persist within the interest and purposes of another (in this case, the State) and, therefore, within its relationship with me as an individual. This is precisely why the State is not something alien to me and that, in this State of consciousness, I am free (HEGEL, p. 230, 1997).

This interconnection, imbued with Reason, between the State and the individual is fundamental; it guarantees the order of social life. This thought constructed by Hegel is coherent if we see him as holding crucial elements to build a society that is orderly and organized, that is, stabilized. Thus, ideally, the philosopher wants a politically balanced society, organized to the point of not opening up any type of imbalance or conflict: with this, the philosopher wants peace. In other words, unlike what happened in the French Revolution and what it represents<sup>3</sup>.

Hegel develops a conception of the State that aims at order and peace in a nation/society, thus avoiding what for him would be the convulsions and problems of a revolution. For example, the escape from what the French Revolution was towards the horrors it produced, as Edmund Burke states<sup>4</sup>. An individual who is aware of his freedom and who participates in the State; a State that meets the needs of its citizens; an individual and a State that are aware of their rights and duties in the midst of the realization of Reason are, for Hegel, fundamental aspects for understanding how a nation can be ordered and well organized (pacified).

“Reason governs the world”, and this will only carry out this task through the State which, in turn, is considered as the means capable of conveying and achieving Reason. For Hegel, the State organizes civil society according to determinations already well founded in certain societies (customs, traditions and the specific culture of each social grouping).

For example, the constitution of the State must consider principles that represent the fundamental aspects of a given people, that is, it tries to develop actions/policies and rules of social order that best express the signs of its citizens, something that represents a given collectivity:

As the spirit is only real in what it is aware of being; as the State, as the spirit of a people, is a law that penetrates the entire life of that people, the customs and conscience of individuals, the Constitution of each people depends on the nature and culture of the conscience of that people. It is in these people that the subjective freedom of the

State resides and, therefore, the reality of the Constitution (HEGEL, p. 251, 1997).

If the State does not take into consideration, fundamental aspects of a society when drafting laws for a given people – such as their culture – an irrational nature of their existence is noted. The Constitution/Magna Carta of a society, if it is not suitable for the people it will represent, becomes flawed and exogenous, as Hegel states:

They want to give an a priori people and a priori constitution, even when it is more or less rational in content, is a fantasy that does not take into consideration, the element that makes it more than a being of Reason. Each people therefore have the constitution that suits them and suits them (HEGEL, p. 251, 1997).

In Legislative Systems, the elaboration of laws, according to Hegel, must seek universality. Ideally, the elaboration of a legal construct must not be carried out randomly or considering particular interests/perspectives; it must consider the culture, history, traditions, customs and needs of a people. Thus, customs and the various groupings of a society must be organized by ideas (Reason):

It is the absolute right of the Idea to emerge from the legal provisions and objective institutions that come from marriage and agriculture, whether the form of such appearance is that of legislation, a gift from God or violence outside the law. This is the right of heroes who found States (HEGEL, p. 311, 1997).

In this process of organizing society, the established rules or laws will consider or be influenced by already existing customs and

spectacle of this monstrous tragicomedy, the most opposite feelings occur in us and, sometimes, they are confused. We went from contempt to indignation, from laughter to tears, from arrogance to horror” (BURKE, p. 52, 1982).

4. Here we must make a caveat. We know that Edmund Burke, unlike Hegel, sees irrationality in the French Revolution; he abhors this event because it represents the rupture of a stable and traditional government (with the English representative monarchy and the old French monarchy as parameters). Hegel already perceives the realization of Reason in the French Revolution. However, in relation to this event, both are aware of the horrors it produced. Our attempt to introduce the English thinker into the exhibition is to highlight the disorder, rupture and harm caused by a revolution; Thus, it can be observed that one of the authors who best criticizes the French Revolution based on the idea of a revolution that disorganizes, disorients and destroys a society and produces great misfortunes is Edmund Burke.



moral values: “A people does not begin by being a State, and the transition to the political State of a horde, a family, a clan or a crowd generally constitutes the formal realization of the idea in this people” (HEGEL, p. 310, 1997). Civil society will organize itself through the establishment of moral orders or rules, aiming, rationally, at an ordering or organization of social life: while the existence of the State is not effective, there is no possibility of carrying out this process. In any other type of institution aimed at social organization other than the State:

[...] the moral substance that it is in itself does not yet have objectivity that consists in having in laws, as thought determinations, an existence for oneself and for others with universal validity. As long as it is not recognized, its independence is only form; it is not sovereignty, as it is not objectively legal and does not have a fixed rational expression (HEGEL, p. 311, 1997).

For Hegel, the State occupies a high degree of relevance with regard to its contribution to universal history, in the “development of the world spirit”. Thus, people who do not have a State correspond to people who do not have a history<sup>5</sup>. Where does the failure appear? Why are people who do not have a State excluded from history by Hegel? Considering broadly ethnocentric/ Eurocentric positions and “worldviews”, the Hegelian answer lies in the fact that people without a State are people excluded from the universal spirit, they are not part of the development – mediated by the advancement of Reason – of a totality, of a “whole”: “the study of universal history has resulted and must result in that everything

5. It is not just the issue of not having a State that makes a certain group a people without history: the lack of writing as well. According to Hegel, a people who do not have writing start to have a mythical narrative regarding their existence. In contrast, writing – when put on paper and thus materialized – concretizes what is said and experienced. However, here, we will focus on the absence of the State in understanding what Hegel determines as peoples without history. We will take a look at the Hegelian proposition of people without history to analyze just one of the aspects that fits the thematic scope of this article.

6. Another proposition by Hegel is that Reason has a strict link with morals; through this, Reason is oriented in favor of the social organization carried out by the State. The consideration of moral values by the State is fundamental in its actions, after all, it would be highly irrational for a State to allow its people to fall ill or starve, or even to go to war without any type of conversation/dialogue with the opponent.

happens rationally in it, that it was the rational and necessary march of the universal spirit; the spirit whose nature is always identical and which explains it in universal existence.”(HEGEL, p. 18, 1999).

The State as a rational institution/measure for organizing social life is the result of the development of rationality – of the commitment of Reason amidst the “march of the universal spirit”. Ideally, this process must be experienced by a society so that it can be considered part of history, so that its existence can be understood by Reason. When the State is not effective in a given group, it makes it a non-belonging to universal history precisely because the mythical dominates its ordering, explanations and existence. This aspect is flawed, after all: “Myths, popular songs and traditions must be excluded from this original history, as they are still obscure modes and, therefore, appropriate to the imagination of people with a confused spirit” (HEGEL, p. 11, 1999).

The task of explaining and ordering a society is an undertaking of Reason; in this sense (of organization of social life), it manifests itself through the State, in a way that contributes to universal history; that is, to leave behind the mythical and confusing, thus contributing to both the development of the universal spirit and the history of the world.

For this and according to Hegel, it is fundamental for a society to seek its space in the historical totality and, here, we can observe a Hegelian imperialist-Eurocentric perspective/position<sup>6</sup>: “The people who receive this principle as their natural principle

have the mission of applying it in the course of progress and in the self-awareness of the universal spirit that develops. Such people are the people who at the corresponding time dominate universal history” (HEGEL, p. 309, 1997).

Rationality is fundamental for individual freedom to be realized; that is, the individual as a participating agent of the State, possessor of rights guaranteed by this institution, thus determining his freedom and his action interested in and aspiring to the universal good:

The State is the reality in the act of concrete freedom. Now, concrete freedom consists in personal individuality, as well as its particular aspects, in such a way that it has its full development and the recognition of its rights for itself (in the systems of the family and civil society) that, in part, are integrated by themselves in the universal interest and, in part, consciously and voluntarily recognize it as their particular substantial spirit and act towards it as their ultimate end (HEGEL, p. 225, 1997).

Inside State, the individual must be aware of both his freedom and the State’s responsibilities. It is important that he understands his particular role as a social and political being. The limits that the individual carries with them must be a constituent part of their being. Thus, an order is guaranteed, which comes both from the rationality and freedom that the State has in regulating society (acting on it), and from the Reason imbued in each being belonging to a given collective and to a given State.

In the process of concluding our discussions, it is still interesting to ask: “Reason governs the world”, so, can it not suffer any type of negative interference intended against its existence and development? When carried out

by the State, Reason is not free from obstacles, thus, religion can be seen as one. Religion, for Hegel, can present different forms<sup>7</sup>, and some of its aspects can lead the individual to conform to an irrational reality. Religion can prove to be the enemy of Reason: “it is necessary to gain strength to fight against it in some of its aspects and to defend the rights of Reason and conscience itself” (HEGEL, p. 233, 1997).

The role of the State would be, in this sense, to rationally order civil society without interference outside its rationality: “From the outset it may seem suspicious that religion is sought and recommended especially in times of public misery, disturbance and oppression, which see in it a consolation for injustice, a hope to compensate for what was lost” (HEGEL, p. 232, 1997). Thus, irrational aspects of life can be camouflaged or justified by religion, which would be an affront to Reason and its realization within the State and its prerogatives for organizing society.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this work we seek to understand in an exploratory way the relationship between the concepts of State and Reason according to Hegelian thought. Given this, (i) we focus on the implications that Reason generates when assimilated by the State; (ii) we show how these two categories were “intimately” interconnected by Hegel in his explanations, thus highlighting certain implications; mainly with regard to the ordering of civil society, in which the State starts to guarantee the freedom of the individual, making him a being aware of his role in political action, that is, within this perspective: conscious, autonomous and free.

Bringing Hegelian interpretations about Reason and the State are extremely interesting

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7. For Hegel: “Just as it is considered derisory to stifle all resentment against tyranny because the oppressed would find solace in religion, so it is necessary not to forget that religion can assume such forms as to lead to the harshest slavery in the chains of superstition and the degradation of man below the animal (which happens among the Egyptians and Hindus who venerate animals as superior beings” (HEGEL, p. 232, 1997).

because it puts us, substantially, in conflict with ideas that are currently quite questionable and/or powerful in our society and in the midst of our contemporary political dilemmas. In questionable terms, Hegel's conceptions – broadly Eurocentric – based on universalizing/universal principles certainly exclude other human/cultural/political processes linked to the construction and development of certain societies and human groups beyond Europe. Along with this, traces of imperialist thinking conveyed by the German philosopher are detectable.

Even in light of this and thinking about the construction of Democratic States and the challenges faced by them, certain Hegelian positions deserve attention, for example: 1)

the intrinsic dangers of the impregnation of religious assumptions within the State; 2) the State is an institution capable of acting in favor of a collective to the detriment of particularities; 3) the correlation between individual freedoms and the State as a fundamental agent in guaranteeing them; 4) the convergence between cultural, traditional and social aspects of a people and the typology of actions and the State itself (one of the central themes of the field called Political Culture). Finally, the text presented here seeks to present a theme intrinsic to Hegel's thought and not its author's defense; an interesting approach that raises questions and observations, such as those mentioned above.

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