



INDIVIDUAL-STATE RELATIONSHIP FROM EAST TO WEST THROUGH COLLECTIVITIES: THE SOCIAL INDIVIDUAL IN CONFUCIAN, HEGELIAN, AND COMMUNITARIAN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHIES

Doğu'dan Batı'ya Kolektiviteler Üzerinden Birey-Devlet İlişkisi: Konfüçyan, Hegelyan ve Komüniteryan Siyaset Felsefelerinde Toplumsal Birey Anlayışı

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the nature of the individual-state relationship from a descriptive approach and a holistic perspective. The importance attributed to the sociality of the individual is embedded in both Eastern and Western political philosophies. The position of the individual vis-à-vis the state and other social structures depends on the philosophical understanding of the period and context. The emphasis on the sociality of the individual, which is put forward in the critique of classical liberalism's perception of the individual is also observed in Confucian ethics and Hegel's philosophical approach and thus implies a linear understanding. Especially since the last quarter of the 20th century, liberal communitarians have revived the debate by criticizing classical liberal conception of the individual. In contrast to classical liberalism's understanding of transcendental individual who is free from social/collective features, liberal communitarians highlight the significance of social ties and structures. Recognizing the importance of the individual's collective ties, this study examines the individual's relationship with collective structures, especially the state, in Confucianism, Hegelian political thought, and communitarianism and argues that the relationship between the two has been a subject of constant debate from past to present.

Keywords: Individual, State, Confucianism, Hegel, Communitarianism

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, birey-devlet ilişkisinin doğasını betimsel bir yöntem ve bütüncül bir bakış açısıyla analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bireyin toplumsallığına atfedilen önem hem Doğu hem de Batı siyaset felsefelerinde yer almaktadır. Bireyin devlet ve diğer toplumsal yapılar karşısındaki konumu içinde bulunulan dönem ve bağlamın hâkim felsefi anlayışlarına paralel bir şekilde gelişim göstermektedir. Klasik liberalizmin birey algısına yönelik eleştirilerde de gözlemlendiği şekliyle bireyin toplumsallığına yapılan vurgu Konfüçyanizm'de ve Hegel'in

felsefi yaklaşımında da bulunmaktadır ve dolayısıyla tarihsel bir temele sahip doğrusal bir anlayışa işaret etmektedir. Özellikle 20. yüzyılın son çeyreğinden itibaren liberal komüniteryanların klasik liberalizmin birey anlayışını eleştirerek tartışmayı yeniden canlandırdıkları gözlemlenmektedir. Klasik liberalizmin toplumsal/kolektif bağlardan uzak, aşkın birey anlayışının aksine liberal komüniteryanlar toplumsal bağ ve yapıların önemine dikkat çekmektedir. Bireyin kolektif bağlarının önemini kabul eden bu çalışma, Konfüçyanizm, Hegelyan siyasi düşünce ve komüniteryanizmde bireyin kolektif yapılarla, özellikle de devletle ilişkisini incelemekte, ikili ilişkinin geçmişten günümüze devamlı eden bir tartışma konusu olduğunu savunmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Birey, Devlet, Konfüçyanizm, Hegel, Komüniteryanizm

INTRODUCTION

The state-individual relationship has been the subject of long-standing debates. A review of the relevant academic studies reveals a continuum that extends from Confucian norms to Hegelian political philosophy and contemporary liberal communitarianism. In this respect, it is observed that the primacy given to the social attachments of the individual is not only a narrative reserved for Eastern societies but also appears in the debates on Western liberalism.

Contrary to classical liberalism's conception of the rootless individual, the individual is not inherently free from social ties. This characteristic of the individual also shapes its relationship with the state. In Confucianism and Hegelian political philosophy, the position given to the individual vis-à-vis the most prominent collective structure "the state" indicates that the individual gains meaning within and through the institutional structure of the state. Although communitarians are liberal in essence, they also emphasize the constitutive functions of social/collective affiliations and structures, as adopted in Confucianism and the Hegelian

philosophy. They state that these affiliations precede the individual. Contrary to classical liberalism, they do not accept the view that freedom emerges when an individual acts rationally. Their conception of the individual is the opposite of the atomistic and isolated conception of the individual. The individual exists through its relations with collective ties as a result of being part of a family, a member of a community or a citizen of a country.

The approach emphasizing the sociality of the individual is not unique to Eastern societies. The importance attributed to the sociality of the individual in all contexts from East to West can also be traced in the discourses of Confucius, Hegel, and the liberal communitarians. As a result, it is widely recognized that the individual is a being with a social nature rather than a rootless self.

CONCEPTS OF INDIVIDUAL AND STATE IN CONFUCIANISM

Confucian ideals, which can form a supportive basis for communitarianism by referring to norms related to the social and political sphere, were predominantly based on the teachings of Confucius in the region corresponding to today's China in the 5th and 6th centuries BC and gradually developed into a comprehensive theoretical framework. It is generally considered that Confucianism is embodied within the texts titled the "Four Books" (sishu) consisting of Analects (Lunyu), Mencius (Mengzi), Great Learning (Daxue) and The Doctrine of the Mean (Zhongyong) and "Five Classics" (wujing) consisting of Classic of Poetry (Shijing), Book of Rites (Liji), Book of Changes (Yijing), Book of Documents (Shujing) and Spring and Autumn Annals (Chunqiu). Of the four books that mainly focus on social and political norms, ideas, and philosophy, Analects and Mencius mainly address the relationship between society and the individual and the position of the individual vis-à-vis collectivities.

Confucius' own lectures and teachings were compiled by his disciples after his death and the relevant writings were maintained by various Confucian authors, notably Mencius. His teachings recorded in Analects were developed by various writers and evolved into a complete political and social philosophy (Bell and Chaibong, 2003). Although different versions of the philosophical approach labelled with names such as Neo-Confucianism have emerged over time, Confucianism's social and political arguments have generally remained unchanged.

In Confucianism, individuals are not defined as autonomous and transcendental beings, but in terms of their social nature and their interaction with society. Confucianism primarily repudiates the autonomy of the individual, has a holistic perspective, emphasizes the groups/collectivities over the individual, authority over freedom, and responsibility over rights. Despite the significance of collectivities over the individual, the concept of individual/self is also at the center of Confucian ethics. The Confucian social and political philosophy begins with the individual/self. An individual cannot have an existence on its own without the relationship and ties with others. Individuals are not autonomous, they become fully human when they interact with others. Society is therefore an important part to which the individual belongs. Confucian ethics does not problematize freedom in a fundamental sense, since people essentially are not free and they have familial responsibilities above all. The individual exists primarily with the family and is not a transcendental subject as in the classical liberal understanding and filial piety stands out as one of the most important norms (Confucius, 1999).

Three central institutional structures stand out in the Confucianism. These are the family, the state, and education as an institutional unit. The family is the basic collective unit, seen as the primary structure in which the individual/self is constructed and family ties take precedence over other social ties. It is through the family that people learn to live virtuously and obediently. Relationships within the family are subject to a set of rules. For instance, young people should

respect and obey their parents (respect for authority). Five basic types of relationships are specified in Confucianism. These are the relationships between father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger, ruler and ruled, and the friendship between friends. The fact that three of these relationships (husband and wife, father and son, and elder and younger) are directly related to the family highlights the priority given to the family in Confucianism (Bell, 1996; Tu, 1996).

In parallel to the rules recognized within the family, Confucianism also points to certain norms and values that shape the relationship between ruler and ruled and accordingly between the individual and the state. Among these norms familism, paternalism, communitarianism, and meritocracy stand out. In addition, concepts such as filial piety, respect for authority, the importance attached to education, and social cohesion also become prominent. These concepts are expressed as being of high importance for the construction of a harmonious society called “datong shehui” in which social order and obedience to the state are essential (Shin, 2012). While the individual and society complement one another, the state functions as the most important institution for building a harmonious society. In essence, a linear process extending from the individual to the family, to the state and ultimately to world peace is pursued (Hu, 2007). The hierarchical relationship between the individual and the family, as between father and son, is adapted to the relationship between the individual and the state. As a result, an unequal relationship between the state and individuals emerges. Tu (1996) asserts that Confucianism constructs a more favorable balance between individual and collectivity than Western liberal thought proposes.

It is claimed that an approach called Eastern communitarianism has emerged in line with the values and norms of Confucianism. It is also stated that Western communitarianism should be construed community communitarianism, while Confucian communitarianism as state

communitarianism (Hu, 2007). Confucian communitarianism prioritizes the social one over individual freedom and rights, is constructed under specific conditions and is associated to the traditional society in East Asia. East Asian societies represent a patriarchal system based on blood ties. The state is considered as an enlarged family within the social system and the political regime is founded on a patriarchal system. The ruler is regarded as the father and the relationship between the ruler and the ruled is understood as that between a father and a son. The ruler should treat the ruled with kindness, and the ruled must treat the ruler with respect and loyalty. Confucian communitarianism emphasizes the common good which is perceived as one of the highest values and the state is a means to the common good. The state is of central importance among communities ranked from the smallest to the largest such as family, kin, state and world.

Compared to Western political and social philosophy, the arguments of Confucianism are equated with Chinese political philosophy. It is generally considered that Chinese culture is group-orientated and anti-individualistic and that Chinese ethics and morality have always been based on subordinating self-interest and favoring the collective one. In traditional Chinese culture, an individual's self-identity is dialogically constituted by its relationships with others and collectivities (Pye, 1991).

It is inferred that Confucian ethics does not grant the individual a transcendental status in relation to collective structures, especially the state. The individual constructs its identity within a collectivity, beginning with the family as the basic unit. The ultimate form of the relationship between father and son or elder and younger within the family shapes the relationship between the ruler and the ruled and thus the position of the individual versus the state as a collective structure.

HEGELIAN INDIVIDUAL'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE STATE

In the Western world, similar to Eastern Confucianism, there are debates about the sociality of the individual. In this context Hegel's arguments are noteworthy. Hegel's emphasis on the ultimate determination of collective structures such as the family, civil society and the state, which he refers to as the institutions of ethical life (Sittlichkeit), on individual reveals the communitarian features in his philosophy (Hegel, 2001).

Hegel conceptualized his ethical theory on the self-realization of the individual (Wood, 1990). He constructs his arguments about the political on how the individual relates to and exists within collective structures. The statements about individuals acquiring meaning in and through collectivities and the construction of individuals embedded in collectivities set Hegel apart from the classical liberal tradition that emphasizes the transcendental individual. His conception of the individual is closely related to the concept of freedom on which he builds his philosophy and as Beiser (2005) points out, there is no more important concept in Hegel's political theory than freedom. Hegel attains freedom through phenomena such as self-consciousness, recognition, dialogical relationship with the other, master-slave dialectic and institutions of ethical life. He takes these concepts to construct the political sphere. It should also be noted that his understanding of the individual and freedom emerged as a result of the historical conditions and context in which he lived. He conceived the individual through the notion of the state constructed by the political and social dynamics of his time (Hegel, 1979).

In *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel (2001) generally focuses on the evolution of the individual's relationship with the collective institutional structures (Sittlichkeit) and assumes the individual and the social one as a monistic entity. He defines the state as an organism and emphasizes that individuals should be perceived as a natural part of society and the state (Taylor, 1979). He

elucidates how the collective structures, institutions of ethical life and the practice of freedom facilitate the self-realization of human beings.

Hegel's political arguments illustrate how freedom is gradually constructed from subjective one to the collective one (ultimately to the state). Only when the individual is reconciled with its social ties and affiliations can one mention freedom in the real sense. The institutional structures of ethical life, of which the state is a part, appear as the foundations of Hegel's understanding of freedom for the individual. According to Hegel, the first condition for the freedom of the individual is to have self-consciousness. Self-consciousness is conceptualized in Hegelian understanding as the ability of the individual to think in a certain way. It emerges in a dialogical process, as a result of interaction with another person. The only way for the self-conscious individual to realize itself as a free and independent actor is to take part in a society in which mutual recognition exists. Only through a dialogical process and confrontation with other selves can the individual/self transcend itself and complete the first stage on the road to pure freedom through dialectics (Hegel, 1979). In this way, the self can also be recognized by others and recognition takes place reciprocally within what he defines as the institutions of ethical life: the family, civil society and the state.

Self-conscious individuals gain their absolute freedom within and through community structures. Here, it is seen that "in and for itself", one of Hegel's political formulations, constitutes the most fundamental action regarding the individual and freedom. Hegel is more concerned with the individual being for itself. He states that individuals can be free if they have the knowledge of their own self-consciousness, however, this freedom is defined within the boundaries of collective/social structures (Hegel, 2001).

In *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1979), while discussing the philosophical foundations of freedom through the master-slave dialectic, he assumes being for someone else as the most

important condition of being for itself. He constructs the phenomenon of freedom on the basis of the slave's making itself known through its labor and actions, achieving the consciousness of freedom and favoring the idea that others can also have freedom. In a similar way, he also addresses Geist, which he sees as the concrete form of the state. The Geist is at first an unfree entity, then it creates an object from itself and realizes its freedom by going beyond itself. He thereby expands and generalizes the conception of freedom with the method of "through and for itself" (Hegel, 2001).

Hegel draws attention to the fact that the freedom of the individual is achieved in collectivities together with the particularity of the individual. In ethical life, the individual realizes its actual existence and freedom within the institutional structure of the state. The freedom of the individual is absolute within society. In Hegelian thought, the state constitutes the highest and the most important normative, collective/social institution in which the freedom is ultimately fulfilled (Hegel, 1975).

Hegel begins the construction of collective institutions leading to the state with the family. The family is the basic institution for the individual to acquire a social character. Once the number of families increases and they are no longer self-sufficient, the need to move to the stage of civil society ensues. The next stage after the family is the civil society, which represents the economic sphere and where conflict will naturally arise as a result of the interests of individuals. The last stage is the state which will put an end to the conflict situation. The differences that cause conflicts in civil society cannot maintain their conflictual character within the state (Keane, 1988). Only when the state of conflict is overcome can one refer to a state structure. The individual through the state and as a member of the state can realize its own existence and become conscious of its individuality (Hegel, 2001). The state as one of the institutions of ethical life constitutes the basic social/collective structure and Hegel attempts to

reach the state by focusing on freedom, not with arguments such as the state of nature or the social contract, which guided the political understanding of his time.

Hegel's concept of the state is constructed in relation to a specific period and context. He formulates his ideas under the influence of Prussian era in which he lived. To him, the modern state which he associated with Prussia, ensures the fulfillment of freedom in accordance with the concept of the will and ensuring the complete freedom of its members is one of the most important characteristics attributed to the modern state (Hegel, 2001). Hegel's construction of his arguments through his own context enabled the state as a collective structure to come to the fore in making individual life meaningful (Hegel, 1975). The fact that the state as a social/collective structure and other collective units have such a central place on the individual in the Hegelian political understanding causes it to be associated with contemporary communitarianism. There are significant similarities between Hegel's views and the criticisms of liberalism and liberal individualism by communitarians in the post-1980 period (Gutmann, 1985). Nevertheless, it should be noted that although they are similar in terms of the value that they place on social ties and relationships, their degree of importance and perspectives differ.

POSITION OF LIBERALISM IN THE COLLECTIVIST APPROACH:

COMMUNITARIANISM

Since the last quarter of the 20th century, debates on the collective identities/ties of the individual and the extent of the relationship with the state which is the most important collective structure have intensified. In this setting which reflects the tension between liberal individualists and communitarians, communitarians oppose liberal individualism under the name of "criticism of liberalism" and underline the importance of community structures for the individual. This opposition emerged especially in 1971 when Rawls published "A Theory of

Justice". In a sense, Rawls' statement that the principles of justice for society can be established by disregarding the particularities and affiliations of individuals sparked the debate.

The communitarian critique of liberalism has not developed uniformly. It has various forms labeled with different names such as conservative, republican, and democratic communitarianism. However, all versions ultimately challenge liberalism's conception of the isolated individual, its rejection of the individual's collective attachments, and its construction of social values such as justice on abstract foundations. Communitarianism is not a new phenomenon and is also associated with socialists and communists who prioritize collectivity and argue that the mere existence of the individual is unimportant. By the end of the 20th century, communitarianism emerged as an understanding that took a stance against liberalism which adopts the rational and atomistic individual highlighted by Enlightenment and modernity (Dagger, 2004).

The political understanding referred to as communitarianism gained momentum in the 1980s with the publication of works by Walzer, MacIntyre, and Taylor. These scholars targeted leading representatives of liberal individualism such as Rawls and Dworkin and challenged the idea of the ahistorical, atomistic, rootless, and isolated self held by classical liberalism. According to communitarians, the conception of the individual/self adopted by classical liberals disregards the actual conditions of the individual's formation. Such a conception constructs the individual as an unencumbered self capable of determining and pursuing its own goals and interests (Sandel, 1998). Conversely, the process of the formation of the individual's identity always refers to community structures. The individual acquires its absolute existence only within the community structures, through a dialogical process and mutual recognition. An individual can only be itself in the social/collective sphere (Taylor, 1989), otherwise the self will live without roots.

In the communitarian understanding, individuals are recognized as embedded in social structures. They directly reject classical liberalism's abstract conception of the individual and the existence of the individual independent of society. Like Aristotle, who defines the individual as a political animal, they conceive of the individual as a being who can realize itself only within society. They argue that no set of abstract principles can be formulated for the social existence (Benhabib, 1992). To them, the liberal individual is pictured as a mythical being who is free from all social ties, who has no responsibility to any social affiliation and who constructs its own life (Walzer, 1990).

Buchanan summarizes the criticisms of liberalism by communitarian thought, which is mostly based on Hegel's views, as follows: Classical liberalism excludes community, ignores and disregards the importance of collective attachments. But collectivities and communities are essential to what is conceived of as the good life for individuals. Liberalism regards the political association of individuals as good only in an instrumental sense, it does not take into account the sociality that differentiates the political life of the individual. It is therefore not concerned with the importance of people's participation in politically collective structures for their own good. Classical liberalism does not reckon with the individual's sense of responsibility towards collectivities such as community, the country of citizenship or the family. The self, presented by liberalism, is not perfect. This is because the concept of self is embedded in social ties and structures. These collectivist attachments exist before the individual and are constitutive for the individual (Buchanan, 1989: 852-853).

MacIntyre (1984), one of the leading names of the communitarians, also disagrees the perception of the abstract individual. He states that society precedes the individual and that the individual participates in society from the moment of birth. The individual inherits the history, traditions and various collective heritages while living as a part of society. Referring to Hegel's

institutions of ethical life, he states that the individual is a part of a family, a member of the social groups, a citizen of the state and cannot be conceived without them. The individual is mostly constituted and moulded in and through certain roles that bind it to the society in which the human good can be actualized (MacIntyre, 2007). The individual finds its actual meaning only within collective structures. The collective one has a constitutive function, defines what the individual is, and is seen as an indispensable part of individual's identity (Sandel, 1998).

There are many common points in the communitarian and Hegelian understanding. It is claimed that today's communitarians are inspired by Hegel. In particular, there are great similarities between Hegel's criticisms of classical liberal ethics and those of communitarians (Gutmann, 1985). Hegel's and communitarians' conceptions of the individual, society, collectivities and freedom; how they position the individual vis-à-vis the state and how the relationship between the individual and the collectivities is shaped are mostly similar. However, one should be cautious in claiming that the views of contemporary communitarians are entirely compatible with those of Hegel, who constructed his political concepts during the constitutional monarchy of Prussia and favored centralized government. In general, it is plausible to argue that Hegel provides a source of the communitarian conception establishing a balance between the political and the ethical one and referring to an understanding of freedom actualized in and through society.

CONCLUSION

Individuals cannot be comprehended apart from their collective ties. In light of the collective roots of the individual, the position of the state in relation to the individual differs. The relationship between the individual and collective structures is mainly problematized within the framework of liberalism. It is observed that there is a constant conflict between the atomistic nature of the individual and its social existence. The debates on the social existence of the

individual extend from the East to the West through various political and philosophical interpretations. From an Eastern perspective, the ideas and teachings that construct Confucianism underline the collective ties of the individual. Moving the perspective slightly to the West, one observes that Hegel also attached great importance to the sociality of the individuals.

The historical foundations of liberal individualism and liberal communitarianism which represent the two opposing stances of liberal conception of the individual have always been based on Kant's and Hegel's conceptions of the individual. Unlike Kant who points out the rational individual, Hegel emphasizes the individual's relationship with social ties and institutions and claims that the individual can only attain freedom within and through collective structures.

It is observed that communitarians who have become prominent in political discourse since the 1980s with their criticism of liberal individualism, have similar arguments to Hegelian ethical-political understanding. A comparison of the Hegelian and communitarian claims reveals that they have many aspects in common. Hegel assumes that the individual attains freedom through a dialogical and dialectical process. He emphasizes the self-consciousness of the individual and focuses on the mutual recognition of the individual with self-consciousness within the community structures. In the subsequent process, the individual can attain its own essence within the family, civil society and the state (institutions of ethical life) and the individual can only be free with all its particularity within and through the state. Thereby, it is pointed out that the individual cannot be characterized as a free being by ignoring collective structures. In this way, the universal reason which Hegel calls Geist also embodies itself in and through the state. These arguments provide evidence for the claims that Hegel has similar points with liberal communitarians. In Hegel's philosophy, the existence of the individual has both

social and individualistic dimensions. He does not ignore essence of the individual but reconciles these two dimensions focusing on how a synthesis of the individual and the social/collective is possible.

Hegelian individual acquires meaning within the framework of the relations with the institutional structures that Hegel characterizes as the institutions of ethical life. Hegel's arguments about the individual and individual's relationship with the state - the highest collective structure - are parallel to the arguments of communitarians. As in Hegel's philosophy, communitarians also emphasize the constitutive nature of social/collective ties and structures that precede the individual. Their conception of the individual exists through relations established with collectivities as a result of being a part of a family, a member of a community or a citizen of a country.

It should also be noted that the state and other institutions of ethical life do not guarantee mutual recognition and freedom for each individual. It is therefore obvious that Hegel's institutions of ethical life can lead to domination over certain groups of people. Women in the family, the poor masses in civil society where each individual pursues its own economic interests and those who have no right to political participation in the state such as non-citizens cannot experience the recognition and freedom in and through the collectivities.

Although there are arguments that Hegel emphasized collective structures in order to legitimize the monarchy in his time, it is also apparent from the contemporary context and the arguments of communitarians that the social individual constructed by Hegel is compatible with the conception of the individual characterized by communitarians. In conclusion, with regard to general arguments, it can be claimed that there is a linear path from Confucianism to contemporary communitarians in terms of the individual-state relationship and the concept of social individual.

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