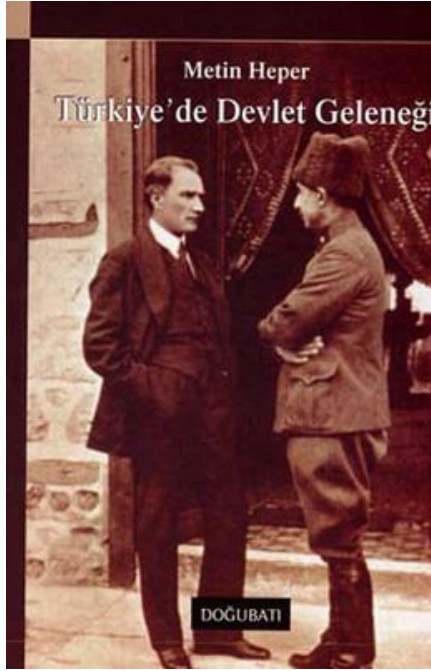


## BOOK REVIEW

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**Book Title:** *Türkiye'de Devlet Geleneği (The State Tradition in Turkey)*

**Author:** Metin Heper

**Year of Publication:** 2006

**City of Publication:** Ankara

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Metin Heper's book, *Türkiye'de Devlet Geleneği* was initially published in English with the title, *The State Tradition in Turkey*, in 1985 by Eothen Press. As Emrah Konuralp (2016) puts it, this book is an effort of finding answers about how the characteristics of the state are affected by and how the state influences political life, how the state was structured by which person and/or institutions in different time intervals in Ottoman-Turkish politics. His book is an example of centre-periphery relations, an approach developed by Şerih Mardin (1973) to analyze Turkish politics. As the name suggests, its primary focus is the state. In other words, there is a state-centred analysis of Turkish politics and state-society relations in Turkey.

Heper's main concern is the formation of an independent civil society depending on economic rationality, which is prevented by the political centre or, in Heper's terms, a strong state/high stateness. The Weberian notion of "stateness" depends upon the extent to which the significant goals for society are designated and safeguarded by those who represent the state, independent of civil society. He underlines the need for taking the state as the object of inquiry and looking at Turkey's state tradition to understand Turkish politics. This is the primary motive of his introduction of the state tradition thesis.

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However, I should note that this work lacks a substantive theory of the state. Therefore, it is vulnerable in terms of theoretical consistency. The only reference in one paragraph to his understanding of state is in the preface to the Turkish edition of the book written in 2006. In the original text written in 1985, there is not such a reference. In his mini explanation, he states that the state phenomenon in the book is not taken into account in a normative or deterministic manner.

Neither Marxist conception of the state as an instrument of dominating classes nor Hegelian emphasis on the state as representing ultimate rationality is determined. Heper argues that the state in his work is regarded as an empiric phenomenon in which, in different places and times, a state phenomenon, i.e. state elites, could emerge. These could take political elites under control in various forms and ratios. Therefore, it is assumed that they could have a great influence on political life.

I find it very important that referring to the contractarian tradition in Western Europe and claiming that the ability to create consensus after multiple confrontations and conflicts determines the extent to which a state is sovereign and autonomous vis-à-vis civil society, Heper states that there emerged variations in the early forms of Western European states. Variations in state formations led to the emergence of different political cultures. In that sense, the phenomenon of the state gives birth to a particular political culture. Concerning the case of Turkey, Heper locates this country in the developed-Western category rather than in the developing world.

He uses some conceptualization, such as transcendentalism and instrumentalism, and their extreme and moderate forms. Transcendentalism means the priority of the community, connoting concepts such as duty, service, leadership. And instrumentalism implies the priority of the individual and connoting concepts such as freedom, diversity and plurality. These are used to define forms of politics. Extreme and moderate forms of these orientations exist in different societies. In moderate transcendentalism, it can be claimed that a consensus is created by the imposition of the state norms on civil society. Whereas a degree of institutionalization is seen in the moderate form of transcendentalism, the personal rule becomes the tenet of extreme transcendentalism. While goals for society were designated by civil society and no sovereign state vis-à-vis civil society is seen in moderate instrumentalism, the extreme form is conceptualized by the efforts to gain the active support of the ruled.

According to Heper, the dominant paradigm in the study of Turkish politics lacks systematic attention to the political structure and culture of the phenomenon of the Turkish state. Thus, some aspects of Turkish politics remain a puzzle for many. However, the “contradictions” that appear in Turkish politics can be fully explained if the state is put into its proper place in the analysis. Only from this vantage point, Heper claims that Ottoman political culture was characterized by a tension derived from the bureaucratic centre’s nervousness toward the periphery and the periphery’s effort to circumvent the centre whenever it could.

It is worth mentioning that he criticizes some theses that are far from catching the main philosophy of “Ataturkism”. For him, the essential motivation of Kemal Atatürk was to form a temporary transcendental state. However, some scholars could not discern his primary strategy from his temporary tactics. In this sense, even Atatürk’s ardent opponents used his tactical statements to prove how “genuine Atatürkists” they were. Heper also criticizes the bureaucracy for not keeping Atatürk’s real path and developing a bureaucratic and authoritarian interpretation of Ataturkism.

Heper emphasizes the lack of control of the centre by peripheral forces in Ottoman society and defines Ottoman rule as patrimonial. The Turkish Republic seems to have inherited a strong state and a weak civil society from the Ottoman Empire. The duality between the strong state and weak civil society lies behind the tribulations of Turkish politics, crises of legitimacy and integration. In other words, the asymmetric relationship between the strong centre and the weak periphery paves the ground for the emergence of a state autonomous vis-à-vis civil society in designating goals for it.

Heper claims that the dichotomy between state and civil society continues to be a fundamental problem about the nature of Turkish politics. The new Turkish state inherited the Ottoman legacy. In his efforts to found a moderately transcendental state, Mustafa Kemal attempted to plant the seeds of liberal democracy in both horizontal and vertical dimensions. The horizontal dimension is related to participation mechanisms, whereas the vertical dimension is related to leadership and responsibility.

The importance of state tradition in the foundation of the Turkish state is that a state-dominant political system was to be established. Since the basic cleavage was the one between a dominant centre and a fragmented periphery, Turkish politics lacked a tradition of multiple confrontations as a way of resolving conflicts. A tradition of “politics” is lacking in that sense, and the political parties in Turkey have been nothing more than a means of elite conflict.

The contrast between state and civil society leads to an approach to politics as an elite confrontation. For him, bureaucratic elites, representing the state tradition against political elites, which emerged with the establishment of multi-party democracy, is the main theme of Turkish political history that merely reflects cultural cleavages because functional cleavages cannot be developed. Also, the group of economic elites, or the bourgeoisie, was not formed independently from the state, nor could it formulate economic policies despite the state. This “high stateness” results in the obstruction of economic rationality and civil society's development.

The post-1973 era up to the early 1980s can be summed up as such: the strong state tradition, having its roots in the absence of moderating structures in the Ottoman Turkish polity, results in an easy-shifting of the political regime between extreme transcendentalism and extreme instrumentalism. The incapacity of the political elites to create a dynamic consensus due to the lack of links within the civil society forced the military to attempt to re-equilibrate democracy. The coup d'état of 1980, in that sense, can be taken as a “transient transcendental state” to reach moderate instrumentalism in which the fertile ground for the enhancement of liberal democracy was created. Interestingly, the developments after the coup presented as “hopeful” signs for institutionalizing moderate instrumentalism in Turkey.

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