

# [Hegel and the problem with identity](https://assignbuster.com/hegel-and-the-problem-with-identity/)

In G. W. F Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind , he discusses humanawareness and how they develop a sense of an exclusive identity. However, healso believes that one’s identity is reliant on others in that they candetermine whether they are an individual. This essay will examine Hegel’sexplanation of the phenomenon where the identities of oneself and othersinteract in regards to rights in the civil society and the state, and arguethat how this could be invalidated in terms of narcissism, and why one is neverreally free in the eyes of other systems.

Hegel starts off by discussing the consciousness and the ego, which is defined as the recognizing of objects and the identity of the mind respectively, meaning that the two tend to interact with each other to make a mind (413-415, 142-145). This is because the conscious mind with an ego provides the person an existence which is implied to be identical with everyone else (Hegel 416-417, 145-146). Hegel argues that the ego provides the human some sort of certainty about their identity, in which it arguably provides them the truth in who they are (413-416, 142-145). This certainty is seen in three forms, one being self-consciousness which is arguably the self-identity of a person who are able to define themselves (Hegel 424, 152-153).

The self-consciousness is formed from the sense-consciousness, which is when a person views something as outside of themselves: this means that an individual can see something, like an apple for example, and say what it is (Hegel 418-424, 147-153). The consciousness then becomes mindful of the thing and experiences it as an external object, allowing it to pass on to the intellect where it gains knowledge of that thing (Hegel 418-424, 147-153). However, according to Hegel, what distinguishes regular consciousness from self-consciousness is when the ego understands itself and recognizes it as an “ I”; in other words, the person gains an identity (423-424, 151-153).  It is able to want things while cancelling out anything external which goes against the identity, which means that the person’s ego develops its own identity that differs from others (Hegel 423-429, 151-157).

Hegel believes that in terms of freedom of the mind, there has to be a universal self-consciousness in which a person is only a self-identifying individual if others see them as one; this means that a person’s awareness is reliant on others (436-437, 162-164). He gives the example of the master and the bondsman where the latter views the former as their focus, in which two self-consciousnesses that oppose each other must battle for dominance so that equality can occur: implying the universal self-consciousness exists in a world where one looks as if it is dominant over the individual one because another person is needed for it to be recognized (Hegel 430-437, 157-164). It is also implied that the master needs the bondsman to recognize him as its ruler for his identity to remain when Hegel states: “ On the one hand, this relationship is a community of need and of care of its satisfaction, since the means of mastery, the bondsman, must likewise be maintained of his life” (434, 160). Therefore, the self-consciousness is universal because it depends on everyone in all sorts of relationships to recognize each other as an individual being (Hegel 423-429, 151-157; 434, 160; 436-437, 162-164). He then argues that reason becomes a part of the mind in that it is able to come up with its own thoughts, but also make decisions that are universal, which possibly means that it considers others (Hegel 436-439, 162-164). Rationality then is considered to be both subjective and objective, in which it makes the person’s mind not only acknowledge themselves, but others as well (Hegel 436-439, 162-164).

Hegel also discusses the free will and the neutral: the free will is defined as something that is individual to the person but conformed to a number of areas such as the State, possibly meaning that the person and their mind is not as free as one would think; and the neutral will is implied to be what the free will is subjected to since it arguably operates with other particular people and their autonomies (484-487, 217-219). He discusses how one’s autonomy is divided into personal needs that make them an individual and the needs of the whole, meaning that the free will is not only conditional to the one person (Hegel 483-487, 217-219). Hegel points out that there are conditions called laws that the will must follow, in that the neutral will and consciousness puts out through a number of institutions such as laws; this shows that the individual has freedom as long as they follow them (483-487, 217-219). For example, when it comes to property the person forces their will onto the object; however, contracts between them and another person enforces the transfer of these properties from one to another, which demonstrates how one can freely obtain and get rid of them as long as they are regulated (Hegel 487-495, 219-221). Rights can be legal in that while they may belong to a person naturally, if they violate another person’s will, then they are viewed as either crimes or fraud (Hegel 496-502, 222-223). This is an example of how the individual will is subject to the neutral will because all people but must respect the rights of others legally or they will be punished (Hegel 483-487, 217-219; 496-502, 222-223).

The common will, according to Hegel, is needed because it essentially regulates all individual wills into behaving in a certain manner; this is because humankind is built on protecting freedom, but things must be restrained in order to do so (483-487, 217-219; 502, 223). So, the person must obey the law of the people, and internalize their subjective will; this passage possibly means that people are free to think what they want whether it is good or bad, however they must act in an objective manner so that they do not potentially cause chaos (Hegel 502-503, 223-224).

This is further explained by Hegelwhen he claims that freedom requires right and is governed by law (529, 232). This is seen with the civilian public, where the individual mind becomesconnected with others (Hegel 523, 230). Hegel claims that laws are universalofficial rights, so that possibly means that everyone has to follow them sincethey are basically legal obligations (496-502, 222-223; 529, 232-233). Laws canbe arguably subjective in the matter that people can freely think whatever theywant about them because they are outside of them and some see them as bad, which demonstrates their identity can develop its own thoughts about the law(Hegel 423-429, 151-157; 529-530, 232-233). However, the person’s autonomy issubject to the laws because it only affects the abstract will, meaning itarguably leaves out things that are objective from the ethical mind: so theselaws are also objective because the individual and their will must obey them(Hegel 423-429, 151-157; 483-487, 217-219; 529-530, 232-233).

Hegel argues that this idea of right creates the principle that laws cannot be broken and must be objective: this is because there needs to be a determination of what is right (530-531, 233-234). This leads to laws being enforced by outer institutions such as the judicial network which protects abstract rights, which arguably means that one is able to choose without infringing on another’s will; meaning abstruse rights only focus on the individual’s freedom (Hegel 423-429, 151-157; 486-487, 218-219; 496-502, 222-223; 529-532, 232-235). The court and jury needs proof in order to convict the criminal because the individual has that right: this demonstrates how the universal recognizes the individual because they arguably decide if the person is free or not through this evidence; this determines if the person is worth to be an individual (Hegel 423-429, 151-157; 529-532, 232-235).

This is the same with the policingand corporate systems which oversees and regulates the citizens and their needsto avoid commotion; this shows that in order to be viewed as an individual, these institutions are needed either to protect their rights or allow them topursue their interests (Hegel 423-429, 151-157; 533-534, 235-236). In regardsto businesses, which are defined as professional organizations; they arerequired for people to be viewed as individuals in a universal context becausewithout them, they are not able to do their own work or interest if there is noorganization that provides it, meaning that others are needed to recognizetheir shared worth (Hegel 423-429, 151-157; 534, 235-236). Therefore, civiliansociety is needed for humans to be seen as individuals because theseinstitutions require the self-conscious person to interact with others and dotheir obligations in order to be free to do what they want; if they do not andviolate the rights of others, it will be taken away from them (Hegel 423-429, 151-157; 483-487, 217-219; 496-503, 222-224; 529-534, 232-236).

Then there is the state, which isuniversally self-conscious in itself because it brings together individuals inorder in a world that everyone must acknowledge each other rationally (Hegel436-439, 162-164; 535-536, 236). It does this partially by providing aconstitution, where the individual and the civilian world combine: this is becauseeveryone is classified as equal through controlled neutral freedoms that makesthem more concerned about how they treat others (Hegel 537-539, 236-239). Interms of equality and being free, Hegel claims that the state takes freedomsthat could detriment other people’s wills and use laws that come from the mindof the people to make sure their freedoms are not infringed upon: not only doesthis show how rights must be regulated, but also demonstrates why people mustbe recognized as individuals by others because it is the people who determinehow one should live (423-429, 151-157; 483-487, 217-219; 496-502, 222-223; 539-540, 237-240). The constitution is separated into different governmentalauthorities such as the executive, and argues there is a monarch who controlsand unifies the state (Hegel 541-542, 240-242). Hegel also argues that nationshave to interact with each other through law, which governs peace between them; this is a prime example of the self-conscious individual and their autonomy, andthe will of everyone: a nation is one living being, but in order to survive, itneeds alliances with other nations (436-437, 162-164; 547, 245-246). Thecivilian world is regulated by the state as the police force and the judiciary, as well as business, are regulated by the government: this demonstrates thatcivilian society needs to be controlled and that people need to be noticed asan individual by the state because if they acted towards their own interests, this would cause freedom to be overridden by unruliness in and possibly bythese institutions which could cause imbalances within and problems with otherstates – everyone must work together in order to be free individuals (Hegel423-429, 151-157; 533-534, 235-236; 543-547, 242-246; 550-552, 249-256).

However, I argue Hegel is somewhatwrong in needing others to recognize one’s autonomy in that people may eitherbe unaffected by the public self-conscious and do not need them, or could losemost of their freedoms because of the state’s limitations on them (423-429, 151-157; 436-437, 162-164; 543-547, 242-246; 550-552, 249-256). While I dothink that institutions and laws are necessary for regulating how one usestheir autonomy, I believe that the state is still capable of ending up likecivil society by creating more inequalities towards its citizens: for example, a narcissistic monarch may not recognize anyone’s freedom but their own, suchas refusing to work with other nations if it does not suit their needs anddisregard the rights of their citizens by using the law and constitution totheir own benefit (Hegel 483-487, 217-219; 496-502, 222-223; 543-547, 242-246; 550-552, 249-256). Narcissism can arguably cause the ego to only view theiridentity and rights, without regard to others: this could cause them to violatelaws because they would feel that they are above them (Hegel 483-487, 217-219; 496-502, 222-223; 543-547, 242-246; 550-552, 249-256). It would go againstHegel’s argument that the state provides equality and freedom because the rulerwould not be concerned about trying to make everyone equal under the law, onlyhow to make it work for themselves (423-429, 151-157; 483-487, 217-219; 496-502, 222-223; 539-540, 237-240). While others may recognize the ruler as solike with the master and the servant, it is not necessarily required if themaster is narcissistic and believes they are the most powerful anyway (Hegel430-437, 157-164).

Furthermore, if the self-consciousperson requires others in order for their identity to be recognized, then theywere arguably never free to begin with (Hegel 423-429, 151-157). If that weretrue, then it would mean the individual would have to conform to the either thecivilian society or the state no matter what, in the fear that their rightswould be taken away if they did not (Hegel 423-429, 151-157; 543-547, 242-246; 550-552, 249-256). For example, state laws can arguably affect the person’sidentity in a detrimental way, such as bans on sexual orientation, which meansthat both the identity and the autonomy of the person is limited to the pointthat they can no longer exercise their freedoms, compromising who they are asan individual while creating injustice in the same state that is trying toprevent it (Hegel 423-429, 151-157; 543-547, 242-246; 550-552, 249-256). Thismeans that the freedom of the people can arguably cause someone to not berecognized as an individual (Hegel 423-429, 151-157; 543-547, 242-246; 550-552, 249-256).

A possible objection is that peoplewho truly believe they are free can be recognized as individuals because Hegelclaims that the state and its laws exist not just to limit individual freedoms, but only to regulate them from overriding other freedoms (423-429, 151-157; 543-547, 242-246; 550-552, 249-256). One example is the police, which arguablyserves to regulate the public from creating complications, demonstrating thatit is not the state that takes away individual freedom, but it is actuallyother people that do so, meaning these institutions are needed for people toexplore their freedoms without having them impeded on (Hegel 483-487, 217-219; 496-502, 222-223; 533-534, 235-236; 543-547, 242-246; 550-552, 249-256). Interms of the identity, one can still be who they are even if the law is againstthem: for example, Hegel could argue that one can still be a homosexual intheir minds as long as they do not practice it in public, so they are sexuallyfree in terms of their identity (423-429, 151-157; 543-547, 242-246; 550-552, 249-256). As for a narcissistic person or monarch, Hegel could argue that itneeds people to recognize their self-obsession: it is similar to the master andslave in that the citizens need to recognize their rules in order to see themas one because the self-obsessed individual needs people to prolong theirsatisfaction (423-429, 151-157; 483-487, 217-219; 496-502, 222-223; 539-540, 237-240).

However, I think that is wrongbecause I believe that freedoms need to be practiced in public in order to beviewed as a self-identifying person – the individual would still be limitedbecause the person would be hiding their will and thoughts in secret, whichwould mean that no one is really recognizing them for who they are (Hegel423-429, 151-157; 483-487, 217-219; 543-547, 242-246; 550-552, 249-256). Itwould be like being an actor: they are playing a part in public but could betotally different in private, so the universal public would only be seeing oneside to them (Hegel 423-429, 151-157; 483-487, 217-219; 543-547, 242-246; 550-552, 249-256). If the state, civil society and their rules cause theindividual to hide their identity, then the other is only recognizing a falsity(Hegel 423-429, 151-157; 483-487, 217-219; 543-547, 242-246; 550-552, 249-256). Furthermore, I do not think that narcissism needs to be acknowledged by othersand their institutions because people who experience it would arguably not carefor it (Hegel 423-429, 151-157; 483-487, 217-219; 543-547, 242-246; 550-552, 249-256). Although I do admit they may need a few select people to reaffirmtheir obsession, I do not think they would really recognize that theinstitutions are supposed to provide freedom for them, they would think thatthey are already free and that they exist to benefit them (Hegel 423-429, 151-157; 483-487, 217-219; 543-547, 242-246; 550-552, 249-256). This would meanthey would think that people do not follow the laws for the universal will, butthat it exists to serve them (Hegel 423-429, 151-157; 483-487, 217-219; 543-547, 242-246; 550-552, 249-256).

Therefore, I think that Hegel’s argument on people needing to be affirmed as individuals by other civilians, as well as the territory, is not fully correct. It fails to see how people can actually become less free because of rules, as well as those who are not necessarily affected by them as well.

### Bibliography

* Hegel, G. W. F. Philosophy of Mind. Translated by W. Wallace and A. V. Miller, Oxford University Press, 2010.