

Hegel and the problem with identity



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In G. W. F Hegel's *Philosophy of Mind*, he discusses human awareness and how they develop a sense of an exclusive identity. However, he also believes that one's identity is reliant on others in that they can determine whether they are an individual. This essay will examine Hegel's explanation of the phenomenon where the identities of oneself and others interact in regards to rights in the civil society and the state, and argue that how this could be invalidated in terms of narcissism, and why one is never really 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 Hegel when he claims that freedom requires right and is governed by law (529, 232). This is seen with the civilian public, where the individual mind becomes connected with others (Hegel 523, 230). Hegel claims that laws are universal official rights, so that possibly means that everyone has to follow them since they are basically legal obligations (496-502, 222-223; 529, 232-233). Laws can be arguably subjective in the matter that people can freely think whatever they want 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 is subject to the laws because it only affects the abstract will, meaning it arguably leaves out things that are objective from the ethical mind: so these laws 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 abstract 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 police and corporate systems which oversees and regulates the citizens and their needs to 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 to pursue their interests (Hegel 423-429, 151-157; 533-534, 235-236). In regards to businesses, which are defined as professional organizations; they are required for people to be viewed as individuals in a universal context because without them, they are not able to do their own work or interest if there is no organization that provides it, meaning that others are needed to recognize their shared worth (Hegel 423-429, 151-157; 534, 235-236). Therefore, civil society is needed for humans to be seen as individuals because these institutions require the self-conscious person to interact with others and do their obligations in order to be free to do what they want; if they do not and violate 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 is universally self-conscious in itself because it brings together individuals in order in a world that everyone must acknowledge each other rationally (Hegel 436-439, 162-164; 535-536, 236). It does this partially by providing a constitution, where the individual and the civilian world combine: this is because everyone is classified as equal through controlled neutral freedoms that make them more concerned about how they treat others (Hegel 537-539, 236-239). In terms of equality and being free, Hegel claims that the state takes freedom that could detriment other people's wills and use laws that come from the mind of the people to make sure their freedoms are not infringed upon: not only does this show how rights must be regulated, but also demonstrates why people must be recognized as individuals by others because it is the people who determine how 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 governmental authorities such as the executive, and argues there is a monarch who controls and unifies the state (Hegel 541-542, 240-242). Hegel also argues that nations have 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, and the will of everyone: a nation is one living being, but in order to survive, it needs alliances with other nations (436-437, 162-164; 547, 245-246). The civilian world is regulated by the state as the police force and the judiciary, as well as business, are regulated by the government: this demonstrates that civilian society needs to be controlled and that people need to be noticed as an individual by the state because if they acted towards their own interests, this would cause freedom to be overridden by unruliness in and possibly by these institutions which could

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cause imbalances within and problems with other states - everyone must work together in order to be free individuals (Hegel 423-429, 151-157; 533-534, 235-236; 543-547, 242-246; 550-552, 249-256).

However, I argue Hegel is somewhat wrong in needing others to recognize one's autonomy in that people may either be unaffected by the public self-conscious and do not need them, or could lose most 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 do think that institutions and laws are necessary for regulating how one uses their autonomy, I believe that the state is still capable of ending up like civil society by creating more inequalities towards its citizens: for example, a narcissistic monarch may not recognize anyone's freedom but their own, such as refusing to work with other nations if it does not suit their needs and disregard the rights of their citizens by using the law and constitution to their 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 their identity and rights, without regard to others: this could cause them to violate laws 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 against Hegel's argument that the state provides equality and freedom because the ruler would not be concerned about trying to make everyone equal under the law, only how 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 so like with the master and the servant, it is not necessarily

required if the master is narcissistic and believes they are the most powerful anyway (Hegel 430-437, 157-164).

Furthermore, if the self-conscious person requires others in order for their identity to be recognized, then they were arguably never free to begin with (Hegel 423-429, 151-157). If that were true, then it would mean the individual would have to conform to either the civilian society or the state no matter what, in the fear that their rights would 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's identity in a detrimental way, such as bans on sexual orientation, which means that both the identity and the autonomy of the person is limited to the point that they can no longer exercise their freedoms, compromising who they are as an individual while creating injustice in the same state that is trying to prevent it (Hegel 423-429, 151-157; 543-547, 242-246; 550-552, 249-256). This means that the freedom of the people can arguably cause someone to not be recognized as an individual (Hegel 423-429, 151-157; 543-547, 242-246; 550-552, 249-256).

A possible objection is that people who truly believe they are free can be recognized as individuals because Hegel claims 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 arguably serves to regulate the public from creating complications, demonstrating that it is not the state that takes away individual freedom, but it is actually other people that do so, meaning these institutions are needed for people to explore 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). In terms of the identity, one can still be who they are even if the law is against them: for example, Hegel could argue that one can still be a homosexual in their minds as long as they do not practice it in public, so they are sexually free 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 it needs people to recognize their self-obsession: it is similar to the master and slave in that the citizens need to recognize their rules in order to see them as one because the self-obsessed individual needs people to prolong their satisfaction (423-429, 151-157; 483-487, 217-219; 496-502, 222-223; 539-540, 237-240).

However, I think that is wrong because I believe that freedoms need to be practiced in public in order to be viewed as a self-identifying person - the individual would still be limited because the person would be hiding their will and thoughts in secret, which would mean that no one is really recognizing them for who they are (Hegel 423-429, 151-157; 483-487, 217-219; 543-547, 242-246; 550-552, 249-256). It would be like being an actor: they are playing a part in public but could be totally different in private, so the universal public would only be seeing one side 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 the individual 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 others and their institutions because people who experience it would arguably not care for 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 reaffirm their obsession, I do not think they would really recognize that the institutions are supposed to provide freedom for them, they would think that they 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 mean they would think that people do not follow the laws for the universal will, but that 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

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