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Social Pathologies as Educational Injustices

Esther Neuhann

University of Hamburg, esther.neuhann@gmail.com

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Introduction¹

Since the 1990s, Axel Honneth has defended the view that not all social wrongs may be grasped as injustices and that an additional diagnostic concept, namely that of social pathology, is necessary for adequate social critique.¹ In the book, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life* (2014 [2011]), he provides his most accurate definition of social pathology as the accumulation of a number of persons' inability to adequately participate in (freedom-enabling) social institutions due to misunderstanding them. This stands in contrast to his understanding of 'injustice' as the unjustified denial of access to (freedom-enabling) social institutions for certain groups. The main aim of *Freedom's Right* (FR) is to reconstruct *all* institutions of liberal-democratic societies that individuals must participate in to fully realize their individual freedom. Like in the historical model of his project, G.W.F. Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1821), educational institutions, in particular schools, are – in my view wrongly – neglected.

The paper connects these two themes regarding Honneth's FR: the supplementation of the vocabulary of injustice with that of social pathology and the neglect of educational institutions. Specifically, I will argue that if educational institutions were added to the picture in FR, the wrong of social pathology could – and ultimately should – be reformulated as an educational injustice. Roughly, the idea is that because social pathologies are rooted in misunderstandings of social institutions and educational institutions may contribute to an adequate understanding of these, social pathologies point to a lack of access to adequate educational institutions, that is to educational injustice.

The first and most obvious contribution of the paper is to put forward a critique of Honneth's book FR: The reason he needs the additional diagnostic concept of social pathology turns out to rest on his own mistake of wrongly neglecting educational institutions. Whereas the value of such a critique may be apparent for all those interested in Honneth's social philosophy, the paper additionally provides insights for

¹ Besides Honneth, in particular Frederick Neuhauser (2016, 2022) has been engaged in reconstructing the philosophical concept of social pathology. Concerning the distinctive role of the concept of social pathology for the tradition of Critical Theory in general, see Freyenhagen 2019. Also see Piroddi 2021 (esp. pp. 69–77) for a summary of the reception of Honneth's work on social pathologies by several Finnish scholars (Onni Hirvonen, Heikki Ikäheimo, Arto Laitinen and Arvi Särkelä).

two independent debates: the debate on the limits of the concept of justice and the one concerning the importance of the philosophy of education for theories of justice.

As to the former, one may distinguish between a Hegelian and a Marxist skepticism towards the concept of justice. The Hegelian one, which communitarian critics of liberalism built on in the 1980s, doubts that justice is, on the one hand, a sufficiently *comprehensive*, and, on the other, a sufficiently *contextual*, normative concept for evaluating societies.² The weak version of the Marxian criticism expresses the worry that the diagnostic concept of injustice is unable to grasp what is really going wrong in a society. The stronger version claims that undesirable social circumstances, namely capitalist ones, are in fact ‘just’ according to a bourgeois notion of justice. Accordingly, the vocabulary of justice would stabilize capitalism by providing a normative justification for it: If the capitalist and the worker are treated as equals in the labor contract, then this contract must be just.³

I think that there is something right about these worries regarding the concept of justice (see Neuhann 2020). However, I also observe that in the context of contemporary debates in which this skepticism towards ‘justice’ is prevalent, the concept of justice is often prematurely dismissed (see for example Loick 2017: 15). This is both unfair to liberal theories of justice and detrimental to an appropriate understanding of the *real* limits of the concept of justice. Honneth’s supplementation of the diagnostic concept of injustice with that of social pathology in FR is a case in point: The wrong of social pathology can in fact be grasped by the concept of injustice if the importance of education for justice is adequately considered. This brings me to the second debate concerning the question if liberal theories of justice fail to respect their own commitment to state neutrality when including detailed reflection on educational institutions.

This worry is fueled by two slightly distinct considerations: First, liberalism is often regarded as – and criticized for – taking ‘ready-made’ subjects with fixed preferences as the basic unit of theorizing. This is related to the so-called “Böckenförde-thesis” (Honneth 2020 [2012]: 193, my translation) which emphasizes that liberal-democratic societies do not have the ability to secure the moral and cultural

² This line of skepticism corresponds to Honneth’s own perspective, in particular see Honneth 2012.

³ For a reconstruction of this Marxian line of criticism, see Neuhann 2020, ch. 3.1.

qualities necessary for their survival and thriving without relying on other sources (like tradition, religion etc.). More concretely, liberal societies are dependent on individuals who have the ability to use their freedom reasonably and to defend their liberal states; the resources that are necessary for attaining the relevant abilities and attitudes (like hope or confidence) can, however, not be provided by liberal values themselves. If schools aimed at conveying these additional abilities and attitudes – which seems reasonable if citizens with these are needed –, they would impart other than liberal values. Second and relatedly, liberal theories of justice are based on the idea that the state should be neutral towards different conceptions of the good life (see *ibid.* 194). In conjunction with the assumption that schools unavoidably favor a particular conception of the good life, liberals have been fairly reluctant to say much about the adequate content of school curricula.⁴ Later on (section 5), I will demonstrate that a lot can be said about the adequate content of school curricula without overstepping the liberal commitment to state neutrality. Furthermore, I will argue that liberal theories of justice should in fact be more concerned with education than they have been.⁵

I proceed in five steps: First, I summarize Honneth's project of developing what I call an 'extended', in contrast to an orthodox liberal, theory of justice in FR. Second, I reconstruct Honneth's understanding of social pathology in FR and three other texts. Third, I expand on the neglect of educational institutions in FR and how my framing of this problem differs from Dum and Guay's (2017). Fourth, I defend the claim that (at least some) social pathologies may be reframed as educational injustices and distinguish between two versions of it. In the fifth section, I examine a case of educational injustice that goes beyond Honneth's examples of social pathologies. The case is the exclusion of critical race theory from school curricula in certain states in the U.S., like Texas. This exclusion may lead to the inadequate – if you will, pathological – attitude of individuals to *just* diversity policies. Discussing this case will show that there is something right about Honneth's insistence that even if an institution is just, a social problem still exists if the relevant individuals don't understand it properly. However, in contrast to Honneth, I think this point is better accounted for by

⁴ For an overview of positions on education from justice-centered political philosophies, see Culp 2020.

⁵ Note that these remarks about why liberal theories of justice might have failed to put sufficient focus on education are based on an article by Honneth. Therefore, it is particularly remarkable that he himself neglected education in his own 'Hegelian' or 'extended' theory of justice.

emphasizing the importance of education for justice, rather than by supplementing the diagnostic concept of injustice with that of social pathology.

1. Honneth's *Freedom's Right*

In his book *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life* (2014 [2011]), Honneth presents what I call an extended theory of justice. It is extended in the sense that it goes beyond a more orthodox liberal understanding of justice.⁶ I will state what this means concretely later on.

For Honneth, “[t]hat which is ‘just’ is that which protects, fosters or realizes the autonomy of all members of society.” (Honneth 2014 [2011]: 18) Individual autonomy is the key modern value, according to Honneth, and prior to the value of equality, in particular (ibid. 15). For Honneth, there are three more or less adequate ways of spelling out the core value of freedom as individual autonomy: negative, reflexive and social freedom (ibid. Part I). In turn, “the methodological conception of justice” (ibid. 18) depends on the concept of freedom one uses. Now, for Honneth, social freedom is the most adequate interpretation of individual autonomy, whereas negative and reflexive freedom are derivative of social freedom.

So, what does Honneth mean by negative, reflexive and social freedom? Negative freedom is freedom from interference in pursuing one’s ends in a circumscribed sphere. The content of these ends is irrelevant. Reflexive freedom is more demanding and means the freedom to pursue rational or well-reflected ends. With regard to social freedom, Honneth writes:

A subject is only ‘free’ if it encounters another subject, within the framework of institutional practices, to whom it is joined in a relationship of mutual recognition; only then can it regard the aims of the other as the condition for the realization of its own aims. (ibid. 45)

Let me try to give an example for social freedom, in order to make the concept more tangible: friendship. I couldn’t pursue my end of having a friend without another person who wants to be my friend. If we engage in the social practice of friendship together, we recognize each other as the persons who make our ‘free’ aim of having a friend

⁶ Cf. Neuhann 2020: 88–96 for a reconstruction of Honneth’s extended theory of justice and how it differs from an orthodox one.

possible. The other person is therefore a constitutive element of my freedom and does not threaten it. Note that in a real instance of social freedom the description of the context-relative institution of friendship would have to be much thicker.

In the example of friendship, the (derivative) role of reflexive freedom could be to have the freedom to question the quality of our friendship and of negative freedom not to be forced to be friends with a particular person.

Back to the definition of justice: We now can insert ‘social freedom’ into the quote I started with and then it reads: That which is ‘just’ is that which protects, fosters or realizes the *social freedom* of all members of society.

According to this specified understanding of justice, the aim of a theory of justice is then to determine all those social institutions which are necessary elements of realizing relations of mutual recognition (which, in turn, realize individual autonomy understood as social freedom). This is to be done by a “normative reconstruction” (ibid. 7) of actually existing institutions.

Two things need to be noted about these institutions that are to be reconstructed: First, Honneth thinks that they must include a variety of institutions in which individuals are recognized with regard to *multiple and distinct features* of their person. Concretely, with regard to their individual needs and aspirations in personal relationships, like friendships, and, concerning their equal standing in the market as well as their specific qualifications in the workforce.

Honneth doesn’t provide a reason for why which spheres of recognition must necessarily be distinguished in a just society but emphasizes that justice cannot be realized one-dimensionally, say only by the provision of equal rights (cf. for example ibid. vii f.). The social institutions in question are thereby of very different kinds, they may be formal or informal institutions, and they may be part of what is commonly perceived as the public as well as the private sphere. In short, for Honneth, intimate relationships are just as important *for justice* as unemployment benefits (cf. Neuhann 2020: 91). This is one of two reasons why it is warranted to call his theory an ‘extended’ theory of justice.⁷ I will introduce the second reason in the fourth section.

⁷ I am contrasting a liberal with an extended theory of justice here. With regard to the debate in analytical political philosophy about the appropriate *site* of justice, my understanding of a *liberal* theory of justice is therefore rather Rawlsian than in line with G.A. Cohen. Cf. Neuhann 2020: 43f.

Second, for Honneth, not all institutions which realize mutual recognition contribute to the definition of what justice is, but only those that “also constitute the conditions of reproduction of a given society” (Honneth 2014 [2011]: 4). This implies that an institution is not necessary for the realization of justice if another institution in the given society already realizes the same kind of mutual recognition. This is because the just society could reproduce itself without the existence of the former institution (cf. Neuhann 2020: 91f.).

With this rough sketch of the project of an extended theory of justice in mind, we can also see what kinds of criticisms can be made of a particular suggestion of a theory of justice like the one Honneth puts forward in FR. Even if we accept his methodological picture, his theory can still be criticized for forgetting or superfluously including certain institutions within the group of institutions necessary for a just society. One criticism that has been made of FR is that Honneth neglects educational institutions (Dum and Guay 2017, Schieder 2018, Neuhann 2020: 94). In fact, Honneth has acknowledged this as a mistake (Honneth 2018: 315, Honneth 2020: 9) and has written a separate article on the importance of educational institutions for political philosophy (Honneth 2020 [2012]).

Now although Honneth could potentially in a revised edition, say, add educational institutions, I think this neglect is telling with regard to at least one systematic element of FR, namely the supplementation of the vocabulary of injustice with that of social pathology. This is roughly because, for Honneth, injustices occur when individuals are denied *access* to freedom-enabling institutions and social pathologies occur when individuals do not properly *understand* these institutions (cf. Honneth 2014 [2011]: 86). I will come back to this in detail in section 4, but I hope the superficial connection is obvious enough, because educational institutions should contribute to our understanding of things.

2. Social Pathologies

Four of Honneth’s texts are most relevant for understanding what he means by social pathologies in contrast to injustices. The first is an article entitled “*Pathologien des*

Sozialen. Tradition und Aktualität der Sozialphilosophie“ from 1994⁸, the second is “*Eine soziale Pathologie der Vernunft. Zur intellektuellen Erbschaft der Kritischen Theorie*“ (2004), the third certain passages from FR and most recently “*Die Krankheiten der Gesellschaft. Annäherungen an einen nahezu unmöglichen Begriff*“ (2020 [2014])⁹. I will comment on each in turn and chronologically, although my argument will focus on FR. This is important to keep in mind since Honneth has wavered in his understanding of the concept; commentators as well as Honneth himself have recognized this (cf. Freyenhagen 2015, Piroddi 2021, Honneth 2015b: 212f.).

(1) Honneth first introduces the term ‘social pathology’ in the 1994 article. The aim of this paper is to define what kind of inquiry ‘social philosophy’ consists in, which according to Honneth’s narrative begins with Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Honneth claims that in his *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755), Rousseau was not only interested in criticizing inequalities between persons but also in the criticism of “an entire form of life” (Honneth 1994: 14, my translation). In this form of life individuals are alienated from themselves and live for the sake of other’s recognition (cf. *ibid.* 15). According to Honneth, for Rousseau, the critique of this kind of alienation is – despite the *Discours*’ title – more crucial to the so-called Second Discourse than the critique of inequality (cf. *ibid.* 17f.). Honneth’s claim is that social philosophy beginning with Rousseau and in contrast to political and moral philosophy is defined by its interest in social problems that go beyond inequalities and injustices. The umbrella term he uses for these further social problems is precisely “social pathologies [*Pathologien des Sozialen*]” (*ibid.* 10)¹⁰:

What counts as a social grievance is not simply on the level of the violation of principles of justice; rather problems which share certain features with psychic illnesses, namely that they limit and deform life options that count as ‘normal’ or ‘healthy’, are to be criticized. (*ibid.* 52, my translation)

⁸ This has been translated to English in Honneth 2007 [1994].

⁹ This is a revised version of Honneth 2014a/b.

¹⁰ How Honneth sees the relation between alienation and social pathology throughout his different texts is not entirely clear to me. Ultimately, both terms seem to cover approximately the same ground. Cf. Neuhann 2020: 117.

Honneth then spends quite some time discussing how the standard against which social pathologies could be measured is to be determined. Roughly, he states that social pathologies must be seen as compromising the conditions of possibility of an individual's self-realization (cf. *ibid.* 52). A problem he grapples with quite extensively in this text is how social philosophy can make use of a meaningful concept of self-realization, in order to be able to diagnose and criticize social pathologies, without succumbing to too particularistic or paternalistic ideas thereof. In this article, however, he doesn't yet offer a clear definition of what social pathologies consist in exactly. All we know is that they stand in contrast to injustices and somehow get in the way of the conditions of individual self-realization.

(2) In "*Eine soziale Pathologie der Vernunft. Zur intellektuellen Erbschaft der Kritischen Theorie*" (2004) which is somewhat misleadingly translated only to "Critical Theory" (Honneth 2008 [2004]), Honneth's primary aim is to draw out the specificities of the intellectual tradition of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory. He starts out by underlining the "concept of a socially efficacious reason" that this tradition endorses. It expresses the idea that "the historical past has to be understood precisely as a *process of development* [...]" (Honneth 2008 [2004]: 784). Honneth calls a "distortion" (*ibid.*) of this process a "social pathology of reason" (*ibid.*, 785). Note that the addition "of reason" doesn't make this a particular kind of social pathology but all 'social pathologies' are 'social pathologies *of reason*' if society is seen as a (deficient) realization 'of reason'. Referring to his 1994 article, Honneth underlines that social pathologies (of reason) are not "infringements against principles of social justice, but rather [...] violations of the conditions for good or successful living" (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, from the remainder of text, not much more can be learned about the particular nature of the diagnostic concept of social pathology vis-à-vis injustice. Instead, Honneth concentrates on showing that the general idea of distortions of "socially efficacious reason" can be found in the works of central figures of Critical Theory (pp. 787–796). Subsequently, he shows that Critical Theorists have viewed capitalism as the cause of such distortions (pp. 796–803). Furthermore, he argues that, for Critical Theorists, social pathologies (of reason) lead to human suffering and that this suffering is the starting point both for epistemically recognizing as well as the motivation for combatting them (pp. 803–808). In my view, the latter two points (related

to capitalism and suffering) are not necessarily connected to the concept of social pathology but could, in principle, be combined with any diagnostic concept that expresses deficiencies in a society that is seen as the entirety of “socially efficacious reason”. Moreover, note that although Honneth broadly identifies with the tradition of Critical Theory, his aim in this work was not to draw out his own conception of social pathology. As Freyenhagen (2015: 135) underlines and as we will see in the following paragraph, in his later work, Honneth explicitly rejects the two positions of Critical Theorists concerning the relation between social pathologies and capitalism as well as suffering.

(3) The definition of social pathologies in FR is much more precise. To begin with, however, note that with regard to the overall architecture of Honneth’s project in *Freedom’s Right*, namely, to put forward a *comprehensive* or *extended* theory of justice, it is actually surprising that Honneth introduces another type of diagnostic concept next to ‘injustice’ namely ‘social pathology’. This is surprising because the only positive picture we get of a desirable society is that of a *just* society and not say a *healthy* one (cf. Freyenhagen 2015: 140 and Neuhann 2020: 96, fn. 12). Leaving that aside, what does Honneth understand by injustice and by social pathology in FR?

As I mentioned before, for Honneth, injustices are characterized by the lack of access of certain groups to institutions that enable individual freedom understood as social freedom. So, for example, the exclusion of women from the workforce or the exclusion of homosexuals from marriage. This presupposes that working and being a spouse are conducive to individual freedom and this is Honneth’s view. The definition of social pathology needs some more elaboration.

Recall that Honneth distinguishes three interpretations of the modern core value of individual freedom: negative, reflexive and social freedom. Although, for Honneth, social freedom is crucial for justice, he still claims that negative and reflexive freedom must play a certain role in a just society. They are socially realized as legal and moral freedom. In FR, social pathologies come into play as a way of describing the problems of *overemphasizing* legal or moral freedom. The following quote is where Honneth introduces social pathologies at the beginning of the chapter on “4.3 Pathologies of Legal Freedom” (86f.):

In the context of social theory, a ‘social pathology’ indicates any social development that significantly impairs the ability to take part rationally in important forms of social cooperation. Unlike social injustice, which consists in an unnecessary exclusion from or restriction on opportunities to participate in social processes of cooperation, social pathologies are found at a higher stage of social reproduction and impact subjects’ reflexive access to primary systems of actions and norms. Whenever social developments prevent members of society from adequately grasping the significance of these practices and norms, we can speak of ‘social pathologies’ – misdevelopments or disorders that represent, to use a term by Christopher Zurn, ‘second-order disorders’.¹¹ They represent deficits of rationality in which first-order beliefs and practices can no longer be acquired and implemented at a second order; such pathologies certainly cannot be interpreted as a social accumulation of individual pathologies or psychological disorders. Someone who is unable to comprehend the purpose of a certain socially institutionalized practice is not psychologically ill, but has only lost the ability, due to social causes, to practice adequately the normative grammar of an intuitively familiar system of action.

The symptoms typical of such social pathologies thus do not appear in the form of conspicuous individual behaviour or character deformation, but whenever the behaviour of members of certain groups tends toward a certain rigidity [*Verhaltensstarrung*] in their social behaviour and relation- to-self – often expressed by diffuse moods of depression or a loss of orientation. Such moods of ‘reflexive consternation’ [*reflexive Betroffenheit*] are a first indication of a social pathology; however, only rarely can we directly perceive these kinds of symptoms in empirical investigations. The analytical tools used by sociological researchers are generally too blunt to capture such diffuse moods or collective sentiments; therefore, the best approach for diagnosing such pathologies remains, just as in the time of Hegel or young Lukács, the analysis of indirect displays of these symptoms in the aesthetic sphere; novels, films or works of art still the best source of initial insights into contemporary tendencies toward higher-order, reflexive deformations of social behaviour.

¹¹ Honneth is referring to Zurn 2011 here. He also replies to Zurn in the same volume (Honneth 2011). However, note that there is a mistake in the reference given in *Freedom’s Right*. Honneth locates Zurn’s essay in an edited volume on his work entitled *The Critical Theory of Axel Honneth* (ed. by Danielle Petherbridge, 2011), but it is, in fact, to be found in an edited volume called *Axel Honneth: Critical Essays With a Reply by Axel Honneth* (also ed. by Danielle Petherbridge, 2011). For a critical discussion of Zurn, see Freyenhagen 2015: 136ff., Laitinen 2015 and Laitinen and Särkelä 2018 (especially the section “Social pathologies as non-natural but sharing a structure: second-order disorders and more encompassing views”).

I will not comment on all parts of this lengthy quote, but I think we can distill the following definition of a social pathology from it:

*A social pathology is an accumulation of a number of individuals' inadequate participation in certain social practices. These individuals are incapable of adequate participation because they do not correctly understand the social practices in question. Furthermore, this misunderstanding is not due to an individual failure, but socially induced.*¹²

Note three things about this definition.

First, there is no necessary link from inadequate participation in social practices to individual suffering (cf. Honneth 2015b: 216f.) – although, for example, “moods of depression” (see above) may serve as an indicator. This constitutes a break from the way Honneth (2008 [2004]) reconstructs the employment of the notion of social pathology in the tradition of Critical Theory (see above); there suffering played an intrinsic role (cf. Freyenhagen 2015: 135).

Second, note that there is most likely a dynamic of self-perpetuation involved in social pathologies: If a number of individuals fail to adequately participate in a social institution, this will have effects on the functioning of this institution and the understanding of it of further individuals, whose behavior will then also tend to be ‘pathological’.¹³

Third, the definition itself says nothing about the kind of social practices individuals may be incapable of adequately participating in. This might be because Honneth thinks that it is superfluous to indicate this explicitly: He seems to have only one kind of miscomprehension of the point or value of institutions in mind, namely an *overvaluation* of their importance and scope. And this kind of misinterpretation is, according to Honneth, impossible in the realm of social freedom, so social pathologies *can* only occur in social practices of moral or legal freedom. He writes:

The institutional spheres of social freedom are entirely protected from such dangers, for here there can be no chance of one type of freedom gaining independent existence, be-

¹² For a reformulation of the definition of “social pathology” see the beginning of the chapter “5.3 Pathologies of Moral Freedom” (113). Also see Honneth 2015b: 213f.

¹³ On the social effects of individual “cognitive misunderstanding” also see Freyenhagen 2015: 144. On the dynamic character of social pathologies, see Freyenhagen 2019: 411.

cause the entire existence of such spheres depends on subjects mutually completing each other on the basis of shared norms of action, such that they are safe from the danger of a single understanding of freedom becoming passively petrified. (ibid. 66)

Concretely, a pathology of legal freedom is, for example, to take insisting on one's own rights as an adequate form of behavior in any social situation. This, according to Honneth, reveals a misconception – in the sense of an overvaluation – of the function of rights in a social system. I will come back to this pathology of legal freedom in section 4.

Now although, for Honneth, social pathologies are second-order problems because they result from the *misconception* of a social practice – and not the social practice itself –, he also thinks that the social practice must lend itself to be misunderstood:

The pathologies of legal and moral freedom represent social embodiments of misinterpretations for which the rules of action themselves are at least partly responsible; after all, the normative practices in both of these spheres are incomplete on their own and require supplementation by lifeworld relations, without, however, this being made apparent in the performance of these practices. Such pathologies could thus be said to derive from an 'invitation' on the part of the underlying system of action to perceive the mere 'possibility' of freedom as the entire 'reality' of freedom. (ibid.128)

This quote should be comprehensible in itself except for the last sentence. Here, Honneth means that, say, negative freedom might allow you pursue the end of, for example, having a friend, but this mere possibility should not be understood as the totality of freedom – which would include *actually* having friends.

Because Honneth thinks that social pathologies cannot arise in relation to institutions of social freedom, he suggests that social problems in this area should be referred to differently, namely as “misdevelopments” (ibid. 128) or “anomalies” (ibid. 129). In FR, this concept remains underspecified and its relation to both “injustice” and “social pathology” unclear. This has sparked a discussion in the secondary literature that particularly focusses on the question of how reformist Honneth's project in FR is (see Freyenhagen and Schaub 2015 and the reply in Honneth 2015b): Does it still express the anti-capitalist impetus of Critical Theory? I hold the view that the diagnostic concepts of “injustice” and “social pathology” are indeed reformist in that

they criticize either the lack of access to or the lack of adequate understanding of *existing freedom-enabling* institutions. To remedy these wrongs, the institutions themselves do not have to change fundamentally.¹⁴ Since, for Honneth, “moral progress” is the opposite of “anomalies”/“misdevelopments” and moral progress seems to refer to institutional changes (cf. Honneth 2015b: 2016),¹⁵ this diagnostic concept, in contrast, may advocate more radical social changes. If this is true, the further question would arise if the societal stage accomplished by such moral progress would have also surpassed Honneth’s overarching concept of extended justice. A more detailed discussion of this question and the concept of “misdevelopment”/“anomaly” is beyond the scope of this paper. For my further argument here, it is only crucial to keep the definition of social pathology in mind.

(4) In the article “*Krankheiten der Gesellschaft*” (Honneth 2020 [2014]), Honneth explicitly aims to engage with the concept of social pathology independently of FR (cf. Honneth 2020: 8f.). At the beginning of this text, he does briefly refer to his initial treatment of the topic in 1994 (Honneth 2020 [2014]: 165, fn. 2). However, he does not mention his definition of social pathologies from FR, which I find puzzling. It would have been helpful to see how Honneth thinks that his recent remarks connect up to his previous work. The starting point of this text is that the topic of social pathologies has been present in philosophy since Plato, but then (like in Honneth 1994) he emphasizes the tradition of social philosophy beginning from Rousseau (and continuing through to Hegel, Marx and Lukács, in particular). He outlines some major difficulties regarding the concept of social pathology, in particular who or what is accordingly meant to be ill (individuals, the collective, the society as such), before zooming in on the works of the psychoanalysts Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) and Alexander Mitscherlich (1908–1982). Honneth is interested in their perspectives, because they acknowledge that individual mental problems may have social causes, such that the individuals’ psychological status may serve as a helpful indicator for

¹⁴ I take it that a non-fundamental change of an institution may include a modification of its presentation or “performance” (see the quote by Honneth above). With regard to legal institutions, this may, for example, mean providing sufficient and accessible information for divorcees about non-legal ways of conflict mediation.

¹⁵ To avoid misunderstandings, note that Honneth refers to the social changes expressed by “moral progress” as “reform[s]” (Honneth 2015b: 206). Nevertheless, these changes seem deeper than the ones needed to remedy injustices or social pathologies.

social pathologies. For Mitscherlich¹⁶, there are two types of social pathologies, namely that social norms are, either, too rigid to enable persons' free development, or, that they are too flexible and therefore fail to provide orientation (cf. Honneth 2020 [2014]: 178). Note that the social pathology is here located on the level of social norms (their rigidity or flexibility) but that their pathological character is rooted in the fact that both too rigid and too flexible norms make it hard for individuals to integrate well into a society (cf. *ibid.* 179). Honneth's criticism of Mitscherlich is twofold: first, he is skeptical that there can be an ahistorical criterion for social pathologies, in this case a certain degree of stability of norms, that is adequate independent of a societies' particular culture (cf. *ibid.* 180f.). Second, he criticizes that Mitscherlich (and Freud) is too exclusively focused on the connection between the inner nature of humans and the constraints of social cooperation with regard to defining social pathologies.¹⁷ Honneth claims that there are at least two other dimensions in which social pathologies could occur, namely the relation of societies to nature and the quality of intersubjective relations (cf. *ibid.* 182). The connection of this definition of social pathologies to the one in FR which I will focus on in the remainder of the paper is not obvious. However, it seems to me that the emphasis of Mitscherlich (and Freud) on the socialization of an individual into a particular society is closest to the focus of Honneth's previous definition of the concept of social pathologies.

3. A Gap in *Freedom's Right*: The Freedom-Enabling Role of Schools

As I have mentioned, Honneth has been criticized for neglecting educational institutions in his theory of justice as presented in FR. According to what I said about the set-up of his enterprise in the book (section 1), this neglect means that he does not see them as necessary for the reproduction of a just liberal-democratic society. This is rather surprising because, in contrast, as I observed above, for Honneth, all kinds of other institutions, like the informal institutions of intimate relations and

¹⁶ I will leave aside Honneth's reconstruction of Freud here.

¹⁷ Cf. *ibid.* 182: "Nur hier, an dieser Nahtstelle der Gesellschaft, wo es zwischen der inneren Natur des Menschen und den Kooperationszwängen der Gesellschaft einer Vermittlung bedarf, sollen nach ihrer gemeinsamen Überzeugung überhaupt nur Störungen in der sozialen Reproduktion entstehen können."

friendships, or the market,¹⁸ are seen as necessary for justice – necessary in the sense of representing *indispensable* elements of realizing social freedom.

In their critique of Honneth, Dum and Guay (2017) argue that educational institutions should in fact be regarded as distinct and necessary elements of realizing social freedom. The term ‘educational institutions’ obviously refers to a wide range of different institutions. Like Dum and Guay, in the following I will focus on compulsory public schools – or, more precisely, all kinds of schools and schooling (that may include private ones) that are recognized as being able to fulfill the law of “Compulsory School Attendance”. These schools are very specific institutions (cf. Neuhann 2020: 370–373): they are mandatory, and they address persons before fully acquiring all rights and duties of citizens as well as before occupying a particular role in society’s division of labor (or even before being in training for a particular position; they are not specialized educational institutions). Nevertheless, there would of course be much more to say about the relation between liberal democracies and education beyond schools and what role the state should play in its provision and regulation (including interfering in private contexts). In particular, it would be worthwhile to examine other institutions, like sports clubs, universities or adult education centers, and contexts of informal education of children (e.g., in families) as well as adults (e.g., education through media consumption). Note that my argument concerning the reframing of social pathologies as educational injustices is therefore not fully developed in this paper but would have to be completed with regard to education beyond schools.

Dum and Guay begin their argument by stating that in FR, if schools are mentioned at all,¹⁹ they are assigned a “derivative” role (Dum and Guay 2017: 303). This means acknowledging that school education is necessary, in order to participate, for example, in the labor market. However, the *value* of education for individual freedom understood as social freedom then derives from the role one ultimately has in the labor market and not from the educational process itself. Dum and Guay then

¹⁸ Honneth distinguishes between institutions of personal relationships, the market economy and democratic will-formation. The sphere of personal relationships is subdivided into those of friendship, intimate relationships and the family. The market economy is made up of the sphere of consumption and the labor market. And the institutions of democratic will-formation are constituted by the democratic public sphere, the democratic constitutional state and political culture. Cf. the table of contents of FR.

¹⁹ Honneth mentions schools a few times in FR but only in passing (cf. Dum and Guay 2017: 300f.).

argue that this is, in fact, a wrong understanding of existing educational institutions. They write:

Educational institutions do not merely derive norms from other social spheres. They have their own inherent norms and influence individual development in ways that are not mere preparation for participation in the market or the public sphere. (ibid. 295)

Next, Dum and Guay argue that it is also *desirable* that educational institutions play this non-derivative role (see section V of their paper).²⁰

Now, although I agree with Dum and Guay *that* it is a deficit of Honneth to have neglected educational institutions in FR, I propose a different way of framing the problem. In short, my proposal is that in Honneth's framework compulsory public schools should not – at least not primarily – be seen as necessary elements of realizing social freedom, but rather of realizing negative and especially reflexive freedom.

Before I expand on this, I have to say a few words about how Honneth generally understands the institutionalization of negative and reflexive freedom in FR. And there is a tension here. On the one hand, it seems that Honneth thinks of these freedoms as institutionalized in a similarly concrete way as social freedom is. This becomes particularly clear with regard to negative freedom which, for Honneth, is institutionalized in legal rights (cf. Honneth 2014 [2011], ch. 4).²¹ With regard to reflexive freedom, its realization seems 'softer' in the sense that is merely realized culturally as moral freedom (cf. ibid, ch. 5). On the other hand, Honneth continuously emphasizes that these two kinds of freedom are not autonomous, but rather represent ways of realizing the possibility of "retreating from the social lifeworld" (ibid. 66), that is *institutionalized* contexts of social freedom. This seems to suggest that legal and moral freedom are in some sense 'less firmly' institutionalized than social freedom.

²⁰ There is more to be said about the role existing institutions play for Honneth's theory of justice. Remember that he calls the method by which he wants to come up with the group of all those institutions that are necessary for justice "normative reconstruction".

²¹ Regarding the institutionalization of negative freedom as legal freedom in contrast to the institutionalization of social freedom, the question whether reciprocally granting one another subjective rights can be seen as a form of recognition would be interesting to pursue further. Honneth seems to deny this in *Freedom's Right* in response to a criticism by Christoph Menke of the contrary position that Honneth held before (see Honneth 2014 [2011]: 81ff., in particular endnote 28 referring to 347).

Disregarding this point, for Honneth, legal and moral freedom provide different ways of distancing oneself from the social world:

The institution of legal freedom should give individuals the chance, regulated by the rule of law, to suspend ethical decisions for a certain period of time in order to assess what it is they desire; the institution of moral freedom grants them the opportunity to reject certain demands on the basis of justifiable reasons. (ibid. 123)

Therefore, Honneth detects a “dependent and merely potential character of individual freedom embodied in the first two spheres” (ibid. 66).

Now, with regard to educational institutions – here limited to compulsory public schools – I would like to suggest that they do more, or something different, than merely offering ways of retreating from institutionalized spheres of social freedom. Rather, my suggestion is that they should primarily be regarded as a form of *collective reflection on the existing state of a current society*, or should ideally lend themselves to such an interpretation.

In a sense, a society reflects on itself via the institution of schools: What must everyone minimally know and be capable of, in order to be part of this society? Being able to take part in a democratic society also includes learning how to take part in *shaping* this society. Learning to take part in this complex sense then entails, (a), *knowing* about the current state of a society and its relevant institutions and bodies of knowledge and also (b), acquiring certain reflexive skills. Importantly, note that I am using ‘knowledge’ as referred to in (a) in a broad sense. It includes practical *know-how*. With regard to the (mis)*understanding* of social institutions that is part of the definition of social pathology (see section 2), this means that having an adequate ‘understanding’ of a social institution includes the ability to adequately take part in it and not merely a correct cognitive understanding thereof.

According to this proposal, the way in which schools contribute to the realization of freedom is *distinct* from the freedom-enabling functions of other institutions that Honneth describes: schools are realizations of reflexive freedom, but not in the sense of providing a way in which individuals already fully participating in the institutions of social freedom can retreat and question the quality of existing institutions. Rather, they are supposed to make the adequate participation in these institutions possible in the first place. Their ‘reflexive’ character is also collective rather than individual.

A few more words about how schools realize *reflexive* freedom are in order here. Remember that Honneth's initial definition of reflexive freedom was that individuals pursue reasonable ends. Now I am transferring this idea of freedom to the collective level. Amy Gutman's (1999 [1987]) concept of the "conscious social reproduction" (14)²² of democratic societies through formal educational institutions is helpful here. A democratic society is supposed to fulfill the ideal of collective autonomy, i.e., that the citizens themselves take part in shaping the society they live in. A democratic society therefore changes when new persons become full citizens. In the case of children who have grown up in the relevant country, they become full citizens after having gone through the public school-system. If a society as a whole is to be seen as collectively autonomous (or reflexively free), it must include a mechanism by which it is – at least to a certain extent – controlled what future citizens bring to the democratic society. The question I suggested above, to which adequate school curricula should provide an 'answer', was: What must one minimally know and have the abilities to do, in order to adequately participate in this society? This question can now be specified to: What must one minimally know and be capable of doing in the society *we want to be in the future*?²³ It wouldn't make sense to educate future citizens in such a way that they learn to preserve things about a society that the current demos is fighting to abolish. In short, exercising collective autonomy in the sense of consciously shaping a society includes thinking about what should be taught in the schools that many²⁴ future citizens will have gone through before coming full citizens.

This collective reflexive freedom may also contribute to individuals' reflexive freedom: Individuals who have adequately learned about the institutions of the society they live in, will likely be able to participate in them adequately – that is 'use' them such that they can realize their individual freedom in them. To link this back to the original definition of reflexive freedom, they will pursue reasonable ends with regard to social institutions. Individuals then have a correct second-order 'understanding' of

²² It would be worthwhile to compare the concept of "conscious social reproduction" with Honneth's of "moral progress" (see section 2) along the dimensions of how radical the change is they refer to and what role institutions play for the respective processes of transformation.

²³ Cf. Gutman's denial that "educational relativism", the idea that education should transfer context-specific knowledge is conservative in a problematic or straight-forward sense: "Educational relativism is conservative not in the narrow sense of maintaining the status quo, but in the broad sense of supporting existing social ideals." (ibid. 20)

²⁴ The future demos will of course also be made up of persons who migrated to this state later on.

these institutions. This includes both “contextual knowledge” (Gutman 1999 [1987]: xiii) and (partly context-independent) deliberative skills (cf. *ibid.* 46).²⁵ This ‘understanding’ of institutions stands in contrast to the individual pathological attitude towards an institution, an accumulation of which establishes a social pathology (see section 2).

Additionally, schools may also – though less importantly so – be seen as institutionalizations of individual negative freedom: They (should) provide spaces in which opinions and actions can be tested without having implications for one’s overall life choices. To relate this back to the initial definition of negative freedom, the relevant opinions and actions may be unreasonable ones.

A question I will not pursue further here is, whether educational institutions are not – like Dum and Guay argue – at least *also* manifestations of social freedom in the sense that they provide institutional space for the mutual recognition between persons. Recall, that enabling recognition is the defining feature of institutions of social freedom (see section 1). Only note that certain functions Dum and Guay ascribe to schools (as part of realizing social freedom), do not actually seem to be realizations of social but rather of reflexive freedom. For example, they write that “[o]ne central feature of social freedom is that individuals can rationally endorse public norms as their own; basic terms of social co-operation need to be seen as enabling conditions for autonomous action rather than as infringements on private liberty” (Dum and Guay 2017: 310). Attaining an adequate second-order understanding of institutions is, however, rather an individual result of successful collective reflexive freedom (realized through schools).

Independently of the question, whether what educational institutions achieve is best described under the heading of a realization of social, reflexive or negative freedom, substantially what Dum and Guay see as further of their genuine contributions (and in fact partially also Honneth (2020 [2012])), also match what I have called the function of schools as a collective form of reflexivity of a society upon itself. For example, Dum and Guay emphasize that the adequate role of educational institutions is not to prepare individuals for their role in only one institution of social

²⁵ Cf. (a) and (b) on p.17.

freedom, say as participants in the labor market. Rather, they should also serve as a space in which the interplay of these institutions is understood and negotiated²⁶:

Educational institutions [...] perform a function that no other institution is in a position to perform: they reconcile demands from other spheres, incorporating relationships that are competitive, caring and legal. Education, furthermore, promotes attitudes that enable persons individually to negotiate the other spheres. (Dum and Guay 2017: 308)

In Honneth's article about education (2020 [2012]), he is in fact interested in the importance of educational institutions for democracy, rather than for a just society (in his sense) in general. To me, this is surprising since in FR he continuously emphasizes the importance of not reducing justice to legal and political institutions. It seems odd that educational institutions should only contribute to the education of persons as democratic citizens rather than also to their future role as participants in, for example, families and the labor market. Anyway, Honneth emphasizes schools' role in fostering students' abilities for public will-formation, which to me sounds like acquiring skills conducive to individual reflexive freedom:

[...] the way to participating in the formation of the public will is enabled through practicing reflexive modes of action (Honneth 2020 [2012]: 195)²⁷

[...] students would have to be prepared to use new instruments of political will formation [...] (ibid. 206)²⁸

In sum, educational institutions, in particular schools, can primarily be seen as institutionalizations of collective reflexive freedom. Furthermore, they realize individual reflexive freedom which is important for the prevention of social pathologies as well as individual negative freedom. I have left open the question, whether and how they realize social freedom.

Although, in virtue of realizing collective reflexive freedom, they are somewhat 'dependent' reflections of society as a whole, they are not dependent on one sphere

²⁶ Remember that, for Honneth, social pathologies arise when one element of a social order is overemphasized (see section 2).

²⁷ My translation of: "[...] durch Einübung von reflexiven Verhaltensweisen [wird] der Weg zur Teilnahme an der öffentlichen Willensbildung geebnet [...]"

²⁸ My (partial) translation of: "[...] die Schülerinnen und Schüler müssten durch die kooperative Nutzung des Computers, also ganz im Sinne Deweys, darauf vorbereitet werden, sich später einmal mündig der neuen Instrumente der politischen Willensbildung zu bedienen."

of social freedom in particular. This position of educational institutions then differs from both the “self-sustaining” (Honneth 2014 [2011]: 128) character of institutions of social freedom and the dependent character of negative/legal and reflexive/moral freedom in Honneth’s sense (see again *ibid.* 66).²⁹

4. Social Pathologies as Educational Injustices?

In this section, I develop the main claim of the paper that social pathologies can and should be reframed as educational injustices. This involves two steps. First, it needs to be established that a lack of *access* to adequate educational institutions (as institutionalizations of collective reflexive freedom, see section 3) constitutes an *educational injustice*. Second, if we assume that educational institutions are added to the picture in FR, then social pathologies can be reframed as educational injustices. This of course also presupposes the definition of social pathologies from section 2. I will first say a few more words about these two steps abstractly and then make it more concrete by relating a social phenomenon Honneth sees as a social pathology to education.

Regarding the first step, note that I am now presupposing the value of educational institutions for a just society – in the sense (Honneth proposes) that they are necessary elements of enabling freedom (section 3). If this is accepted, then a lack of access to these institutions is an injustice. Regarding the second step, remember that social pathologies are, for Honneth, rooted in the *misunderstanding* of certain institutional practices which leads to inadequate participation in them. If this occurs for a number of individuals *and* is socially induced, we have a social pathology.

Now, the initial link to adequate educational institutions, schools in particular, is that they can contribute to a proper understanding of social institutions and therefore prevent social pathologies. I am aware that at this stage this does not yet sound like social pathologies can be re-described *as* educational injustices, but rather like this: *Some* social pathologies are *caused* by educational injustices. This is the weak version of my claim. I will explain later how the stronger case might be made that *all* social

²⁹ Note that integrating this institutionalization of collective reflexive freedom into FR might also help address the worry that the picture of a just society that Honneth sketches in the book is too rigid and unable to accommodate for emancipatory progress. See Honneth’s own critical remarks on FR in the preface of his book *Die Idee des Sozialismus* (2015a: 12). Cf. Conclusion.

pathologies could and should be reframed as educational injustices. But before that, let me turn to a concrete social pathology Honneth describes.

In this case, individuals act pathological when they act according to the view that their rights are what fully constitutes their individual position in a social relationship.³⁰ They then fail to understand that these rights are only supposed to be a ‘last resort’ if other forms of communication break off, but not the substance of the relationship itself. Honneth illustrates this kind of pathology of legal freedom in reference to the film *Kramer vs. Kramer* (1979). This film tells the story of a divorce. Honneth highlights that at a certain point the husband’s behavior towards his child is not anymore defined by his love and care for him, but by the aim of convincing the judge that he deserves custody (Honneth 2014 [2011]: 90f.). His rights³¹ then don’t serve as a protection of a valuable social setting but become formative of the social setting itself. For Honneth, since there is a means-end confusion going on here (which overemphasizes the legal means) and caring social relations (that are part of social freedom) cannot be formed by rights, this constitutes a social pathology.³²

Why do persons tend to such ‘pathological’ behavior? According to Honneth’s general definition of social pathology, it is because they do not have an adequate understanding of the social function of rights – or more broadly of formal, and in particular legal, rules for social settings. As I have mentioned before, Honneth thinks that certain social institutions actually ‘invite’ individuals to develop such misunderstandings (see section 2). In contrast, I want to suggest that adequate knowledge (in the broad sense including know-how), which can be provided by

³⁰ This is the first of two pathologies of legal freedom that Honneth lays out (cf. Honneth 2014 [2011]: 88f.). The second one is the indecisive character of individuals (who overemphasize negative freedom). For the description of the two pathologies of moral freedom, see *ibid.* 113ff. They are: moralism and terrorism.

³¹ “His rights” can refer to two different meanings here: the husbands’ right to attain custody if acting in a certain way and the rights he would have as a parent if attaining custody.

³² One can think of other similar social pathologies which are not, however, part of an actual legal context. Take, for example, a flat share with a strict timetable organizing who has to carry out which household chores and when. This can be a helpful tool to arrange living together, but it may become ‘pathological’ when it becomes an end itself rather than a means to an end. Say, all of three flat mates were away from the apartment for a week and there is nothing to be cleaned at the end of this week; everything is in perfect order. If the person responsible for cleaning at the end of this week still feels obliged to clean the apartment and would not talk to the others about whether it might make sense to delay their duty for another week, one could call this a pathology. The end of living together in a clean apartment by means of a clear timetable becomes unimportant and following the timetable becomes an end in itself.

educational institutions, might at least help to prevent such misunderstandings and thereby social pathologies.

At first sight, it might seem a bit far-fetched to expect schools to prevent pathologies of legal freedom. But if we take a second look, I think it becomes less odd. As I noted in section 3, in order to adequately participate in social institutions, persons need to have (a) sufficient knowledge in the broad sense (including cognitive knowledge and know-how) of the institutions in place and (b) as democratic citizens attain reflective skills in general and regarding particular institutions.

With regard to knowledge in a narrow, cognitive sense, it is perfectly natural that students ought to learn about the history of, say, the French Revolution (and its critics and exclusions), the philosophy of individual rights and the basics of the legal order they live in.

With regard to know-how and reflective skills, schools may also offer an environment in which a reasonable attitude towards formal rules is practiced. This could, e.g., mean that teachers ought to suspend general rules in situations where there are good reasons for this. Take the rule that classrooms should be aired for 10 minutes every 50 minutes due to the Corona Pandemic. Now, if there is a heavy storm outside and opening the window would actually risk to harm students by objects that are moved by the wind, the teacher would serve as a good example, if she suspends the airing-rule. Furthermore, engagements with works of art dealing with certain social institutions can of course also further individuals' understanding of their function and perils. To use Honneth's examples, discussing Heinrich von Kleists *Michael Kohlhaas* or Philip Roth's *Indignation* might make students sensitive to the risk of pathologies of legal freedom (cf. Honneth 2014 [2012]: 87 and 348, en. 45). However, note that the effect of, say, reading a certain piece of literature should not be overstated if other conditions are not met. For example, take an all-white classroom in the U.S. where students discuss James Baldwin's *If Beale Street Could Talk* (1974). This will not be sufficient for the students to receive an anti-racist education. This would, simply put, also involve training their 'know-how' in relating as equals in multiracial groups.

If you accept my proposal that – although this might initially seem far-fetched – social pathologies, like Honneth's first pathology of legal freedom, might be prevented by adequate education, then it is easy to take the further step of seeing social

pathologies as caused by educational injustices: If someone did not have access to adequate educational institutions, they will be more likely to fail to participate in social institutions adequately and thereby contribute to the existence of social pathologies.

An important question arises at this point: Are *all* social pathologies caused by educational injustices? If we consider Honneth's abstract definition of social pathologies from section 2, then at least all social pathologies involve a lack of education in some broad sense. If someone does not adequately participate in a social institution (that is in principle freedom-enabling), then they lack the right education to do so. They do not have the necessary knowledge to participate adequately. However, there is a difference between a *lack of the right education* and an *educational injustice*. It seems natural to assume that a society should provide for a certain minimum of education for everyone, in order to facilitate adequate participation in all freedom-relevant social institutions. If this minimum is not guaranteed, then an educational injustice is in place. But even a society in which there are no educational injustices at all³³ will – for all kinds of reasons, for example, tragic individual life events – not be able to ensure that all have actually learned to participate adequately. Does this mean that a society in which not everyone adequately participates in the institutions of social freedom *and* no (educational) injustices are in place still exhibits social pathologies?³⁴

From the perspective of a social critic working with an orthodox or liberal concept of justice, this is not the case if we take seriously that 'social pathology' is (at least also³⁵) a normative concept: There is nothing *normatively wrong* with a society in which there are no injustices including educational injustices even if some do not

³³ Remember that I am restricting myself to educational injustice in relation to schools in this paper. A society with full educational justice will – beyond good schools – also display other features, e.g., a mechanism by which the state may interfere in deficient informal education (in families).

³⁴ It is important to note that alleged social pathologies could also point to forms of injustice not related to education. For example, if an individual cannot adequately participate in a social institution due to misunderstanding it because of say a mental illness or an addiction, then this may point to an injustice in the health care system (this person might not have had adequate access to institutions of health care). This consideration is not at the heart of my paper, because in this case the diagnostic vocabulary of 'social pathology' is, as it were, much more off than in the case of a 'social pathology' related to an educational injustice. As I point out in section 5, I do think that from an engagement with Honneth's account of social pathology we can learn that for the designated participants to *understand* a (just) social institution is a crucial part of its 'justness'. The reframing of 'social pathology' as educational injustice is therefore closer to the core of the meaning of 'social pathology' than the observation that an alleged social pathology actually points to an injustice in health care.

³⁵ This raises some interesting questions concerning the nature of the diagnostic concepts of 'social pathology' and 'injustice' regarding their 'thickness', that is whether 'social pathology' is a concept that intrinsically combines a normative and a descriptive element. Cf. Neuhann 2020, ch. 6.4.9.

participate adequately. The remaining failures to participate are rooted in individual short-comings, tragedies, contingencies of any kind that are *normatively irrelevant*. Remember that educational justice only facilitates adequate participation but cannot guarantee it. Furthermore, some instances of inadequate participation (that are, e.g, due to certain kinds of accidents) simply cannot be addressed institutionally, that is society or the state cannot – if ought implies can – have a duty to remedy them; accordingly there is nothing wrong with them. For the social critic considered here then *the wrong of all social pathologies* lies in the fact they were likely caused by educational injustices. Educational injustices might indeed be seen as problematic because they often cause failures to participate adequately, but where something goes wrong in the society in question is not regarding such failures in themselves. In sum, from the perspective of an orthodox concept of justice, the wrong of all social pathologies should be reframed as educational injustice.

Does this strong claim also hold from the perspective of Honneth's extended theory of justice? The following two considerations – which are in some tension with each other – are relevant here:

On the one hand, it seems that this strong claim cannot hold because, for Honneth, a society is only completely 'just' (in the comprehensive sense) or not worthy of critique, if all *have actually achieved individual self-realization* (not only had a fair chance to achieve it). This is the second sense in which Honneth's theory is 'extended' beyond the fact that it includes a whole range of institutions and social contexts as necessary for justice that are often seen as private or irrelevant for justice, like intimate relationships (see section 1). Accordingly, it seems that there is still something wrong in a society in which some persons inadequately participate in social institutions, which are important for their self-realization (their individual realization of social freedom), even if no educational injustices are in place.

On the other hand, however, in Honneth's concept of social pathology, the accumulation of individuals' inadequate participation in social institutions due to misunderstanding them must be "socially induced". So, if not all social pathologies could be reframed as educational injustices, there would have to be other structural or social reasons for the misunderstanding responsible for inadequate participation besides failures in the educational system. What could these be? For Honneth, in the

case of a ‘pathology of legal freedom’, it is the institution of law that (systematically and wrongly so) suggests to individuals that the kind of freedom it realizes (negative freedom) is the entirety of freedom. Now from here, again two considerations are relevant: First, since, for Honneth, law/legal freedom is a necessary part of the realization of freedom (though not sufficient in itself), he is not in favor of fundamental changes of the institution of law. What seems to be relevant instead is the adequate attitude/understanding of individuals vis-à-vis law. This would bring us back to education/educational injustice. Second, one might still argue that fundamental “moral progress” (Honneth 2015b: 206) is possible with regard to the institution of law, or other institutions. In Honneth’s view, however, “moral progress” is the contrary to the diagnostic concept of “misdevelopment”/“anomaly” (cf. *ibid.*) and not “social pathology” (see section 2). So, this consideration is irrelevant and the first brought us back to education. Therefore, it seems that even in Honneth’s framework *all* social pathologies could and should be reframed as educational injustices.

Reframing social pathologies as educational injustices has two advantages for Honneth’s own project. First (see already fn. 29), note that integrating an account of “conscious social reproduction” (Gutmann) into Honneth’s FR might help address a worry he himself expressed with regard to this book, namely that it is too conservative because it only *reconstructs* existing institutions (Honneth 2015a: 12). If what is taught in schools is aligned with what the demos has decided to want to develop into in the future, then considering what to teach in schools might provide the necessary leeway by which a reconstructive account of justice like Honneth’s can integrate more dynamism into its theory.

Second, note that in FR no solution is offered for combatting social pathologies. With regard to injustices in Honneth’s sense, they may be alleviated by granting access to institutions to formerly excluded groups. But what are we to do about social pathologies? It seems that they are somewhat inevitable in Honneth’s framework, because, on the one hand, he sees negative/legal and reflexive/moral freedom as necessary elements of justice and, on the other hand, he thinks that they ‘lend’ themselves to misinterpretations that lead to social pathologies. So, must we simply endure social pathologies? Or is the philosopher or social theorist who understands the proper (circumscribed) role of negative/legal and reflexive/moral freedom in a

privileged position because only they are immune to overvaluing them? Both options are odd positions to hold for a democratic social critic. It seems more constructive and inclusive to trace social pathologies to educational injustices which can be combatted. However, at this point, the question also comes up, how one sees the role of the social critic or philosopher (social or political?) regarding the diagnosis of social wrongs. Must they only diagnose wrongs that are in principle mendable (ought implies can) or may the intellectual simply offer interpretations of the world we live in? With regard to the latter option, this could be an interpretation along the following lines: In modernity, where we value moral and legal freedom, we simply have to live with the fact that they also create certain forms of alienation or pathology. But even then, we might think that this insight alleviates the burden of living with alienation. If this is true, why not share this insight with all those affected in public educational institutions, rather than keeping it to intellectual elites?

5. A Case of Educational Injustice: Excluding Critical Race Theory from Curricula

In this section, I aim to show that we can learn something from Honneth's insistence that the diagnostic vocabulary of injustice should be supplemented by that of social pathology while accepting that the wrong of social pathology should be reframed as educational injustice. What we can learn is that theories of justice in general, and Honneth's in particular, should pay sufficient attention to educational institutions (cf. Neuhann 2020, ch. 12.2.2). Abstractly, this is because there are social situations in which a just institution (freedom-enabling in Honneth's sense) is in place to which access is not unfairly denied but which relevant individuals do not understand properly, thereby failing to adequately relate to it or participate in it. Note that a failure to adequately relate to or participate in an institution, must in Honneth's sense mean that an individual does not realize their freedom in or through it, although this institution allows for this in principle.

To illustrate this point, I look at a partly fictional and partly real case, namely the resentful relation of white men and the guilty feeling of women of color with regard to diversity policies in hiring processes— which I stipulate to be just policies in Honneth's

sense here³⁶ – in conjuncture with the fact that (at least some varieties of) critical race theory, in particular, but also feminist theory are excluded from school curricula in certain states of the U.S..

With regard to the latter aspect of the case, I will limit myself to the so-called “critical race theory’-law” (Lopez 2021) that came into effect December 2, 2021 in Texas.³⁷ This law does not explicitly ban critical race theory from school curricula, but it is widely seen as having been intended to have this effect (cf. Powell 2021). That critical race theory is in fact targeted by the law, is quite obvious with regard to this section of it:

[...] a teacher, administrator, or other employee of a state agency, school district, or open-enrollment charter school may not [...] require or make part of a course inculcation in the concept that: [...] with respect to their relationship to American values, slavery and racism are anything other than deviations from, betrayals of, or failures to live up to the authentic founding principles of the United States, which include liberty and equality [...].³⁸

This stands in contrast to the ambition of critical race theory and critical philosophy of race (which can be seen as a subfield of the former) to at least question the racial neutrality of the values of liberty and equality (at least as they were historically perceived in the U.S. context). Maybe a formal concept of freedom was actually designed to, or at least lends itself to masking racial inequalities and stabilizing white supremacy (cf. Alcoff 2021: 34). Another interesting part of the same section of the law is the one stating that it should not be insinuated by teachers and other persons with authority in the school context that “an individual, by virtue of the individual’s race or sex, bears responsibility, blame, or guilt for actions committed by other members of the same race or sex [...]” (ibid.) Depending on how exactly this is read, it might question the – in my view – very legitimate goal of education to make non-marginalized groups aware of their privilege qua membership, say, in a certain race. For the purposes of my argument here, let us assume that this law leads to students learning

³⁶ This means that they are necessary parts of institutions or companies that constitute a freedom-enabling environment for their employees.

³⁷ The law can be accessed here: <https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/872/billtext/pdf/SB00003F.pdf#navpanes=0> (last access: 5/24/2022).

³⁸ See p. 8 of the legal document to which the link is provided in the last footnote.

a “whitewashed history” of the U.S. (Powell 2021) and underestimating the importance of racism for the structure of U.S. society in history and until today.

If we further assume that certain companies and institutions will have diversity policies that are more accurately informed by the history and presence of U.S.-racism, it seems quite likely that young adults who went through school education in Texas will have a skeptical attitude towards these measures. This skepticism will play out differently depending on which racial (or gender-group) the relevant skeptic is part of. Let us take the skeptical attitude of a young black women: She might be skeptical that her being offered a job (partly due to the company’s ambition to become more diverse) is just and instead fear that this compromises meritocracy³⁹. This might lead her to develop the so-called imposter-syndrome and benefit less from the job she practices. Recall, that, for Honneth, this benefit would have to be spelled out in terms of mutual recognition and the realization of social freedom. The company this woman works at, however, – by stipulation in this case – in itself *does* have the potential to contribute to both; it is the women’s deficient education that leads her to fail to realize the (freedom-enabling) potential of her job. For Honneth, this could be seen as a social pathology and in my terminology, this constitutes an educational injustice: It is unjust that this woman did not have access to adequate school education because this now contributes to her inability to live a fully free life in the society she is part of.

A question arises here about what ‘adequate’ education means and who should have the power to determine its exact meaning (i). Furthermore, note that – at least at first sight – my example goes beyond the contexts in which social pathologies arise for Honneth, namely the overestimation of the importance of legal and respectively moral freedom (ii).

(Ad i) As I suggested in section 3, I understand schools as a mechanism by which a society exercises collective reflexive freedom over time. Schools should therefore teach students the relevant knowledge and abilities for becoming free democratic citizens in this society: This means having the ability to participate in relevant institutions (by, e.g., having a job, like in the case above), and, since we are

³⁹ Note that meritocracy is explicitly mentioned in one bullet point of what should *not* be taught in Texan schools: “meritocracy or traits such as a hard work ethic are racist or sexist or were created by members of a particular race to oppress members of another race” (ibid.).

thinking about a democracy, this ability to participate also includes an ability to co-determine the society of which one is educated to become a full member. As I also mentioned in the third section, the knowledge and abilities to be taught should not be those of the current deficient society but those of the desired future society. It would be strange – to say the least – to teach students that marriage is an institution between cis men and cis women, if in the relevant society a majority just voted in favor of marriage for all, even if this has not become law yet. Also, think again about the example of teaching critical race theory at school: Proponents would argue that teaching critical race theory is valuable because it might help to contribute to a less racist society. In Gutmann’s terminology, ‘consciously reproducing’ a racist society therefore must not mean reproducing a similarly racist society but might, in contrast, mean attempting to internally and consciously transform this society into a less racist one. As is obvious in this case, there will be disputes about the adequate content of school curricula and it is the task of a theory of education for democratic societies to determine how the authority to decide upon curricula should be distributed (see again Gutmann 1999 [1987]). Nevertheless, I think we can – from the armchair, as it were – establish one or more principles that should guide these democratic disputes (cf. *ibid.* 3–6). From what I have sketched in the paper so far, my suggestion for such a principle can be summarized in the following way: Schools should teach future full citizens the knowledge and abilities necessary for adequately participating in the desirable future of the society they live in. Again, adequate participation implies the ability to ‘use’ the freedom-enabling potential of existing institutions for oneself (remember the women of color above) and further to in some sense become a co-shaper of the relevant society. This latter aspect opens up a further question: Could it be that a person was adequately educated but still does not adequately participate in certain social institutions in her future life (not because something else went wrong that is not attributable to an educational injustice, like individual tragedies), but because they *disagree* with the purpose of these institutions?⁴⁰ I do think that such a case is imaginable and even inevitable if future citizens are to be educated to become *co-shapers* – and not simply executors of the goals of the previous generation. Nevertheless, I do not think that this point is detrimental to my general view of how

⁴⁰ Thanks to Rachana Kamtekar for pressing me on this.

adequate educational content should be determined. Ideally, adequate education would contribute to the fact that such a disagreement is real or genuine and not simply due to deficient knowledge of the relevant institution.

The discussion about the adequate content of school curricula also points to a core question of the philosophy of education. Let me briefly situate my view with regard to possible answers to this question, which is: “Should education aim at the transmission of existing knowledge or, rather, at fostering the abilities and dispositions conducive to inquiry and achievement of autonomy?” (Siegel 2009: 5) Differently put, is education more about transferring knowledge or key competences which enable autonomy (cf. Neuhann 2020: 370)? Since I suggested that collective *autonomy* is the ultimate goal of education, my answer to Harvey Siegel’s question is obvious. However, I would like to emphasize that it is a crucial misunderstanding to think that fostering autonomy is in any sense ‘contentless’. Learning to become (or being socialized into becoming) an able and autonomous participant in the variety of social institutions that are (according to Honneth) necessary for achieving individual freedom as social freedom means acquiring a lot of factual knowledge. This knowledge to be attained must be relevant to the society one is part of; it does not constitute an objective stock of knowledge. Although I have used knowledge of the legal sphere (section 4) and the history of racism (in this section) as examples, this does not at all imply that subjects like politics, law⁴¹, social sciences etc. should be seen as more valuable for students than say mathematics or physics. Basic knowledge of the latter is, for example, relevant for understanding (to a certain degree) how industries in one’s society function. The suggestion that any kind of socially relevant knowledge should be part of school curricula, also implies, for example, that IT should play a larger role in school education (cf. Neuhann 2020: 371).

Note that democratic deliberations about the adequate content of school curricula are possible within the normative framework of collective autonomy and do not need to invoke conceptions of the good life: This is because we can only be autonomous persons in particular societies and in order to be able to navigate within

⁴¹ In Germany, legal education is in fact hardly part of school curricula. For an article problematizing this, see: <https://www.ito.de/recht/feuilleton/f/juristische-allgemeinbildung-schueler-schulen-sollte-gefoerdert-werden/> (last access: 5/24/2022).

these, we need particular knowledge and know-how of common practices within these. Therefore, I see no reason why the liberal principle of neutrality should prohibit thinking about the adequate content of school curricula in particular societies.

(Ad ii) When introducing Honneth's notion of social pathologies from FR in section 2, I noted that they are restricted to certain contexts, namely the overemphasis of the importance of moral and legal freedom. The critical race theory-example in this section had the purpose of showing that the need to consider *educational* injustices is brought to light by Honneth's opinion that the diagnostic vocabulary of injustice must be supplemented with that of social pathology – even if ultimately my claim is accepted that the vocabulary of social pathology is normatively empty. The engagement with Honneth helped to show that just institutions (diversity policies) can only fully realize their freedom-enabling potential if the targeted participants have the adequate education (in this case exposure to critical race theory).⁴² In this example, however, it does not fit to say that the women of color who was educated in Texas and therefore feels guilty for getting a job in a company that has strict diversity policies, is an instance in which she overly values negative/legal or reflexive/moral freedom – or at least, whether this description fits, is a question that occurs at this point. On the one hand, this description does not seem to fit, because the problem here does not seem to be that this woman has a particularly strong view about meritocracy which, in turn, could be seen as an expression of negative freedom (although she must endorse some version of it), but that she has a deficient understanding of the history of her country: If she knew more about the importance of racism for the social structure of her home country, she would not have to adjust her view of meritocracy to see that the diversity policies of her employer in fact contribute to a better approximation of meritocracy rather than compromising it. On the other hand, one could argue that taking into account identity categories in hiring processes already is a deviation from a formal or pure principle of meritocracy. In this paper, I will leave open the question if educational injustices can be related to all kinds of institutions or parts thereof or whether they

⁴² Note that I have focused on school education throughout the paper and in this example. In addition, a society that goes through relatively fast and important transformations (like the recognition of structural racism) will also have to provide educational measures or at least opportunities for adults. Simply put, otherwise the emancipatory value of a just policy (here: diversity policies) will only unfold very belatedly (when adequately educated youth has grown up). Thanks to an anonymous referee for expressing this concern.

always relate to some realization of negative/legal or reflexive/moral freedom and thereby a formal rule or principle, like meritocracy in this case. To this end, it might help to think of more cases of what one may call ‘pure educational injustices’, that is instances of social wrongs in which an institution in itself is not problematic but merely the way in which the designated participants were educated.⁴³

Conclusion

I started out by summarizing Honneth’s project in FR (1) and laying out his understanding of ‘social pathology’, focusing on the notion in FR (2). Then I suggested that Honneth failed to consider educational institutions, in particular schools, in FR (3). Taking Honneth’s own framework seriously, this means that he does not think schools are necessary means of realizing individual freedom in a liberal-democratic society. In contrast, I suggested that schools realize freedom in distinct ways: First and primarily what I have called collective reflexive freedom, second individual reflexive freedom, as well as potentially individual negative and social freedom. For the remainder of the paper, I focused on the role of schools as realizing collective reflexive freedom. In section 4, I laid out a weak and a strong version of how social pathologies may be traced back to educational injustices. The first and weaker version was that social pathologies are in many cases caused by educational injustices. The second and stronger claim that I ultimately endorsed was that, in fact, the social critic should only be interested in educational injustices: the wrong of all instances of ‘social pathology’ can and should be reframed as educational injustice. Regarding the general debate on the limits of the concept of justice, this, of course, does not mean that a concept of social pathology can never serve as an important or even necessary supplementary diagnostic concept next to ‘injustice’. This paper only showed that Honneth’s specific proposal in FR did not convince me. In section 5, I looked at a case of something I regard as an educational injustice namely the exclusion of critical race theory from Texan school curricula. I suggested that Honneth’s view that the diagnostic concept of injustice should be supplemented with that of social pathology helped bring to light

⁴³ Note that educational injustices can, of course, also contribute to (more) injustice further along the life of an individual: Deficient education can also cause someone’s exclusion from an institution and not only their misunderstanding of it.

that there might still be a social problem in reference to just institutions: namely that the persons who are to participate in them were not adequately educated to do so. So, while rejecting Honneth's supplementation of 'injustice' with 'social pathology', it helped me understand the importance of education for justice. Discussing this example also prompted me to say more about how the general idea that schools should realize collective reflexive freedom translates into how the content of school curricula should be determined. Thereby, I offer a way in which liberals may make substantive normative statements regarding school curricula in specific social contexts: The content is provided by the *reflection on existing societies* (with a substantial history, culture, norms etc.), without drawing on a conception of the good life.

Lastly, let me point to three desiderata for further research. First, it would be worthwhile to spell out the exact role that Honneth's third diagnostic concept from FR ("misdevelopment"/"anomaly") plays with regard to the claim defended in this paper. This would include a reflection on the relation between the two concepts expressing diachronic societal development that I mentioned in the paper: "conscious social reproduction" (Gutmann) and "moral progress" (Honneth) (already see fn. 22). Second, the general idea that schools ought to realize collective reflexive freedom that I sketched in the paper needs spelling out. It could be developed into an account in its own right in the philosophy of education, independently of the framing of this paper. Third, in this paper, I have focused on public schools as representative of the kind of education that should be accessible for all *equally* in a democratic society. To complete the argument of the paper that social pathologies can and should be reframed as educational injustices, further institutions and contexts of education pertaining to *equal* education would have to be considered, in particular education in families and the question when the state is obliged to interfere in it. To complement the picture, it would be interesting to examine forms of education that prepare persons for *specific* roles in the system of the division of labor in a society (in particular, higher education and vocational training). When is the right moment in a child's development to begin specialized education? Who should decide upon the future role of a child or adolescent?; How should first and third personal assessments of the talents and preferences of a person be related?

For now, I hope to have shown, first, that adding schools to the group of institutions considered in FR has considerable consequences for the set-up of Honneth's extended theory of justice, in particular that his concept of 'social pathology' becomes superfluous or normatively empty, and, second, that both 'extended' and liberal theories of justice should include in their perspectives the conscious reproduction of just societies in the future and not only be concerned with the justice of societies in the present.

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