

Pathologies of Society and Social Philosophy: New Perspectives from Finland

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The main aim of this paper is to illustrate the distinctive features of the Finnish school of critical theory, focusing especially on its reception of Axel Honneth's theory of recognition and his ideas regarding the concept of social pathology. In this respect, the article will provide a concise description of the philosophical work of some of its members: Onni Hirvonen, Heikki Ikäheimo, Arto Laitinen and Arvi Särkelä. The paper consists of seven parts. First, the paper will sketch a very general account of Honneth's theory of recognition and social life, and, secondly, it will describe the ways the Finnish scholars have reinterpreted Honneth's paradigm of recognition. The third part will discuss two conceptions of social pathology that Honneth has explicitly endorsed in his intellectual career: Christopher Zurn's idea of pathology as a second-order disorder, and the organicist conception of social pathology, which Honneth himself has put forward in his essay *The Diseases of Society: Approaching a Nearly Impossible Concept*. Part four and five will then look at how the Finnish theoreticians have discussed and criticized these two conceptions of social pathology that are central in Honneth's work. In part six, the paper will briefly introduce some of the more fundamental criticisms that scholars have aimed at Honneth and, more or less directly, at the Finnish scholars. Finally, the article will explain why the new perspectives of Laitinen, Ikäheimo, Hirvonen, and Särkelä are, in any case, consistent with Honneth's philosophical perspective.¹

1. Axel Honneth's perspective on reciprocal recognition and social life: a brief sketch

Axel Honneth states that to recognize somebody means, essentially, to be able to assume the perspective of our partners of interaction and consider ourselves in the role of our social addressee:

«we should think of the act of recognition on the model of reciprocal action, in which two subjects ascribe to each other a certain normative status allowing them to treat each other in accordance with norms of respect and consideration». (Honneth 2011, p. 402)

According to Honneth, reciprocal recognition is an important constitutive factor for 1) the achievement of a good individual self-relationship and psychological well-being, 2) the realization of several collective practices and, therefore, 3) a successful process of social reproduction. For Honneth, all these aspects are essentially intertwined.²

In reflecting upon the connection between reciprocal recognition and individual flourishing of human beings, Honneth seems to endorse the idea that the need for recognition represents a strong motivational force at the bottom of human social actions and interactions. Our self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-respect depend respectively on the love we receive in the family and from our friends, the esteem we gain as members of a community based on cooperation and a division of

¹ This paper is the translation of the Italian article "Patologie della società e filosofia sociale. Nuove prospettive dalla Finlandia", *Consecutio Rerum*, vol. 4, 1/2018. Minor changes have been made concerning footnotes and references. The first and sixth sections are not present in the Italian version. The conclusive section has been slightly enriched and extended. I kindly thank Hans Arentshorst and the four anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions, which have significantly improved the quality of this paper.

² The following account does not represent an historical reconstruction of Honneth's theory. It only aims to clarify the concepts that constitute the invariant elements of Honneth's work, and to better understand the nature of the work of the Finnish scholars that will be presented in the following pages.

labor, and the respect that others give us as citizens with equal duties and rights. Such experiences of recognition push us to repeat the same behavior when we find ourselves involved in analogous situations, reinforcing our tendency to transform a behavioral pattern in a persistent custom or habit. In the labor market and through the division of social labor, for instance, we realize that to be recognized as an active contributor to our community can foster and improve our personal self-esteem. Experiences of social esteem that are related to our professional efforts can drive us to improve our skills and competencies and to be more enterprising in social cooperation.

In this regard, individuals tend to interiorize social duties, norms, and rules to the extent that they experience a satisfying emotional life while acting accordingly with them. Successful conduct in a specific social context gives us the chance to experience positive feelings generated by the social recognition that we can receive from our partners of interaction.

This connection between individual flourishing and reciprocal recognition clarifies point 2): how do we learn to enact effective collective behavior and actions in a coordinate way? Acting in institutions that allow us to achieve self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem, we comprehend how to act coherently with the expectations of other social agents. We learn to cooperate, realizing material conditions that are necessary for the attainment of the individual plans of each member of the social community. Therefore, human social reality can be considered as a coherent set of social spheres that consist of norms of recognition, which «regulate» actions in a way that ensures intersubjective coordination» or «constitute» a kind of action that the subjects involved can only carry out cooperatively or together» (Honneth 2014b, p. 125).

In this regard, it is important to notice how Honneth states that his model of reciprocal action «should not lead us to speak of acts that are external to institutional reality or even of a kind of “pre-social” act» (Honneth 2011, p. 403). Successful processes of reciprocal recognition can be realized only thanks to the mediation of an objective social dimension that allows individuals to recognize their peers and to be recognized. As depicted in *Freedom's right*, the spheres of family and friendship, of labor and commodities market, and of democratic public life are the relational spheres that are necessary for achieving the actualization of successful forms of recognition and, thus, the realization of social cooperation.³ Such institutions are relational, since they provide a specific set of social statuses, roles, and expectations to social agents. In doing so, they promote and consent the realization of social agents' intentions in harmony with the expectations of their partners of interaction and, at the same time, the minimal preconditions for the reproduction of society as a whole.

Aspects 1) and 2) shed light on the importance of the dynamics of recognition for the process of social reproduction. Following Honneth, it can be said that every society consists of a specific system of different orders of social recognition that can reproduce itself when it enables human beings to pursue their individual self-realization through forms of cooperation and collective actions that are characterized by mutuality:

«the reproduction of social life is governed by the imperative of mutual recognition, because one can develop a practical relation-to-self only when one has learned to view oneself, from the normative perspective of one's partners in interaction, as their social addressee. [...] The aforementioned imperative, which is anchored in the social life-process, provides the normative pressure that compels individuals to remove constraints on the meaning of mutual recognition, since it is only by doing so that they are able to express socially the continually expanding claims of their subjectivity». (Honneth 1994, pp. 92-93)

Institutional orders of recognition provide us, on the one hand, with the framework in which our intentions and practical activities acquire a social meaning that is relevant for our partners of interaction. On the other hand, they establish the values and properties that regulate our social behavior and consent its reproduction, which depends eventually on its capacity to contribute to the

³ See Honneth (2014), pp. 125-129.

development of a satisfactory self-relationship by individuals. However, Honneth himself underlines the fact that the evaluative properties and normative criteria that govern the recursive actualization of different forms of social recognition are always historical variable and amendable.

That is why, for Honneth, social struggles can arise often and easily. For Honneth, social struggle is a collective activity that emerges in human societies because «the interpretation of socially valid norms is an essentially unfinished process, in which one-sided interpretations and resistance to them take turns with each other» (Honneth 2017a, p. 913). In this regard, the process of transformation that allows the reproduction of the society is inseparable from social struggles for redefining and re-interpreting values, rules, and norms at work in a concrete society and the best way for actualizing them:

«the source of recurrent social struggles is thought to lie in the fact that any disadvantaged social group will attempt to appeal to norms that are already institutionalized but that are being interpreted or applied in hegemonic ways, and to turn those norms against the dominant groups by relying on them for a moral justification of their own marginalized needs and interests». (Honneth 2017a, p. 914)

Even if relationships of recognition have a constitutive role regarding the ontological existence of a society, their correct implementation is dependent on institutionalized norms and rules that can be subjected to conflicting interpretations and divergent ideas regarding the best way to realize them.

2. The Finnish school of critical theory between a microphysics and a macrophysics of recognition

The Finnish school of social philosophy has made original and valuable contributions to the study of social pathology.⁴ To better appreciate these, it is useful to start by providing an overview of the particular interpretations and reworkings that the aforementioned scholars have produced in comparison to Honneth's more general reflection on the topic of recognition.⁵

First, let us focus on the work of Heikki Ikäheimo and Arto Laitinen, which could be conceived as an attempt to elaborate a *microphysics of recognition*. This particular approach manages to deepen, from an ontological point of view, the invariant characteristics of the practical processes of recognition illustrated by Honneth, clarifying at the same time some aspects of the perspective of the German philosopher. In this respect, it is necessary to mention at least two theoretical points that characterize the position of Ikäheimo and Laitinen.

First, it is worth noting the analytical distinction that they have drawn between *a*) recognition as a quantitative and qualitative identification of objects and people, *b*) recognition as the acknowledgment of norms, reasons, rules and values, and *c*) interpersonal recognition. This distinction allows one to grasp the difference between recognizing institutionalized values and norms and recognizing people in the flesh. In case *b*), in fact, recognition consists of the rational approval of abstract entities that cannot have a self-relationship with themselves. In the case of *c*) the recognition takes place between individuals who can be recognized and who, as a result of situations of misrecognition, may suffer from a lack of self-esteem, self-love, and self-respect.

⁴ The Finnish scholars that, through the second part of the 20th century and the beginning of the new millennium, have shown interest and have participated actively in critical theory's debate are undoubtedly many more. Thomas Wallgren has underlined how a «gradual rise of interest, first in Frankfurt School critical theory and to a smaller extent French and Italian Marxism and poststructuralism, and later in feminist philosophy and postmodernism, can be noted at Finnish universities from the late 1960s onwards», becoming relevant especially at the University of Jyväskylä and involving a noticeable number of scholars and theorists (Wallgren 2003, pp. 560-572). In line with this tendency, Wallgren, Rauno Huttunen, and Arto Laitinen have highlighted, for instance, how Habermas' thought has been influenced by Georg Henrik von Wright and Finnish legal theorist, becoming in turn rather meaningful for the development of Finnish social research in many sides (Huttunen, Laitinen, Wallgren 2019).

⁵ There are other Finnish recognition-theorists, like Risto Saarinen and Heikki Koskinen, whose studies are less critical and more oriented to addressing the problem of religious recognition. See, for instance, Saarinen (2016) and Koskinen (2019).

These conceptual clarifications between *a*), *b*) and *c*) puts us in a position to identify who the potential subjects of the recognition processes are. Actors that can entertain appropriate forms of recognition are those who 1) are capable of recognizing norms and values; 2) can be subjects and recipients of interpersonal recognition; 3) can entertain significant self-relationships, that is, to elaborate beliefs and judgments inherent in their own person.

Consequently, this threefold distinction consents us to account for how the intersubjective attitudes of recognition affect both the psychological self-relationships of individuals and the objective social reality in which individuals take part. Self-esteem and self-love, for example, can be achieved respectively through interpersonal relationships with people who value us for our professional contributions and successes and who love us sincerely. Consequently, what is particularly important for our well-being are the solidity and proper functioning of those objective social organizations, like the labor market and the family, which ensure these interpersonal relationships to unfold, enabling us to be able to achieve a positive self-relationship.⁶

The second relevant feature of Laitinen and Ikäheimo's considerations is their analysis of recognition in terms of *recognitive attitudes*.⁷ According to this perspective, the various forms in which recognition manifests itself depend fundamentally on the specific attitudes of the individuals involved in a specific kind of interpersonal relationship. In other words, in order for the dynamics of recognition to be realized concretely, it is necessary that agents and subjects of recognition have practical personalizing attitudes towards their partners of interaction. This means that, given a grateful subject A and a recognized subject B, for having successful forms of recognition, A must have certain attitudes towards B, and B must recognize A as a subject whose judgments have a certain value and are credible. For example, let us consider the conditions that are necessary for a complete recognition process to take place in the sphere of intimate relationships and in the labor market. In these circumstances, it is not enough for A to have the aptitude to recognize B as a person whose happiness is unconditionally important, or as a cooperation partner whose peculiar skills are appreciable for the well-being of society. It is necessary that B also assumes a certain recognitive attitude towards A. This attitude must be indicative of the fact that B sees in A an agent whose love and esteem are fundamental for the achievement of a positive self-relationship. Such a conception of recognition processes in terms of recognitive attitudes leads Ikäheimo and Laitinen to define the circumstances of successful mutual recognition in a rather definite way. These are situations in which, on the one hand, those who recognize consider someone as a person and act accordingly, and, on the other hand, those who are recognized understand and accept the content of this attitude. Thanks to this perspective, it becomes possible for the two Finnish philosophers to highlight some important properties of recognition that have not been sufficiently emphasized by Honneth. First, the description of the recognition processes in terms of attitudes of recognition places the emphasis on the attitudes of B, i.e. the recognized subject, and allows us to understand the dialogical and non-monological nature of mutual recognition.⁸ Secondly, this interpretation highlights both the responsive and constitutive character of recognition, whereas Honneth tends to emphasize only the perceptual dimension behind the acts of recognition.⁹ As Laitinen puts it:

«recognition has something of the nature of making: it has a crucial active role in actualization of potentials, in identity-formation and in forming special relations. At the same time, recognition has the nature of a response. Recognition can be a response to actual evaluative features, in which case it does not bring about, but rather sustains, those features, or it can be a response to potential evaluative features, in which case it contributes also to the actualization.» (Laitinen 2002, p. 475)

⁶ For a complete overview of this conceptual clarification see Ikäheimo & Laitinen (2007, pp. 34-37) and Laitinen (2006, pp. 77-79).

⁷ To deepen the theme of recognition in terms of attitudes of recognition cf. Ikäheimo (2002, pp. 447-462) and Ikäheimo & Laitinen (2007, pp. 42-51).

⁸ Cfr. Ikäheimo & Laitinen (2007, pp. 37-39).

⁹ Cfr. Honneth (2007, pp. 329-330).

At this point, it is possible to grasp an important difference that exists between the position of Honneth and that one of Ikäheimo and Laitinen. It is certainly true that, according to the reading of the latter, and in line with Honneth's position, in order to have complete forms of recognition, «neither mere attitudes without the relevant practical behaviour, nor mere “external” action in conformity to the rules without the genuine attitudes counts as proper recognition» (Laitinen 2006, p. 80). However, expanding Honneth's theory by interpreting recognition also in terms of attitudes allows us to identify a wider set of actions that express authentic recognition. According to Honneth, in fact, gestures, verbal acts or institutional measures express recognition «only if their primary purpose is directed in some positive manner towards the existence of another person or group» (Honneth, 2002, p. 506). The reading of Laitinen and Ikäheimo, on the contrary, conceives recognitive attitudes, and not actions, as the constitutive element of recognition. Furthermore, the same interpretation locates in these same attitudes those motivational elements that are decisive for the actualization of the social actions of human beings. If this is so, also actions that are not aimed at affirming, directly or explicitly, the existence of a subject worthy of recognition can express authentic attitudes of recognition:

«Why does A help B, when B has hard times in her life? There are of course many possible explanations, but one candidate is that A loves B. A does not need to say this to B for B to be able in principle to tell. Or what does it tell B of A's attitudes towards her that A always asks for B's help when there is some especially difficult work to be done at the office? Well, possibly that A holds B in esteem for her abilities and achievements in similar tasks. A does not have to give B a medal or a gold watch ‘in recognition of’ B's contributions for B to be able in principle to understand A's attitude-complex towards her as including the recognitive attitude of esteem». (Ikäheimo & Laitinen 2007, p. 45)

If the reflections of Ikäheimo and Laitinen are characterized by a focus on the interpersonal dimension of the dynamics of recognition, Onni Hirvonen and Arvi Sarkelä try instead to develop a more attentive view concerning the *macrophysical side of recognition*. Their work undoubtedly reflects Honneth's change of perspective in his social philosophy with the publication of *Freedom's Right*. With this work the German philosopher switched from the analysis of the dynamics of intersubjective recognition to the historical and normative reconstruction of the objective conditions of possibility of recognition itself: namely, the study of the social institutions and customs of Western liberal democracies and, more general, of Western modernity.

Hirvonen's philosophical production has been concerned with developing a social ontology capable of clarifying the relationships of recognition between individuals and social groups. In fact, his approach constitutes an interesting contribution to remedying an effective lack in the theory of Honneth. From an ontological point of view, Hirvonen notices, Honneth seems to have a reductionist conception of collective recognition. In other words, Honneth tends to deny that it is possible for collective entities such as classes or social groups to recognize and act as persons. From Honneth's perspective,

«recognition is collective insofar as it consists of interpersonal social actions that happen within a shared normative framework of recognition institutions. Recognition in this sense is not private or atomistic but rather dependent on a broader social setting». (Hirvonen 2015, p. 212).

This position seems, on the one hand, to contradict some typical assumptions of the first phase of Honneth's theoretical work. In that period Honneth considered social movements and collective subjects as the agents able to improve the normative grammar of recognition in a given society.¹⁰ On the other hand, this reductionist conception of collective recognition underestimates the fact that classes and groups can play an agentive function in the processes of recognition. Assuming that groups can be taken as subjects, as people with agential skills, Hirvonen identifies two other

¹⁰ On this topic see especially Honneth (2002, pp. 171-199).

fundamental ways of conceptualizing collective recognition. A further point of view from which collective recognition can be declined concerns the relationship of recognition that can be established between the members of a given group (individuals or sub-groups) and the group itself. The third possible way to conceive of recognitive processes is as relationships of recognition that a collective agent can establish with individual and collective subjects external to it. Obviously, from a social-ontological point of view, it is necessary to clarify which ontological commitments must be made in order to be able to talk about the agential capacities of collective entities in relation to the recognition processes. In this respect, Hirvonen argues that a group must be able to be recognized as a person. In other words, a collective body must be able to respond to those different dimensions of recognition which constitute the fundamental preconditions for the development of an integral individual personality. Hirvonen puts forward the hypothesis that this is reasonably conceivable if it is assumed that:

«interaction with a group amounts to interaction with a member of the group. The information communicated in an interaction can be related back to other members, which may have an effect on the behavior and decision-making of the group in a manner comparable to forms of interaction affecting individual decision-making. In this sense, groups are capable of reciprocal interaction. They can express their opinions and communicate through their members. The possible lack of phenomenological self-consciousness, centralized perception, and unified memory do not necessarily rule out the possibility of embodied reciprocal interaction» (Hirvonen 2017, p. 156).

Similar reasoning can also be made when one considers that, in Honneth's perspective, in order to entertain relationships of recognition an agent must have the ability to relate to himself. In this respect, for Hirvonen,

«we can try to see if a group can somehow be self-conscious through its members. The knowledge individuals collectively have of a group, as members of that group, can perhaps be understood as that group's knowledge of itself. If a group's self-consciousness is understood in this manner, it is indeed possible for a group to formulate beliefs regarding itself». (Hirvonen 2017, p. 156).

These considerations lead Hirvonen to conclude that collective entities such as social classes and groups can maintain, at least potentially, significant relationships of recognition with other collectivities and with other individuals. In other words, collective entities can be viewed as moral people; as agents capable of developing self-esteem based on their peculiar collective characteristics; and as subjects capable of nurturing caring attitudes towards needy human beings.

The distinctive feature of Arvi Särkelä's approach to the paradigm of social recognition is influenced by his particular interpretation of Honnethian thought in the light of Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit* and the intellectual production of John Dewey. According to Särkelä, social life should be conceived as a balanced process between conservation and transformation of the recognition rules that regulate social interactions within a community. The necessity of conservation can be understood, trivially, if one observes that a society that is unable to reproduce its fundamental structures and institutions cannot survive and risks irreparable disintegration.

When it comes to the natural imperative for social transformation, this can be grasped if one approaches the process of re-interpretation of the social ends that superintends the dynamic of social reproduction of a given community in terms of a struggle for recognition between dominant and dominated groups. In this respect, according to Särkelä, struggles for recognition have both a responsive and generative function with respect to the rules of recognition that articulate the relationships between individuals and groups of a given society.

The responsive function of these struggles reflects the fact that certain rules for recognition have become "problematic", "particularistic", and harbingers of social conflict as they are merely an expression of the interests of the ruling class. The generative function of struggles depends on the fact that the dominated subjects, as soon as they try to emancipate themselves, work for the social

affirmation of norms that not only favor their particular interests but the interests of the whole society as well. To recognize the claims of the oppressed does not only mean emancipating the latter. It also means getting on the road to achieving a social integrity that has been lost. The struggles for recognition must, therefore, be understood as a process that aims at creating new values through which it is possible to reconstitute the recognition relations weakened on a social level. When a society is in crisis, when it is crossed by disruptive phenomena, «there is a need to orient the recognitive relationships that make up the community in a new way» (Särkelä 2014, p. 103). In this sense, those groups, which are fighting against each other for the affirmation of their collective interests, struggle to affirm certain values with respect to which the members of this society are called to behave toward each other.¹¹

From this point of view, it is interesting to note how Särkelä's thought regarding the problem of social transformation is in continuity with the idea of social freedom introduced by Honneth in *Freedom's Right* and, in a certain sense, enriches it. It has been said that the struggle for recognition between groups and classes of a given society arises from the inability of the existing social norms to guarantee the cohesion of the society itself and the freedom of its members. Therefore, a truly democratic society is also «a community in which the recognitive attitude towards the investigation has become a habit» (Särkelä 2014, p. 105). In short, in a democratic society, there are no absolute values and norms of recognition, as their validity depends on their ability to guarantee the social freedom of the groups, classes, and individuals that make it up. On the other hand, this also means that a democratic society reproduces itself correctly only on one condition: it must be open to the eventuality of the transformation of the values and norms that regulate the social interactions of recognition within itself, in case new needs and interests emerge among social actors.¹²

3. Axel Honneth and the concept of social pathology: a brief description

Before examining the reflections of Hirvonen, Ikäheimo, Laitinen, and Särkelä on the problem of social pathology, let us briefly describe the relevant features of the two conceptions of social pathology that have been supported by Honneth.¹³ Zurn's conception of social disorder, which Honneth explicitly endorses, uses the lemma of *social pathology* to indicate a disorder inherent in the critical-reflective faculties of social actors. According to Zurn, all the social pathologies that are described by Honneth are united by an invariant element. Whether it is reification or maldistribution, social invisibility or ideologically distorted forms of recognition, for Zurn there is social pathology when there are «constitutive disconnects between first-order contents and second-order reflexive comprehension of those contents [...]» (Zurn 2011, pp. 345-346). Furthermore, in order to be considered pathological, these disconnections must be socially pervasive and caused by social factors. When there is social pathology, Zurn asserts, human beings can no longer understand the original, authentic meaning of those practices, norms, and beliefs that constitute the fundamental components

¹¹ For a deeper understanding of this conception of social life, see in particular Särkelä (2014, pp. 87-105). Here the issue of the struggle for recognition, a central topic for Honneth at least until the publication of *Freedom's Right*, is precisely reinterpreted by drawing a parallel between the competitive image of recognition elaborated by Dewey and the process of recognitive reconciliation described by Hegel when he deals with the dialectic of consciousness in the *Phenomenology*.

¹² Ultimately, Särkelä clarifies how the idea of democratic ethics introduced by Dewey and taken up by Honneth is compatible with the dynamics of social conflict and with the substantial and progressive transformation of a given normative framework.

¹³ In line with the purposes of the first section, this part of the article intends to present a conceptual clarification and map of Honneth's ideas regarding the issue of social pathologies, not an historical reconstruction of the evolution of Honneth's thoughts about the topic. For a precise historical account of Honneth's ideas concerning this topic see, for instance, Laitinen and Särkelä (2019a & 2019b). Nevertheless, it is worthy to clarify why the present section does not take into account the distinction between «social pathology» and «social misdevelopment», which has been introduced by Honneth in *Freedom's Right* (Honneth 2014b, pp. 128-129). Simply, Honneth himself states that the social misdevelopments should not be subsumed under the concept of «social pathology», but under the broader category of «social wrong». In this regard, a discussion of the idea of «social misdevelopment» is beyond the scope of this paper. For an acute and precise analysis and critique of Honneth's distinction between «social pathology» and «misdevelopment» see Freyenhagen (2015).

of the social reality to which they belong. In this respect, according to Zurn, ideological forms of thought, redistributive injustices, social invisibility, and social subjects' reifying attitudes would all be social dysfunctions that share the same structure and pathogenesis: a disconnection between first-order contents and second-order reflexive capacities of individuals. Once they are affected by such a pathological condition, the social actors are unable to reasonably reflect on the meaning of the practices and beliefs that constitute the core of their social existence and, therefore, to understand in which context these same practices and beliefs were generated.

In capitalist societies, for example, the belief that the well-being of everyone depends exclusively on individual initiative and responsibility is socially widespread. According to Zurn, this is a form of ideological, and therefore pathological thought, since social agents tend to conceive this correlation between well-being and individual choices as an immutable law of nature, not dependent on the historically given structure of the society in which they live. Unable to understand the social origins of this belief (and, consequently, the fact that the latter is primarily functional to the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production and its effective functioning) individuals act and think in accordance with it. Under these circumstances, professional failures, asymmetric forms of income distribution, and lack of social mobility are not considered as dependent on the socio-economic conditions (such as social class of belonging, or the total sum of material and symbolic resources at disposal) that predetermine the position and range of possibilities for action that a social worker can actually aspire to. Failures and injustices are perceived only as the result of the individual's inability to become an efficient self-entrepreneur, because, for instance, somebody has undertaken educational and work paths that are unprofitable according to the logic of the capitalist mode of production.

The second conception of social pathology, which has been directly proposed by Honneth, can be labeled as an organicist proposal. In this perspective, there is an ontological assumption that is central: every society can literally get sick, as it is animated by reproductive processes that are similar to those of a living organism. This conception of social pathology has two relevant characteristics. The first one is that the pathology of a society consists of the collapse of its reproductive functions. This means that a society is affected by some sort of social disease when it is unable to reshape and self-sustain its intrinsic nature through the socialization of individuals, to control and modify external nature and, finally, to actively and normatively regulate the interpersonal relationships of recognition among its members.¹⁴ The second aspect that characterizes the organicist approach is that social pathologies are diagnosed with respect to the society as a whole, and do not affect individuals who take part in the life of a given society. Consequently, from an organicist perspective, individual suffering has no diagnostic value for critical theorists. In fact, since a social disorder « can also consist of behavioral patterns that cause no individual suffering and thus also do not necessarily constitute psychic disorders» (Honneth 2014a, pp. 690-691), social philosophy must start its diagnostic inquiries from the assumption that « diseases of society take place on a level set principally above that of the subjects» (Honneth 2014a, p. 700).

The critical reception of the first model of social pathology is expressed mainly by the reflections of Laitinen and Ikäheimo. The positions of Särkelä and Hirvonen instead show the intrinsic limits to a strong organic conception of social pathology. These critical observations start from two central assumptions of Honneth's thought. The first, particularly significant for the reflections of Ikäheimo and Hirvonen, is that the suffering associated with the processes of misrecognition and the lack of individual self-realization is a fundamental index for understanding the nature of social pathologies and their diagnosis. The second assumption is that a fundamental precondition for individual flourishing is the objective dimension of the social reality to which human beings belong.

In light of these considerations, an adequate concept of social pathology should, therefore, take into account also the failure of the transformation process of the social structures that form the backdrop against which situations of widespread social suffering occur. This intuition, which has been emphasized in particular by Laitinen and Särkelä, refers to a definition of social pathology (only

¹⁴ Cfr. Honneth (2014, pp. 698-699).

sketched by Honneth in his essay *Pathologies of the Social*) according to which the pathological state of a society consists in the “organic drift” assumed by social life itself.

4. The limits of Zurn’s conception of social pathology: Laitinen and Ikäheimo

The general critique that Arto Laitinen aims at Zurn’s conception of social pathology is that the latter can describe, in the best of cases, only those disorders that affect the critical-reflective capacities of social actors. From this point of view, it would not do justice to a significant aspect of the social philosophy developed by Honneth. Indeed, in *Freedom’s Right*, Honneth argues that the reflexive freedom of individuals (i.e. their ability to determine themselves in accordance with universalizable moral norms and to choose the ends on which to shape their own path of individual realization) does not constitute the highest degree of freedom one can aspire to. Reinterpreting the ideas expressed by Hegel in his *Philosophy of Right*, Honneth affirms that a complete individual flourishing can only be achieved in the context of a wider social freedom, in which «the objectives freely chosen by individuals fit together in such a way in others to complement each other and therefore find in the social reality a fulfillment desired by that reality» (Honneth 2017b, p. 284). In other words, in Honneth's opinion, social freedom can only be implemented through those forms of mutual recognition that «‘constitute’ a kind of action that the subjects involved can only carry out cooperatively or together» since «status granted to us enables us to expect from others a kind of behavior that enables us to fulfill our own aims» (Honneth 2014b, p. 125). The existence of this social freedom, in turn, is a function of certain institutional preconditions and objective practices, which constitute and structure the environment in which individuals act and exercise their negative and reflective freedom: the affective sphere of the family and friendships, the economic sphere of the labor market, and the public sphere of the democratic life of a community.

These spheres or systems of actions are not only relational (insofar as they make possible forms of mutual recognition that allow the implementation of individual behaviors that complement each other). These systems are also ethical «because they involve a form of obligation that does not have the contrariness of a mere ‘ought’» (Honneth 2014b, p. 125). Considering this, Laitinen states that the idea of second-order pathology put forward by Zurn turns out to be unable to grasp those dysfunctions that can affect the social reality itself without the rationality and critical-reflective capacities of individuals being compromised:

«There can be oppression, misrecognition, exploitation, domination and brute coercion of various sorts even though the subjects can reflexively grasp these concepts – the fault need not lie in the disconnect between reality and reflection, but in the social reality itself» (Laitinen 2015, p. 47).

According to Laitinen, Zurn's proposal is thus excessively focused on the idea that malfunctions and distortions of social life are fully rooted in the dulling and atrophy of the critical-reflective capacities of social agents. For this reason, it cannot account for those aspects of the social dimension that could be defined pathological regardless of the understanding that social actors have. Let us assume that, in a given historical and social circumstance, the factors that hinder a correct exercise of the reflexive capacities of human beings have been removed or are completely absent. We further assume that, at the same time, situations of oppression and injustice still exist on a social level. What could guarantee the social reproduction of these circumstances, or the lack of effective protests against redistributive injustices or sexual, ethnic or cultural discriminations? One could think of media manipulations that aim at discrediting the credibility and diminishing the visibility of those social agents that show critical postures towards these issues. Or we can imagine limitations to the institutional mechanisms that guarantee freedom of expression and democratic participation, so as to take away from the victims of social injustice the possibility of expressing themselves and carrying out a positive transformation of their social environment. For Laitinen, in this case, it would be correct to talk about *third-order social disorders*: objective aspects or characteristics of a given social reality that prevent, defuse or silence legitimate criticisms and claims by social actors.

In line with this observation, Laitinen also points out that Zurn's model is unable to describe a further type of disconnection, namely between the second-order and third-order of social reality. In other words, the idea of pathology as a second-order disorder would not be able to account for the fact that the disconnection between the reflective capacities of social actors and the social world that should be reformed or transformed can be pathological as well:

«typically the social world is constitutively tied up with the participants, so that socially pre-empting the critique (b) can be internalized in a form of self-censorship (a): as one knows in advance that criticisms will be socially labelled 'naïve', subjects may learn to sanction their critical thoughts by themselves, so that social silencing is not needed thanks to socially created self-silencing» (Laitinen 2015, p. 50).

A final limitation of Zurn's proposal lies in the excessively vague characterization of what are called first-order contents. In fact, for Laitinen, taking the perspective of Zurn, the structure of social reality itself could be included in the first-order contents (that is, the set of institutions and practices that objectively define the morphology and physiognomy of a historically given society) as much as the experiences and beliefs that social agents have of this structure. Consequently, Zurn's model of social pathology does not consider those disconnections that can occur between contents of social reality and immediate understanding of the first order that agents have of reality itself:

«Various cases of anomie, of lack of suitable socialisation (see e.g. Durkheim 1893, Honneth 2014b), and so on, can lead agents to be disconnected cognitively, motivationally or practically from the operative social reality. In some cases, the agents may not appreciate the full value of what the rational social reality is like, and in other cases, they may not have appreciated the oppressiveness of the irrational social reality» (Laitinen 2015, p. 48).

These reflections explain Laitinen's support for the development of an inclusive model of social pathology, alternative to Zurn's one, which is able to consider at the same time the stratified nature of social reality; the direct experiences that social actors make of it; second-order reflexive abilities; and the patterns of the social dimension that prove to be ready to prevent any attempt at criticism and, therefore, social transformation.¹⁵ Furthermore, this conceptualization of the idea of pathology

«can also drop the requirement that any of the aspects are strictly speaking necessary for something to count as a social pathology. Whereas Zurn's proposal can be read as describing forms of 'pathologies of reflection' (analogous to reflexive freedom), the encompassing view is better seen as a candidate theory of 'social pathologies' (analogous to social freedom) » (Laitinen 2015, p. 60).

Heikki Ikäheimo deepens the study of the mechanisms underlying the pathological disconnection between social reality and the first-order understanding of social actors, dealing in particular with the causes that trigger the failure and lack of recognition among social actors. In Ikäheimo's opinion, in all the social spheres identified by Honneth (the axiological sphere of the family and friendships, the deontological sphere of law and morality, and the contributive sphere of civil society and the labor market) it is possible to distinguish *conditional* forms of recognition (that is, interested and instrumental) and *unconditional* types of pure intersubjective recognition. In the first sphere there may be forms of conditional recognition at work when, for example, one cares for the well-being of a friend or a loved one to achieve some purpose that does not strictly concern the happiness of the beloved person, but one's own personal interests and advantages. Unconditional love for someone,

¹⁵ As an anonymous reviewer has pointed out, Zurn's conceptualization of social pathologies would have been problematic for Honneth even before 2011. In fact, in an interview about racism in 2007, Honneth states that the solution to social pathologies cannot be just an act of reflection, which aims to correct a second-order belief. See <https://www.eurozine.com/rassismus-als-sozialisationsdefekt/?pdf>

on the contrary, involves a concern for the well-being and happiness of the other, which disregards selfish advantages and benefits.¹⁶ In summary, for Ikäheimo:

«in the unconditional mode ‘what ultimately counts’ is the perspective or intentionality of the other, whereas in the conditional mode what ultimately counts is one’s own perspective. [...] It is namely only in the unconditional mode of purely intersubjective recognition that the recognizee is seen or taken as an individual *in the strong sense* of irreducible to functional significance in the recognizer’s self-interested perspective, and thus as an irreducible and irreplaceable other person» (Ikäheimo 2015, p. 32).

It is important to underline that, for Ikäheimo, what leads human beings to develop appropriate recognitive attitudes is not so much a clear theoretical reflection, but an adequate social practice. A person can have a perfect understanding of the moral and ethical reasons that justify the adoption of selfless behaviors towards his fellow men, and however be unable to implement them when he should do so:

«respecting someone is not to be moved by reasons, but rather by the person herself as a rational being with a claim to sharing authority, including authority on what counts as acceptable reasons for treating her in this or that way [...] An effective understanding of the goodness of mutual respect [...] is thus not of a theoretical but of a practical nature» (Ikäheimo 2015, pp. 35-36).

In light of such a perspective, Ikäheimo defines the following causes behind episodes of a lack of social recognition. In the first place, in line with what has just been said, Ikäheimo argues that behind the cases of failure of intersubjective recognition there may simply be the inability of a human being to recognize someone properly, due to psychopathological conditions or insufficient forms of socialization. Secondly, the dissipation of unconditional and disinterested responses of recognition can be the consequence of the influence of institutional entities, norms, and social roles. These factors could force the recognizing subject to suppress or avoid forms of recognition which, in certain circumstances, could be too demanding to manage from a psychological point of view or be counterproductive for the proper functioning of a certain institutional milieu. A war situation, for example, can push a soldier to forget or put aside some genuine recognizable attitudes towards his victims, depersonalizing them, in order to make emotionally sustainable the killings that he is called to perform in the name of his homeland and military duties.

Another case that has been considered by Ikäheimo is the following: In order to properly carry out her profession, a prison guard must necessarily develop some form of psychological and emotional detachment from prisoners, so as to avoid becoming familiar with them and being indignant at their condition. In this respect, the merit of Ikäheimo's analysis is to highlight how the cases of lack of recognition, and potentially the actual pathologies of recognition, can be rooted in a disconnection, entirely internal to the first order, between the contents and form of a certain social reality on the one hand, and the immediate experience of social agents on the other. For Ikäheimo, the emergence of this disconnection can be explained by the fact that the need for recognition is intrinsically linked to our innate tendencies towards recognition or lack of recognition. However, if it is true that our psychological well-being is dependent on the social recognition that we receive, it is undeniable that this condition of dependence on the other can put us in a condition of vulnerability. This same

¹⁶ Similarly, following Ikäheimo, even in the deontological and contributory spheres there can be conditional and unconditional forms of recognition. A person can be respected only for prudential, calculative reasons. A staunch racist could engage in public tolerant behavior towards ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities just to not be sanctioned by the laws of his country. In the labor market, it is possible to assume unconditional recognitive attitudes when gratitude is manifested for someone's efforts regardless of the results of their work performance. In this case, we appreciate not only the material results achieved by those who are recognized and their usefulness for our personal purposes, but also their intention and efforts aimed at contributing to general well-being and cooperation within the community to which they belong.

condition can push human beings to implement defensive mechanisms that aim to minimize the chances of experiencing psychological suffering through a refusal of mutual recognition.

In the writer's opinion, Ikäheimo's reflections then highlight another interesting aspect that Zurn's definition of social pathology fails to grasp. The proper exercise of reflective ability by humans may be the reason behind a primary detachment. The jailer who avoids giving prisoners the same form of respect that he spontaneously grants to other human beings does this because, from a practical point of view, he knows that the institution for which he works, in order to be able to function properly, requires the adoption of some recognitive attitudes that are different from those operating in normal social circumstances. Consequently, those second-order reflexive abilities whose dulling, in Zurn's opinion, underlies social pathologies, can also occasionally cause the weakening or cancellation of our normal attitudes to intersubjective recognition in certain situations. In this regard, Ikäheimo states that: «Theoretical understanding is clearly essential in designing and devising institutional conditions in which the unconditional recognitive response either has to be suppressed due to its costs for individuals, or has room to flourish in interhuman relations» (Ikäheimo 2015, p. 60).

This leads us to conclude that social pathologies are not necessarily linked to a second-order disorder. What could be considered pathological from Ikäheimo's point of view is the prevalence of a specific modality of conditional recognition at the expense of an unconditional one, or the social affirmation of misrecognition practices generated by individual experiences of psychological suffering that are recursive and socially pervasive.

5. The limits of the organicist conception of social pathology: Hirvonen and Särkelä

At first glance, an organicist perspective on social pathologies, like the one that has been endorsed by Honneth in his essay *Diseases of society*, would seem to be the ideal candidate to account for the pathologies of recognition at a collective and systemic level. This perspective, in fact, clearly defines which evaluative standard should guide the diagnosis of the critical theorist: the functional capacity of a society must be assessed in its entirety, conceiving institutions and intermediate bodies in terms of functional and reproductive integrity. From this perspective, the health level of a given society depends on its ability to reproduce itself, and therefore on the normal functioning of the corporate bodies and organs that make it up.¹⁷ Both Hirvonen and Särkelä do not a priori accept this concept, which is depicted in strong functionalist terms, but they problematize it, in the light of their studies concerning the macro-physical dimension of recognition.

As mentioned in the first paragraph, according to Hirvonen collective entities such as classes and social groups can establish, at least potentially, significant recognition relationships with other collectivities and individuals. It is in line with this idea that Hirvonen identifies a wide range of pathologies of collective recognition. One form that the disorder can assume is *systemic* in nature and manifests itself as the unsuccessful achievement of individual and collective self-realization for those agents that participate in a specific recognition system. In other words, a socially rooted complex of rules and forms of collective recognition turns out to be pathological when it prevents the flourishing and well-being of individual and collective agents, even when this same system of recognition is socially accepted and has no particular problems from a reproductive point of view.

Instead, from an *agentive* perspective, which is attentive to the actions of the actors involved in the recognition processes, Hirvonen affirms that social pathology occurs when a collective agent does not act coherently with the system of recognitive rules in which it is taking part. In this situation, collective actors misrecognize, or do not recognize, groups or individuals that are external to the recognizing group or belong to it:

¹⁷ For an alternative and interesting account of Honneth's (and Durkheim's) organicism, more inclined to underline the positive features of such a paradigm, see Thijssen (2012) in which «organic solidarity is conceived of as a synthesis of both instrumental and empathic considerations. Instrumental solidarity results from a universalistic identification of others as useful exchange partners. Emphatic solidarity results from a particularistic identification with the singularity of another individual and the perceived misrecognition of his qualities and needs» (pp. 467-468).

«The common factor behind the various practical cases of discrimination, ostracization, and reification is that either a group is harmed or a group causes harm in the sense of breaking the norms of recognition» (Hirvonen 2015, p. 218).

In the dynamics of recognition within a group, at least two pathological forms of *agentive* recognition can be identified. The first form occurs when the collective will of a group proves to be so powerful as to lead to the misunderstanding of the will of self-determination of the individuals who belong to it. The second type of collective pathology, closely linked to the first, is defined by a chronic insensitivity of the group with respect to forms of external recognition, determined by the emergence and affirmation of particularly strong and exclusive collective identities:

«the stubbornness of some communities – e.g. small religious cults with ‘us against the world’ attitudes – might be partly explained by the self-sufficiency of the collective identity that makes external recognition largely irrelevant» (Hirvonen 2015, p. 220).

The third type of collective agentive pathology, which can happen in the form of in-group or out-group dynamics, concerns the phenomena of identification with a group and its public representation. In these cases, it is possible to speak of a dynamic of reifying recognition, which occurs when «either someone is identified with a group they do not personally identify with or the identity that is associated with a group has not been determined by the group itself» (Hirvonen 2015, p. 220). Finally, the emergence of pathologies of collective recognition can be closely linked to the dynamics of the exercise of power of a given group internally and externally. In fact, large communities can have a greater visibility and influence than individuals, their internal subgroups or external minorities. This, at least potentially, can lead to situations in which «[s]ome claims for recognition can be easily dismissed when there is no crowd strength behind them. The voice of many is more easily heard than a voice of one» (Hirvonen 2015, p. 220).

In the light of this picture, it is possible to understand why, for Hirvonen, it is necessary to adopt a conception of social pathology that is weaker, or more articulated, than the classical organicist model. From Hirvonen’s perspective, the degree of health of collective institutions and social agents cannot be evaluated by only taking into account their ability to reproduce themselves in functional terms. One of the ideal parameters against which to evaluate the state of health of a collective system of recognition, as well as the wellness of the agents that are involved in it, concerns also their ability to guarantee the process of individual self-realization of human beings. It is therefore evident, on the one hand, how Hirvonen respects the teleological spirit of Honneth’s social theory, in which the ethical idea of a good life and individual flourishing play a pivotal role in describing and diagnosing the proper functioning of our social systems. On the other hand, Hirvonen’s conception of the pathologies of collective recognition does not seem to be subsumable under a radical organicist point of view. In fact, according to Hirvonen’s account, there is the possibility that the reproductive functions of a given social system may not be compromised and that, at the same time, this same social system produces forms of misrecognition or lack of recognition which are detrimental to the integrity and freedom of its members. A patriarchal and caste society, for example, can reproduce itself without problems. Women and slaves can be forced to perform merely reproductive functions from a material point of view (offspring reproduction and commodities production by means of forced labor) and, at the same time, an elite of men (defined by blood and/or economic wealth) can be given the task of supervising respect and the application of rules and values that regulate this society.

In line with this latter consideration, Arvi Särkelä argues that Honneth’s organicist conception proves to be insufficient to grasp the systemic aspects of the social disorders. Through a real conceptual reversal, Särkelä maintains that a society that proves capable only of reproducing itself without evolving is in a pathological state of stagnation. This statement becomes clearer if we reconsider the idea, put forward by Särkelä and exposed in the first part of the paper, that the essence

of a democratic society is its ability to transform itself under the pressure of new emerging individual and collective needs and interests. Behind such a perspective it is possible to grasp a naturalistic but not organicist conception of social life. It is a naturalist conception because it sees in human society a dimension of vital processes, even conflicting ones, which lead it to grow, change and evolve. It is non-organicist because this evolutionary and transformative point of view on society is incompatible with the idea that society becomes ill only to the extent that it is unable to self-sustain and reproduce itself according to a predetermined and static set of reproductive purposes. In the light of such a conception, along the lines of Dewey's reflections, Särkelä identifies at least two forms of pathology that can affect the associated life of human beings.¹⁸ The first type of pathology, which can properly be labeled as *social*, is characterized by an excess of conservatism, by an idealization of existing social conditions that end up being perceived by social actors in terms of mere facts of nature. Social pathology, therefore, occurs when the associated life stagnates and petrifies, limiting itself to reproducing its existing structures in a static and recursive way, without taking into account any new interests and needs that its members might have developed. In this sense, following Dewey, Särkelä sees in the organic reproduction of a society, when the process of social reproduction becomes an end in itself, the death of associated life.

The second type of pathology, which Särkelä defines as *societal*, is defined by an excess of transformative drives, which affects the necessary mechanisms of social reproduction. In this sense, societal pathologies occur when there is a socially widespread tendency to radically abolish, and not to reform, those institutions, habits and social customs that once did not have oppressive effects but guaranteed the integrity of society and the well-being of its members. The latter type of dysfunction can produce, on the one hand, a form of social disintegration and dissolution that depends on the impossibility, for a social environment, of reaching some sort of inner stability. On the other hand, it can trigger a conservative reaction, that is, a social pathology of the first type, which leads to the oppression of any critical voice within society and, therefore, to its stagnation. In light of these reflections, Särkelä can conclude that «social life is a kind of pulsating processual unity of the organic and the inorganic» (Särkelä 2017, pp. 122) of which the critical theorist must be able to identify «arrhythmias».

The influence of these ideas is evident in Särkelä's definition of ideology as *artificial respiration*. Särkelä sees ideology as an essential tool for ensuring the survival of society that has come to a dead end. This happens when society tends to reproduce itself mechanically, regardless of the fact that what were once the universal interests of the whole community have become, at some point, particular interests of a ruling class. In such a situation, members of the community who do not belong to the dominant group suffer from the social conditions in which they live. Furthermore, although dominated, they perceive the fact that the general interests of their society are surreptitiously identified with those of a few dominants. In this respect, the task of the ideological narrative is to inhibit the possibility of an authentic transformative practice within this sick society. To this end, an effective social ideology must be able to modify the conscience of the members of a given community consistently with the fact that the oppressed suffer from the conditions which they experience in their social existence. Simply put, ideological beliefs cannot limit themselves to making social circumstances, which are negatively experienced by social actors, appear as immutable. They must also be able to divert the desire for change that can arise in the victims of oppression towards an object other than the practical and concrete social dimension in which oppressed agents live and act. The objects that are liable to change become the social agents themselves. Perceiving the external social conditions as immutable, subjugated agents try to overcome the pathological state in which they are transforming themselves. In order to do so, an ideology must ensure that the misrecognition from which the oppressed suffer drives them «to the contempt of the practical in general, thus

¹⁸ For a broader description of these types of pathology and an analysis of the contribution of John Dewey's reflection in this regard, see in particular Särkelä (2017, pp. 107-126). In this essay, Särkelä analyzes in particular the reflections that the American philosopher elaborated in a cycle of lectures in China held between 1919 and 1920.

preventing any truly transformative activity by the members of the community» (Särkelä 2015, p. 76). In this sense, according to Särkelä, ideologies are true and false at the same time. On the one hand, they are true insofar as they do not hide the fact that social reality is pathological. Ideologies do not deny that society is ill and something must be transformed. On the other hand, they are false because they push agents to believe that the change of external social circumstances, which means a redefinition of the collective ends and interests of the community to which they belong, is impossible. Ideologies push agents in believing that the overcoming of the condition of disadvantage in which they find themselves rests in a change of consciousness with respect to this condition.¹⁹

In light of these considerations, it is possible to understand how much Särkelä also distances himself from the second-order disorder model described by Zurn. Ideology is indeed a form of disconnection of the second order: to be operational, it must be internalized by consciousness and prevent social agents from acting rationally. However, ideologies arise and take root in order to prevent a social body from dying, which is affected by a first-order pathology, that is, a disturbance of transformative mechanisms of social life that leads the latter to reproduce itself in a purely organic way.

6. Finnish critical theorists and the critics of Honneth's theory

It remains unclear if the refinements that these Finnish scholars have brought to Honneth's paradigm are able to overcome the criticisms that several critical theorists have moved against Honneth himself. Unfortunately, an accurate discussion concerning these strong and sound counter positions falls outside the objectives of this paper. The previous pages, in fact, have mainly aimed to provide a short introduction to the main aspects of the intellectual works of these Finnish thinkers. However, it is necessary to cite at least some of them in order to get an idea of the challenges that they pose to the ideas described above. Nancy Fraser has criticized the monism of Honneth's proposal, that grounds both his normative and social theory on the pivotal constitutive role of recognition.²⁰ In this respect, such an objection does not lose its power and validity when applied to the contributions of Hirvonen, Ikäheimo, Laitinen, and Särkelä, which are also centered on the idea that social recognition is the main constitutive element of social reality.

Lois McNay underlines how Honneth's conception of oppositional social agency does not consider how our bodily and psychological dispositions, which we acquire through the process of socialization, can naturalize experiences of social suffering and social misrecognition (or lack of recognition). In other words, according to McNay, Honneth institutes a causal connection between oppositional agency and experiences of social suffering that is too strong, underestimating the effects of normalization that acquired habits and customs can exercise on social agency.²¹

In line with these criticisms, Michael J. Thompson argues that the paradigm of recognition does not sufficiently take into account the constitutive and normative power that objective social institutions and structures can exercise on the development of both critical skills and expectations of recognition in social subjects. In this respect, Thompson asserts that forms of social recognition that from Honneth's perspective would be considered healthy and good could support a reproduction of society in which power relations, social hierarchies, and asymmetries prevail. In doing so, relations of recognition can support the perpetuation of pathologies that affect the objective side of the social reality, instead of calling them into question.²²

¹⁹ «Ideology culminates thus in an unintended learning process; it is unintended since the ideological consciousness intends not to change the world, but only itself; yet it is a learning process, because, in changing itself, the ideological consciousness also appears to change the world. Ideology denotes, then, a learning process that goes beyond itself: the participants learn to acknowledge the practical consequences of their ideological conceptions as the truth of those conceptions by assuming the standpoint of a generalized other – the great institutional achievement of the ideological experience itself» (Särkelä 2015, p. 77).

²⁰ See Fraser & Honneth (2003).

²¹ See McNay (2008).

²² See Thompson (2016, pp. 63-88).

Finally, Neal Harris shares the idea of Hirvonen, Ikäheimo, Laitinen, and Särkelä according to which the concept of social pathology is an important theoretical tool for critical and social theory. However, Harris warns us about the limits of a conceptualization of social pathology that is completely elaborated through a cognitive and recognitive lens. The risk, according to Harris, is to exclude from the diagnostic agenda of critical theorists those social pathologies that are not entirely or exclusively related to malfunctioning or deformation of intersubjective recognition, like negative self-perpetuating dynamics (the social, political and economic processes that cause and reinforce global warming, for instance) or normalcy and social conformism.²³

All these critical positions and comments deserve to be discussed more deeply. Until now, the Finnish scholars have paid more attention to advance a corrective critique of Honneth's conception of recognition and social pathology. They have not addressed and discussed explicitly Honneth's lack of attention to the issue of social power and the role of social structures, both on the subjective and objective sides. However, I think it is worthwhile to consider in a positive manner their focus on concepts like «attitudes of recognition» and «third-order reality»; their attempt to understand how the dynamic of social groups can affect individuals and their reciprocal relations; and their general propensity to reinterpret Honneth's idea of social pathology and his theory of recognition in a more naturalistic framework, talking about social life as a *life-process*. In this respect, Finnish scholars' attention to the socio-ontological aspects of a theory of recognition may be seen as a theoretical and philosophical stance that is sensitive towards the remarks mentioned in this section, which point out the flaws of Honneth's paradigm in terms of a theory of power, social agency and social structures. There is no doubt that the Finnish scholars here presented still consider the idea of recognition central for understanding social reality and its normativity. Nevertheless, their approach tends to be ecumenic and unbiased towards other traditions of critical thought, insofar the latter aim: 1) to contribute to the development of a social philosophy that is anti-reductionist concerning the idea of social pathology and; 2) to support the idea that an authentic form of emancipation cannot be easily separated from the achievement of a collective and individual good life.

7. Conclusion

These pages have focused on the contributions of certain Finnish scholars to critical social philosophy as a science of social pathologies. In the light of the previous considerations, is it reasonable to talk about a Finnish school of critical theory? Somebody could find the term too demanding, and perhaps unnecessary for labelling the philosophical work of these scholars. However, it is possible to provide some reasonable justifications for employing such an onerous definition. It could be underlined that they have a common adherence to a fundamental idea of Honneth's thought, namely recognition. Interpersonal recognition, in its multifaceted manifestations, is essential both for individual flourishing and well-being and for the existence and proper functioning of the objective social reality (understood as a set of collective institutions and customs). From this point of view, it can certainly be argued that, for Finnish theorists as well as for Honneth, social philosophy and critical theory are essentially tied to a precise formal-ethical approach. Such an approach aims to identify not so much the universal and absolute ends of human self-realization, but the conditions of possibility of such self-realization.²⁴

²³ See Harris (2019).

²⁴ It is worth noting that there are other scholars that, following similar theoretical assumptions concerning Honneth's theory of recognition, have contributed to the analysis of such specific topics. Hans Arentshorst has mainly discussed the limits and contributions of Honneth's perspective regarding the problem of degenerations of democratic politics, and social and political freedom (Arentshorst 2016), and of Honneth's normative conception of the market and economics (Arentshorst 2015). Heidi Elmgren instead has deepened the study and the critique of the idea of meritocracy and its relation to recognition (Elmgren 2015, 2018). Further contributions on the topic of social pathology developed by Finnish scholars can be found in the volume "Special Issue-Pathologies of Recognition", *Studies in Social and Political Thought*, vol. 25, 2/2015.

However, these characteristics are not enough for justifying the use of the term «school». Therefore, is there something more specific about the common way of reinterpreting Honneth's work by the four Finnish philosophers? This paper has shown how Hirvonen, Ikäheimo, Laitinen, and Särkelä tend to enrich Honneth's paradigm focusing on the socio-ontological side of recognition, whereas Honneth is inclined to privilege the discussion of the normative and ethical nature of reciprocal recognition.

In doing so, the members of the Finnish school make explicit and discuss the ontological commitments that Honneth has implicitly assumed while he was developing his social theory. To properly recognize somebody, in fact, implies the presence and influence of mental, perceptive, and practical skills that allows the realization of effective forms of recognition, as well as the action of those objective social entities that embody types of social recognition that are collectively accepted. Honneth simply assumes that interpersonal recognition is the main constitutive factor of social reality. The Finnish scholars analyze in a deeper way the connection between recognition and individual and collective intentionality, the role of beliefs, habits, and attitudes, and the socio-ontological conditions (the nature of social institutions, norms and conflicts) through which collective and individual agents actualize good forms of recognition. Refining Honneth's paradigm from a socio-ontological perspective, Hirvonen, Ikäheimo, Laitinen, and Särkelä employ in a novel way philosophical styles and concepts that belong to traditions of thought, such as analytic philosophy and American pragmatism, thereby further enriching the intellectual tools available for critical theorists.

It is certainly possible to identify significant differences between the individual positions of the scholars presented here concerning the most fruitful way of diagnosing social disorders. Just to cite an example, Ikäheimo seems to tend towards a normative conception of social pathology, in which it is the distortion of the cognitive skills necessary for a positive personal self-relationship that is pathological. Särkelä instead promotes a naturalistic approach that conceives social pathology as a phenomenon capable of disturbing or blocking the development and evolutionary process of a given society. However, what unites the Finnish school of critical theory on these issues is the critical stance taken by its members with respect to the two models of social pathology that have been explicitly supported by Honneth. In this sense, the Finnish theorists defend the idea that a social philosophy that aims to be a diagnostic and therapeutic science of social ills must avoid running into two fundamental limits. The first, typical of Zurn's model, could be defined as reductionist, whereby all social pathologies are characterized by the same structure. The second, which afflicts instead the strong organicist conception proposed by Honneth, is to lose sight of the fact of the evolutionary capacity and plasticity of our social existence. Human beings are in fact capable of making history: they can not only reproduce the social environment in which they are born and develop. They can also change such a social environment if it ceases to be a favorable precondition to the pursuit of a good life.

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