

Discussion Article

What kind of thing must human society be if it is vulnerable to falling ill?

Examining *Diagnosing Social Pathology: Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, and Durkheim* (Cambridge UP, 2023) by Frederick Neuhaus

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It may be a surprise to many readers that the idea of social pathologies has returned to social philosophy and social ontology, and furthermore, that its return route is via contemporary critical social theory of the Frankfurt School. Doesn't the very idea of social pathology sound somewhat uncritical? And whether critical or not, is not all talk about societies falling ill or being pathological most charitably forgotten and put aside as Durkheim's and other early sociologists' perhaps understandable attempt to grasp societal reality with the help of biological metaphors?

Perhaps not, at least according to Frederick Neuhaus's book, which is about "the connection between social ontology and the discourse of social pathology" (2023, xi). The question it asks is "What kind of thing must human society be if it is vulnerable

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to falling ill?” (2023, xi). The question is motivated by the observation that while there are clear differences between biological organisms capable of literally falling ill, and human societies, there has nonetheless been an “irresistible propensity to use vocabulary of illness, health and cure” about the latter, from Plato via Hobbes to contemporary authors. (Neuhouser 2023, x).

As most readers may not readily see the benefits of the pathology-vocabulary and indeed will be inclined to think that the vocabulary is misleading or harmful for the aims of social philosophy, it is good to start by paraphrasing what Neuhouser does *not* mean by pathologies (Section One). After that, I summarize Neuhouser’s main points. I then try to place his conception on a map of four conceptions of social pathology and social wrongs. In the last section, I discuss Neuhouser’s attempt at a synthesis—following Durkheim and Hegel—of two considerations, functionalism and artificiality. This synthesis is meant to tell us what kind of thing society must be for it to be able to be in a literally pathological state.

1. WHAT NEUHOUSER DOES NOT MEAN BY PATHOLOGY

Neuhouser helpfully distinguishes his idea of a social pathology from five other conceptions of social illness, that he puts aside.

One view is simply that society is ill, when significant number of its members are (physiologically or mentally) ill, and the second one adds that society must further play a significant causal role in that predicament (Neuhouser 2023, 1). Neuhouser finds such conceptions lacking. The causal role in bringing about illness is important, as social pathologies must indeed be bad for at least some social members, but Neuhouser comments that “the socially pathological character of such a society lies in its dysfunctional dynamics, not in its member’s ... illness.” (Neuhouser 2023, 2). As an example, Neuhouser mentions Marx’s views on alienation. Alienated workers need not be ill. Capitalist alienation is “a systematic result of capitalism’s class structure and its mode of organizing production and accumulation.” (Neuhouser 2023, 3). What is at stake is a dysfunction of structure or of the society’s constitutive dynamics. Another dysfunction that Marx stresses is the “inherent tendency of capitalism to produce recurring crises” (Neuhouser 2023, 3). For Neuhouser, it is the dysfunctionality of society itself that makes *it* pathological, not its causal relation to the members’ illnesses. By contrast, what have since been termed “non-speculative” conceptions of social pathology (Sik 2024) would restrict themselves to the mortality and illnesses of the human members. In contrast, Neuhouser is examining putative illnesses of the society, not its members—thus trying to articulate what Sik would call a “speculative” conception of pathology.

The third view that Neuhouser puts aside is one that sees experienced social suffering or pain as the hallmark of social illness. Suffering is indeed not to be neglected, but Neuhouser stresses that admitting this “does not, however, imply that socially caused suffering is either a necessary or a sufficient feature of social pathology.” (Neuhouser 2023, 3). Many medical illnesses do not involve suffering, and for Marx as well, to continue with the example, the alienated may feel “confirmed and at ease” in their alienation. There are false positives, such as someone’s unjustified outrage at seeing hijab-wearing women in “their” streets: it may be a form of suffering but not a response to genuine social ill. And there are false negatives, as Neuhouser demonstrates with Nietzsche’s idea that some suffering, as in pregnancy, connotes growth and new possibilities, rather than degeneration or dysfunction, which Neuhouser thinks are the case with genuine social pathologies.

Fourthly, Neuhouser puts aside the (in)famous views of Plato and Hobbes, who hold that social illnesses are “large-scale versions of physiological or mental illnesses that afflict individual humans”. (Neuhouser 2023, 4). These views consider human society as an organism, as in Plato’s isomorphism between the *polis* and the soul and in Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, Chapter XXIX, attributing various physiological illnesses to human society. Neuhouser emphasizes that this will not do, as the analogy “diverts our attention from real social phenomena” and “from the specifically social dysfunctions” (Neuhouser 2023, 5). He emphasizes that “none of the classical instances of social pathology rely on this model”. (Yet, Neuhouser does not fully reject the idea that if a society is to be able to be ill, it must in some way resemble organisms; I think he would have conceptual room to take more critical distance to this organismic view).

Finally, Neuhouser puts aside the view, which talks about social pathology merely as “a haphazardly collected group of so called “social problems”—including poverty, crime, drug abuse, “promiscuity,” and racism” (Mills 1943, 165–80). It is this usage that would suggest that social pathology talk is not really critical or progressive in the sense desired by critical theorists. After all, this fifth approach worries, in a conservative spirit, about deviation from social norms, and failures of individuals “to ‘adapt’ or ‘adjust’ to those norms” (Neuhouser 2023, 5). Neuhouser reminds us that the norms that are supposedly “essential to social order” to be reproduced rather than called into question include thrift, sobriety, heterosexual monogamy, discipline in work, commitment to family. Typically, these are also seen as bad for the individuals, and calling for social work (Neuhouser 2023, 5). For Neuhouser, the fact that homosexuality was one of these pathologies reminds us most strikingly of the dangers of relying on prevailing criteria, and the fallibility of our present judgements. More centrally to the theories of social pathology, Neuhouser also sees a theoretical deficiency in this approach: here a mere list of “social problems” constitutes an account of social illness. This view “lacks a sufficiently complex conception of human social

life" (Neuhouser 2023, 6) and is made "independently of any specific understanding of a society's structure or basic functions." (Neuhouser 2023, 6). Neuhouser quotes C. Wright Mills, who pointed out that this way of conceiving of social pathology is capable only of "collecting and dealing in a fragmentary way with scattered problems" (Mills 1943: 166).¹ (Neuhouser 2023, 6). It cannot tell us "how a society in its basic structure is deformed or unbalanced, or how its essential functions are disrupted, impaired, or misaligned." (Neuhouser 2023, 7). In Neuhouser's book all these views of social pathology are to be put aside in a search for a better understanding.

2. THE MAIN POINTS OF NEUHOUSER'S BOOK

After explaining what he does not mean by social pathology, Neuhouser (2023, 7–10) goes briefly through the main disadvantages and advantages of the concept. The burdens include links to Nazi ideology, which made extensive use of the idea of a diseased society. Some U.S sociologists, as mentioned above, linked the concept mainly with social deviance, and the concept might call to mind Spencer's social Darwinism and the idea of the survival of the fittest. Sometimes the concept is also used very loosely: whatever one disapproves of is "sick" (Sontag 1978: 74). A further disadvantage that Neuhouser tackles head-on is the fact that while animal organisms can literally fall ill, society is not an organism, so why apply the concept of illness at all.¹

Neuhouser sees theories of social pathology as having two main advantages. "First, they can draw our attention to social phenomena worthy of critique to which theories focused exclusively on justice are blind; and, second, they have at their disposal critical resources beyond those employed by most liberal political and social philosophy." (Neuhouser 2023, 10). For Neuhouser, pathology is "the result of a social dynamic—a self-reproducing nexus of collective practices—that, apart from its connection to injustice, diminishes the good (or impedes the ends) of those who participate in those practices." (Neuhouser 2023, 10). Theories of social pathology try to analyze the underlying structural conditions, rather than mere symptoms.

Neuhouser emphasizes two significant disanalogies between animal and social illness. The first is that "human societies are normatively constituted entities whose workings depend on the agency, including some sort of 'acceptance' of social norms, of their human members." (Neuhouser 2023, 25). This means that there is an internal link to criticism—the members can also withhold their acceptance. The second

¹ As a disadvantage of the concept of social pathology, theorists like Thompson (2016) and Harris (2022) would no doubt add the worry of the domestication of critical theory.

disanalogy is that it may well be that all human societies have always contained some illnesses, while animals are typically in normal health (Neuhouser 2023, 28).

In Chapter Two, Neuhouser discusses the idea of a society as an organism. While he rejects many aspects of such an idea, he holds on to a modest idea of society as a totality or a social whole, where political institutions are embedded in larger social life. The key idea is that “the differentiated parts of a healthy organism must cooperate so as to achieve the ends of the whole” (Neuhouser 2023, 31). In talking about the functions of differentiated social institutions, Neuhouser accepts three important points: like organisms, societies are functional beings in the sense that “how they are constituted and how their parts act and interact cannot be understood without ascribing ends to them, as well as to the whole they make up.” (Neuhouser 2023, 31). Without this assumption, talk of dysfunctionality would not make sense. Secondly Neuhouser accepts the idea of functionally organized, coordinated functional subsystems or spheres, and a division of labour between them. Third, Neuhouser agrees that reproduction is a central task of human societies. (Neuhouser 2023, 32). Yet, Neuhouser is careful to distance himself from sociological functionalism or any fixed ideas of development and misdevelopment.

Chapters Three and Four discuss Marx. An important finding is that according to Marx, capitalism is prone to crises by its own lights. But even more gravely, when capitalism functions well by its own lights, what from one viewpoint (that of capitalism or capitalists) is functional, is from another viewpoint (of workers and of ethical ideas of good life) dysfunctional. The main aim of the book is nicely characterized by Neuhouser as attempting a synthesis of Plato’s functionalism (discussed in Chapter Five) and Rousseau’s artificiality -thesis (discussed in Chapter Six); while Durkheim (Chapters 8–10, with a nod to his predecessors in Chapter 7) and Hegel (Chapters 11–13) are the two heroes who previously have attempted such a synthesis.

Thus, the book is structured as readings and commentaries on selected big names of social theory. The first author Neuhouser discusses is Marx, especially his analysis of capitalist accumulation as having a life of its own. The Marx-discussion reveals one major downside with Neuhouser’s reliance on the idea of “function” (Chapters 3 and 4, which are a very interesting read). As mentioned, for Marx capitalism is a crisis-prone system, so one literal sense of dysfunctionality is exemplified by its nature to keep driving itself in crises. But more importantly, when capitalism functions well by its own lights, it leads to *ethical* dysfunctions in the larger society such as alienation or exploitation. This is bad, as the economic (sub)system should serve the (ethical) ends of the larger society. It thus turns out that Neuhouser consciously operates with two notions of dysfunction: more “functional” dysfunctions on the one hand, and “ethical dysfunctions” on the other hand. Especially when capitalism

works well by its own lights, it generates ethical dysfunctionality (such as being bad for the citizens' freedom and good life).

I think that at this point some readers will have their eyebrows raised: why should ethical failures be called *dysfunctions* in any ontologically robust sense—clearly such dysfunctions are ethically unsatisfactory in violating the citizens' freedom and good life, but why not make *that* evaluative or ethical point without the notion of a function? The danger is that in some cases social “pathology” ends up being *doubly metaphorical*: pathologies amount to dysfunctions, and the second type of dysfunction really amounts to ethical unsatisfactoriness?

The social ontological question “what kind of thing must a human society be, if it is vulnerable to *ethical failures*” seems to allow a wide variety of answers, and clearly Neuhouser does not intend his original question to be diluted in this way; but the conceptual moves where pathologies amount to dysfunctions and the important dysfunctions really amount to ethical failures seem to leave this reading open. So Neuhouser would need to provide a conception of social reality in which ethical failures are indeed dysfunctions, and more precisely, dysfunctions which we would call pathologies.

It is Hegel's idea of social reality as the “living good” (discussed in the final chapters) that is meant to show that ethical shortcomings are indeed also dysfunctionality, that is, *ontological* and not merely ethical deficiencies. How satisfactory the proposed view will seem to a reader may depend on the reader's background assumptions about the aims of social philosophy, or so I'll suggest below.

Some central questions in the book might have benefitted from including Habermas's takes on social pathologies, solidarity, and colonization of the lifeworld by the system, so it was a bit surprising to see Habermas more or less absent in the discussion.

3. PLACING NEUHOUSER'S CONCEPTION OF SOCIAL PATHOLOGY ON A MAP. SOCIALLY WRONG BECAUSE PATHOLOGICAL OR PATHOLOGICAL BECAUSE SOCIALLY WRONG?

In digesting Neuhouser's views, it is helpful to try to place Neuhouser on a map of existing approaches to social pathology, of four kinds². 1) For many, the idea of a social pathology is just one replaceable metaphor for anything being criticizable or wrong with a society, without different pathologies sharing any unifying feature. This can be called an “anti-theoretical” approach, such as the view criticized by Mills above. 2) On a different approach, all pathologies share some structural feature and

2 Laitinen & Särkelä 2019.

the societal wrongs with that feature count as pathologies. 3) Yet others try to defend the view that societies are organisms, and finally 4) some hold the more promising view that social reality can be approached as social *life*, thanks to which it can be ill. Arguably Axel Honneth, who re-introduced the use of the pathology-talk in critical theory of Frankfurt School, oscillates between these usages of “pathology”, or seems to have elements of at least three different views in his writings.³

Neuhouser also has affinities with three of those approaches, but pretty firmly rejects what can be called the first, “anti-theoretical” one. Most importantly, he defends the fourth conception and writes that “that social reality is *social life* is the main ontological claim I investigate here.”(xii, italics added). Yet, he explicitly states—quoting Honneth approvingly—that this must necessarily embrace the third, “organicistic” view as well: “an important part of my task is to articulate in which respects societies are like living organisms (and in which respects they are not), since in the absence of any such similarities, speaking of sick societies would indeed be empty talk.” (10). And further, social pathologies for Neuhouser share the important structural feature of being *dysfunctions* of vital social functions—societies come with subfunctions, which can be understood only in the context of the whole, and any of these subfunctions, or their coordination, can fail. For Neuhouser, dysfunctionality is tightly connected to life and organisms. However, for those readers, who cannot stomach talk about social health, illness or pathology, Neuhouser’s book should nonetheless be palatable because his view ends up being about *dysfunctional* social formations—and presumably no-one can reject the question: “what kind of thing must human society be if it is vulnerable to becoming *dysfunctional*?” as badly formed. So Neuhouser shares elements of the three different approaches and clearly opposes only the anti-theoretical approaches, which would use pathology-talk about ‘a haphazardly collected group of “social problems”—including poverty, crime, drug abuse, “promiscuity,” and racism’ (Mills 1943, 165–80). Note however that anti-theoretical approaches need not be socially conservative in that way.

Relatedly, Neuhouser does not explicitly distinguish and discuss an Euthyphro-style question: is something a social pathology because it is wrong, or is it a social wrong because it is a social pathology?⁴ One may suspect that the two kinds of dysfunctions Neuhouser distinguishes are different in this respect: something can be wrong with society because it is (literally, “functionally”) dysfunctional, and something can be (ethically) dysfunctional because it wrongs people; for example because it fails to reach the aims of freedom and preconditions of well-being for all. Addressing

3 Särkelä & Laitinen 2019.

4 See Laitinen & Särkelä (2023).

this question would in my view be relevant for grasping an important aspect of the “grammar” of the social pathology talk.

As a sidenote, Neuhouser does not perhaps think that the category of a social wrong is helpful here, or at least it does not appear so in the book. Most of his usages of the terminology of wrongness are about something going wrong, or about wrong steps forward, or there being something wrong with social life (Neuhouser 2023, 43, 64, 81, 102–3, 223–4, 338). Here are just a couple of quotes: “there is an ontological difference between human society and biological phenomena and that something goes wrong when social processes simply mirror life.” (Neuhouser 2023, 64); “something has gone badly wrong when the movements of things, which are underwritten by human activities, serve the sole end of maximizing surplus value.” (Neuhouser 2023, 81); “one suffers (consciously) when one is in pain, but it is also possible to suffer from (to be afflicted with) an illness without knowing that anything is wrong. To say that a society suffers from anomie is to say that it is in some way harmed by that condition, which may or may not be present to consciousness.” (Neuhouser 2023, 223–4). Some of Neuhouser’s usages are about wrongful behaviour, about “distinguishing wrong behavior from right” (Neuhouser 2023, 128; cf. also 129, 229). Arguably, there is a third, important dyadic sense of “wronging” or “being wronged”, closely related to harming and violating legitimate claims, which Neuhouser does not use, but which is often a normatively important element of social pathologies.⁵

4. SYNTHESIS OF FUNCTIONALISM AND ARTIFICIALITY

As mentioned, Neuhouser characterizes the aim of the book as attempting a synthesis of Plato’s functionalism (Chapter Five) and Rousseau’s artificiality—thesis (Chapter Six).

The main point of the artificiality thesis is that societies are made by humans, and Neuhouser’s Rousseau seems to believe this on multiple grounds. On the one hand “social institutions come into the world only as the (largely unintended) results of free human actions and that the ongoing activity of social members is constitutive of what those institutions are.” On the other hand, Neuhouser states that Rousseau’s most important claim is that

‘we all make the rules’ that govern our participation in social life, as expressed in his statement that social inequality—and, by implication, the institutions that make it possible—“depends on a sort of convention and is ... authorized, by [human] consent” (DI: 131/OC: 131). I have interpreted this statement

5 See Laitinen & Särkelä (2023).

as meaning that social institutions are constituted by normative rules whose efficacy depends on their being accepted and applied by rational agents, where repeated applications reinforce and strengthen the institutions in question. (Neuhouser 2023, 137).

Neuhouser's Rousseau thus seems undecided between two important approaches to institutions—one where they arise from interaction (“interaction first,” or “functions first” -approach) and where they arise from collective acceptance of norms (“representation first,” or “rules first” -approach). (See Guala 2016). The full significance of the artificiality-thesis remains a bit unclear to me. Say, for Aristotle and his followers, human societies are natural, whereas for Hobbes and his followers, they are artificial. I would have thought that seeing societies as natural would make pathology-talk even more fitting, so presumably the artificiality-thesis is discussed for the straightforward reason that Neuhouser thinks it is true, whether or not it makes pathology-talk easier or harder. Or perhaps it is that we all nowadays believe that societies are artefacts made by humans, and it is precisely for this reason that the naturalistic pathology-talk is so puzzling, and its (perhaps puzzling) appeal motivates philosophical investigation.

Throughout the book, the ontological thesis is defended that “human societies are normatively constituted entities whose workings depend on the agency, including some sort of ‘acceptance’ of social norms, of their human members.” (Neuhouser 2023, 25). Neuhouser relies surprisingly deeply on the collective intentionality approach of especially Searle, but not unlike that of Tuomela or Gilbert (these theories can be seen as contemporary versions of ontological *social contract approach* to sociality, which could give some pause to Hegel-sympathizers like Neuhouser).

There would be theories of social ontology available that might fit more directly with Neuhouser's concerns—perhaps ones that are more “externalist” (cf. Witt 2023, or Guala 2016). The collective intentionality -approach fits well the “representation-first” phenomena where something is first thought of and then passed as the rule, norm, rule, or constitutive definition—most explicitly in legislation; and the explanatory power of collective intentionality definitely should not be underestimated, and the final words on the strengths and weaknesses of the approach are not yet out. However, the collective intentionality -approach fits less well with “function-first” phenomena where certain patterns of interaction emerge and start realizing societal functions, possibly unbeknownst to the participants.⁶ Given Neuhouser's emphasis on functions, this would have been perhaps more straightforward combination. It also fits less well with the sense in which the agents or “acceptors” and the contents of their intentional

6 The helpful terms “representation-first” and “function-first” are used by Johannes Himmelreich 2017.

states are partly produced by prevailing structures that also in some sense precede the agents. This chicken-and-egg problem of structure and agency is not faced head-on, but in parts of the book Neuhouser is surprisingly agent-centered (in the passages referring to the ontological relevance of collective acceptance), whereas in other parts more holistic and structural (e.g. the chapter on Hegel's objective spirit, following Descombes's 2014 reconstruction).

One interpretation that comes to mind is that Neuhouser here turns the *ethical or normative* point from his previous books (especially sharply in Neuhouser 2000), that full *social freedom* requires among other things that each participant can see themselves in and accept the social whole, into an *ontological* thesis—a bit too Searlean to the taste of many, including me before I hear more—that such acceptance is of sole constitutive ontological or genetic relevance to the society. The ethical or normative point would however be compatible with other ontological views: views on which habits, actions, systematic unintended consequences, external sanctions, and so on suffice to guarantee the continued existence of social reality: withdrawing acceptance does not in itself make the society to go away synchronously, even though it may motivate protests, disobedience, and efforts for change. To the question “what kind of thing must human society be if ... something is wrong with it when it *does not realize human freedom and well-being*” a whole range of answers is available. These answers may be better or worse in various ways, but it is unlikely that any specific answer (especially a Searlean one) is one that *must* be the case to enable such criticism.

The Chapters 8–10 on Durkheim make a host of interesting points. Many questions—for example on different kinds of functional, existential, and historical explanations—are very illuminatingly discussed. The main points of agreement between Durkheim and Neuhouser in chapter 8 include the following: Human societies are functionally organized: they are made up of differentiated subsystems that carry out coordinated, specialized functions. A scientific understanding of society, like physiology and medicine, includes three related tasks: explanation, evaluation, and prescription. Functional analysis, not causal explanation or existential functional explanation, is the primary concern of a theory of social pathology. Causal claims are necessary for theories of social pathology in two respects: ascribing a function to X implies that X has certain useful effects; and responding to social pathologies (usually) requires understanding the unhealthy conditions' causes. Functional analysis can be aided by knowing the specific history of the particular society being studied but need not rely on a conception of universal history. (Neuhouser 2023, 191).

Chapter Nine also includes many points that Neuhouser adopts from Durkheim: Societies differ from biological organisms in that the individual members of the former are endowed with consciousness. The essential functions of human societies include not only material reproduction but also achieving ethical ends. And further,

“integration and solidarity, achieved in part by social members’ acknowledgment of the authority of moral rules, is a vital need of human society, although in organized societies solidarity depends more on individuals’ integration into society’s subsystems than it does in segmental societies, where individuals are attached directly to the whole via a strong, normative collective consciousness” (Neuhouser 2023, 228). Chapter Ten is devoted to the idea of “science of morality”.

My impression is that the discussion in these chapters does not seem to draw extensively on Durkheim-research⁷ but reads like a Hegelian social philosopher’s reconstructive attempt to get something out of original readings of Durkheim’s first-hand texts.

5. HEGEL ON RATIONAL SOCIAL LIFE

The book’s ultimate hero is Hegel; and indeed, even for those not interested in conceptualizations of health and illness, or conceptualizations of ethical deficiencies as (ethical) “dysfunctions”, the book is an interesting comparative study of Hegelian social ontology as in some ways superior to Marx or Durkheim. The central notion, not that often stressed by Hegel-interpreters, is that of a “living good”:

When Hegel sets out his account of rational social life, or *Sittlichkeit*, in the Philosophy of Right, he begins by identifying it as “the living good” (*das lebendige Gute*) (PhR: §142). The standard English translation of *Sittlichkeit*, “ethical life,” reflects this definition: most fundamentally, social life consists in processes of life infused with ethical content. Although human society is an ethical phenomenon for Hegel, the term “ethical life” signals that his account of the rational society has ambitions beyond those of moral philosophy. Calling rational social life “the living good” expresses an ontological thesis about the kind of being human societies possess: like Durkheim, Hegel takes human societies to be normatively and functionally constituted, living beings. (Neuhouser 2023, 281).

It is this ontology of the living good that ultimately serves as the fullest background for Neuhouser’s favoured view of social pathology:

For Hegel social pathologies should be understood not only in terms of impaired functioning generally or as imbalances among specialized functional spheres,

⁷ Just as the Marx-chapters do not seem to draw extensively on recent Marx-scholarship, but are an independent take. It is my impression that a lot of recent work on social metabolism or the so-called original accumulation would be relevant for a Marxian take on social pathologies.

but also as ways in which society fails in the spiritual task of enabling its members to relate to life in the mode of freedom. (Neuhouser 2023, xvii)

On this view, ethical failures to realize freedom are indeed dysfunctions (while on rival views they need not be, but can be simply ethical failures), and the dysfunctions are indeed social pathologies (while on rival views they need not be but can be simply dysfunctions).

It is possible to do (social) philosophy by drawing sharp analytical dichotomies and make progress by keeping things clear and separate—not mixing them up, as it were. Or, it is possible to make progress by showing how things hang together after all, and by overcoming dichotomies. Without the latter aspiration it may seem undesirable to connect vocabularies of life and pathology to social ontology and social normativity, and it may seem better to simply talk about ethical deficiencies and functional imbalances separately. The jury is out—and given the nature of social philosophy, will remain so—on which is the strongest view.

Yet, I think it is a good Hegelian legacy to aim at both sharp distinctions and at overcoming them in a fruitful overall picture, and I think that Neuhouser excels on both aims. On the whole, Neuhouser's book is definitely the best book on the topic of social pathology, by a leading theorist of social freedom. If one is interested in the question of what kind of thing a society must be, if it can literally fall ill, this book should definitely be on the essential reading list. And equally so, even if one takes pathology-talk metaphorically, but is interested in social wrongs and dysfunctions.

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