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Understanding climate injustice as social pathology through the lens of psychoanalysis, recognition theory and critical psychology

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Abstract

The concept of climate injustice and a socio-critical, psychoanalytical perspective associate the climate crisis with other forms of social injustice classifying these as 'social pathologies'. Two approaches towards social transformation, both recent Frankfurt School developments, are presented: (1) the double asymmetry of the social (Herrmann), a concept that sees the strength of social bonds as stemming from the acceptance of difference and (2) the value-oriented philosophical approach to radically change patterns of everyday life practice (von Redecker). The latter finds expression in social protest movements such as Fridays for Future or Extinction Rebellion. Seen through the lens of the anti-psychiatry movement, some 'psychopathology' can be re-framed as a meaningful, resistant expression of social grievances. Our integrative approach provides a framework that makes room for non-violent difference, destigmatisation of real (as opposed to neurotic) anxiety and the anger it produces, recognition of and responsibility for the other instead of bilateral subjugation, and mutual vulnerability as a driving force for change in both subjects and systems, on the road to healing social pathologies.

Keywords

alterity theory, climate injustice, critical theory, Extinction Rebellion, Fridays for Future, mental health, psychoanalysis, recognition theory, social transformation

Introduction

The term climate change refers to long-term changes in temperatures and weather patterns. Humans, especially those living in Western, industrialized nations, can be identified as the main contributors to climate change since the 19th century, particularly due to the burning of fossil fuels (Leichenko et al, 2019).

Climate change affects both natural and human environments, with some regions and their populations' health, housing, security and economy already more affected by environmental degradation and its consequences than others; in addition, climate-induced migrations can be expected in the future (United Nations, n.d.). It can be assumed that these effects will intensify in the coming decades (IPCC, 2021).

Dealing with these facts can evoke strong feelings of loss, guilt, fear, shame, and despair that are difficult to endure (Hickman et al, 2021). The ways in which we deal with these feelings influence how adaptive or maladaptive the societal response to the climate crisis will be. In recent years, more attention has been paid to psychological factors contributing to the climate crisis, as exemplified by the American Psychological Association (APA) being granted IPCC observer status and psychologists' participation in the Sixth Assessment Report (cf Andrews et al, 2019: 2).

In this article, we focus on how a combined social-psychological and psychoanalytic approach can make a contribution to understanding the mechanisms in both subjects and societies that have led to this disequilibrium, as well as indicating pathways to potentially transform them. Psychoanalysis has always been dedicated to enlightenment ideals and emancipation of the subject from inner restrictions (Dahmer, 1975; Will, 2003; Gast, 2020). More specifically, it has been an indispensable element of Frankfurt School critical social theory since the 1960s. For Honneth (2001), the psychoanalytic focus on the unconscious underscores the limits of human rationality and highlights forces that counteract emancipation.

The climate crisis is a result of social dynamics and it affects every subject. Therefore, it can be analysed using both critical social theory and its corollary, critical subject theory. The latter, originating in Marxist influenced, psychoanalytical social psychology (Habermas 1973, Dahmer 1975, Jacoby 1978, Horn 1998), focuses on the subject within the context of critical social theory. Drawing on a notion proposed by Honneth and rooted in both the early Frankfurt School and psychoanalysis, we designate the climate crisis as a 'social pathology'. After elaborating on the concept of social pathology, we introduce the more recent social philosophical concept termed 'double asymmetry of the social' (Herrmann). This concept views human vulnerability and responsibility within a matrix delineated by the complementary approaches of recognition theory (Hegel) and alterity theory (Lévinas), highlighting the dialectic between separating otherness and solidary connection (I).

Applying these socio-philosophical perspectives to the socio-critical psychoanalytic approaches to the climate crisis, it becomes apparent that the latter can be assigned either to the recognition theory tradition (for example, Paul Hoggett's "perverse

culture” or Sally Weintrobe’s “culture of uncare”) or to the alterity theory tradition (for example Donna Orange’s concept of “the other’s keeper”). What they have in common is a fundamental critique of capitalistic and neoliberal social and economic activity (cf Jaeggi, 2013) as the core of the climate crisis. This outlines the focus of the second section (II).

Man-made destruction of the environment can induce strong feelings that consciously or unconsciously challenge the subject’s experience, defences, and coping capabilities. At the same time, feelings have a signal function and can initiate attempts to adapt. In this context, the differentiation between realistic anxiety and neurotic anxiety is of utmost importance. The theoretical investigation of the psychological dimension of the climate crisis is further specified by a critical examination of the ideological construction of psychological suffering, which can be seen not only from the traditional psychoanalytic standpoint as a compromise between subjective needs and social adaptation, but also as a meaningful, resistant expression of social grievances (III).

Subsequently, as a contribution to theorisation on new forms of protest, we outline climate activist approaches to social transformation away from carefree consumerism, apparent apathy and denial, and towards a more caring and responsible stance (IV).

While sections I to III draw on critical subject and social theories from an academic standpoint, the final section is more descriptive. On the one hand, we strive to demonstrate that activists’ goals and narratives are based on discourses that can be understood and supported by social science. On the other hand we do not wish to dilute the current revolutionary fantasies, because these are an antidote to the “entrenched rule of the privileged”, as formulated by Horkheimer and Adorno (1984: 23). In this way, we emphasise that this movement, emerging from a younger generation, is a realm of experience and voices which we do not wish to encounter with dry analysis and objectification, but instead to witness and support.

(I) Social pathologies and the subject’s ‘second nature’

Climate change with its catastrophic current and predicted impacts (IPCC, 2021) can be understood as a social phenomenon (Weintrobe 2013, 2021; Orange, 2017). Drawing on Kant’s Enlightenment ideal of an imperative of reason, Hegelian dialectics, Marxist sociology, and psychoanalytic concepts such as unconscious dynamics in human interaction, the Frankfurt School has developed a systematic approach to social criticism starting in the first half of the twentieth century. This approach aims to emancipate individuals and influence social struggles (cf Iser et al, 2010). It draws attention to *societal pathologies*, assuming that an informed, self-reflexive subject can better deal with the inhibition of freedoms, inequalities and

injustices caused by capitalist systems (cf Honneth, 2020). The social philosopher Axel Honneth termed the impairments to social reasoning produced by such systems as ‘social pathologies’. The ethical core of this socio-critical standpoint is found in Hegel’s political philosophy: social pathologies begin when institutions and social practices deviate from the progressive potential for reason attained through the course of history, that is, an ideal of rationality that strives for undistorted self-realisation for the common good. Thus, this approach embraces some aspects of Enlightenment thinking while criticising others (cf Horkheimer, 1947): it supports a reflexive ideal of rationality which encompasses a critique of instrumental reason, an idea which has buttressed societal ideologies that have significantly contributed to the climate crisis.

As this deviation progresses, a “historical process of deformation of reason” or a “falling short of general principles of reason” (Honneth, 2020: 41, *own translation*) ensues. The individual subject is denied a fulfilling life, and there is a systematic loss of “opportunities for intersubjective self-realisation” that is experienced as suffering (ibid.: 35, *own translation*). In general, those affected do not fight back or question the social ills owing to factors constraining social reasoning. Apathy and public silence point to a dynamic of concealment, which itself is inherent to the structure of capitalism. In fact, the causal connection between social ills and the absence of a social reaction itself is concealed. The restrictive, objectifying form of rationality derived from instrumental reason and predominant in capitalist notions of resource utilisation (ibid.: 48), coupled with the concealment of power structures, has a strong influence on subjects’ individual needs and desires, while doing little to encourage reflection of the processes creating them (Jameson, 1998). However, it is not only this concealment through the deformation of reason that is inherent to social pathologies, but also the awakening of emancipatory forces through the social suffering generated (Honneth, 2020: 28-49).

This line of thought demonstrates the proximity of critical social theory to Freud’s psychoanalysis (cf Gaztambide, 2019). In Sigmund Freud’s theory of culture (1930), as with Hegel, the subject must transform her/his (first) nature into a ‘second nature’ (cf Dahmer, 1994) in a way giving it up while being shaped by cultural influences. In this process, desires are repressed into the unconscious according to the reality principle, creating discomfort at least and suffering at worst. However, the repressed desires continue to express themselves from the unconscious (for example, in the form of Freudian slips), and can become both the source of creativity and a fulfilling life (for example in dreams, artistic endeavours, infatuation and love, mourning) and risk factors for psychopathologies (for example, obsessions, depression). The emancipatory forces necessary for individual human development towards

maturity draw their energy from the unconscious. In contrast, the concept of social pathologies refers to social conditions that have a systematic, limiting effect on individuals, determining their potential for experience and self-realisation based on their membership in a social group.

Both Honneth and the social philosopher Steffen Herrmann differentiate between first and second order social pathologies. First-order social pathology "refers to social inequalities such as exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, humiliation, or violence, which have always been at the centre of attention of critical social theory" (Herrmann, 2013: 211-212, *own translation*). This type of social pathology describes the systematic, social disadvantaging of certain social groups, for example, based on class, race or gender. Second-order social pathologies describe, on the one hand, deficits in the ability to reflect on prevailing social conditions. On the other hand, they refer to "existential forces maintaining social inequality" (Herrmann, 2014: 284), which can be intertwined with unconscious ideas regarding social recognition and identity constructs. These result in significant limitations to referencing and critically reflecting on social inequality (cf Herrmann, 2013).

Climate injustice as a consequence of social pathologies

We consider the climate crisis to be an expression of social pathologies. It threatens the possibility of leading a fulfilling life on a massive scale. At the same time, not all people are affected to the same degree. The principles of neoliberalism hinder social transformation in the most affected areas of the world, resulting in social injustices (Chomsky et al, 2021) and effectively destroying the principles of societal solidarity. Due to globalisation, de-regulation, and power differentials (cf Barnwell et al, 2020), the consequences of climate change are felt elsewhere and are systematically endured by others. This aspect of the climate crisis can be considered a first-order social pathology. An essential facet of this social pathology is the impression of many in rich industrialized countries that they themselves are invulnerable, thinking they can continue to live in a bubble, a 'psychic retreat' (Weintrobe, 2013), separated from the downside and the consequences of their own cynical way of life (Richter, 2020). The fact that people living in industrialized nations can be very surprised when environmental destruction occurs in their country, or that they do not associate this with their Western lifestyle, can be counted among the pathologies of the second order. Here, denial and the illusion of omnipotence clearly limit reason and the ability to critically reflect. Multiple, interdependent social factors also play a role in constraining reason, for example propaganda, police violence, workplace bullying, social exclusion, competition, and so forth (cf Herrmann, 2010). Subjects exposed to this force field of anxiogenic social pressures are pushed towards submission to dominant ideologies promising relief.

Vulnerability through the lens of recognition and alterity theories

Herrmann (2013) argues that social analysis should not only critically describe and investigate political systems with respect to freedom, equality and justice, but should also reflect on the socio-emotional, intersubjective concept of vulnerability. His approach combines Hegel's theory of recognition and Lévinas' theory of alterity, representing both the subject and the other as equal, vulnerable actors whose thinking and acting are related to each other. It is the vulnerability of each vis-à-vis the other that creates the asymmetry of communicative engagement. With Hegel, the vulnerability of the subject begins with the dependence on the recognition of the other, whereas in Lévinas, the subject is struck by the other's desire for recognition and thus finds itself exposed to the responsibility for the other. While Hegel focuses on the vulnerability of the subject, Lévinas considers "the fundamental ethical situation of humans from the perspective of the vulnerability of the other." (Herrmann 2010: 177, *own translation*)

Herrmann (2013) elaborates that Hegel and Lévinas share as a common core the relationship between subject and other and that, as complementary viewpoints, they can therefore be connected. Herrmann calls this complementary relationship the "double asymmetry of the social", which he sees as the "primal scene" of social relations (Herrmann, 2013: 155, *own translation*): "As dependence on recognition, on the one hand, and as exposure to precisely this dependence on recognition, on the other". The basic tension in social relations originates from reciprocal inequality. Herrmann develops this idea from Hegel's well-known servant analogy and Lévinas' hostage concept.

In certain social contexts, for example in supportive primary caregiver relationships, the need for recognition by the other can be a primary source of self-actualisation. In others, however, it can lead to submission. Herrmann demonstrates that the subject's choice to subjugate itself (in Hegel's terminology as an "inferior, because dependent servant") stems from the vulnerability of recognition dependence. Subjects can choose to forego certain freedoms in order to attain some degree of recognition. We see this type of dynamic when social inequalities put pressure on individuals, for example by inducing fear of social exclusion, to subjugate themselves to a group and sacrifice self-realisation in order to belong, thus manifesting their status as unequal. Herrmann (2013) sees in this the existential priority of the desire for recognition over the need to achieve a certain self-concept (for example, in Hegel's term, to be an "autonomous master").

Herrmann's (2013) interpretation of this, the Hegelian facet of the double asymmetry, describes the profound binding power of asymmetrical recognition relationships, which can help understand why individuals submit to an ideology when only

systematic submission yields recognition. This can lead to individuals reproducing the structures that are known to perpetuate social ills (for example the climate crisis) even if it destroys their environment and their livelihood.

The other facet of Herrmann's double asymmetry is the recognition of the other and the other's vulnerability. The climate crisis demands solutions which involve taking responsibility for others, not only for oneself. Thus, solutions might be found through a change of focus from the subject to the other, as the social philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas proposes. Lévinas thinks of the social relationship as starting at the difference of the other, in contrast to Hegel's approach (Herrmann, 2010: 176). The primary scene for Lévinas is the face-to-face encounter, which has transformative character. The subject is confronted with the gaze of the other, which shows its vulnerability and demands a response. From Lévinas' hostage emanates a compelling morality that inescapably emphasizes the other asymmetry of the relationship with which the subject is confronted (Herrmann, 2013).

Elements of both facets of Herrmann's double asymmetry can be found in psychoanalytical theories on early development, which imply models for relationship dynamics throughout life. The dialectic between autonomy and adaptation has long been inherent in psychoanalytic thought, and recognition theory has particularly shaped intersubjective psychoanalytic conceptualisation. Honneth (2001: 255) considers psychoanalytic object relations theories to be particularly suitable for interdisciplinary discourse with critical social theory, as they contain an implicit theory of socialisation. Honneth elaborates on a recognition-theory facet of psychoanalysis, postulating that the internalisation of external communication patterns creates a subject that can bear the tension between its own dependence on recognition and the independence of the interaction partner by means of symbolic, inner dialogue. In this context, he refers to Winnicott's dialectic theory of development (Honneth, 2000; 2001). Winnicott postulates a subject that has learned within the transformative interaction with the mother – on its way from absolute dependence in the earliest phase to relative independence. Winnicott's subject can endure ambivalent feelings, because as a baby, it develops the capacity for concern through stable interactional experiences with the mother (cf Honneth, 2000: 1098; Winnicott 2020a; 2020b; Wirth, 2021). In terms of recognition theory, this is a development that begins with the mother's return to a state of relative dependence and vulnerability, which is necessary so that she may identify with the infant's needs and resonate with the baby's feelings. Winnicott (cf 2020b: 113) assumes that mother and baby move through an interrelated process of becoming more independent, in which the maternal adaptive effort must gradually fail in order for the infant to realize its dependence and begin to know that the mother is a necessary, that is, external object. Infant research supports these ideas; John

Bowlby's research, for example, shows that patterns of emotional attachment are established in the first months of life, representations of which operate throughout the lifespan and provide the blueprint for later emotional attachments. Daniel Stern's research provides insight into the complex interaction process between caregiver and child, the reciprocity of which leads to the mutual establishment of shared feelings and experiences (cf Honneth, 2001: 256).

The infant develops the capacity for concern on the basis of its dual experience of the mother: as a caring mother and as a mother who survives the baby's anger. The fear of losing the mother is ameliorated by the tender feelings the infant has towards her as a precious object; thus fear and guilt are mitigated and transformed into reparation (cf Winnicott, 2020a: 98). The capacity for concern thus represents the ability to take responsibility for one's own drives, which for Winnicott is a basic element of play and work (ibid). Thus, through the emotional relationship with others, the child learns to conceive of itself and the caregiver as two independent subjects. In this way, the subject also learns to tolerate the ambivalence of similarity and strangeness, dependence and responsibility.

Orange's (2017) relational psychoanalytic approach postulates a subject of the kind described by Emmanuel Lévinas. Here, the other is not only the boundary at which the individual subject ends, but the constitutive moment of all knowledge.

As these examples show, modern psychoanalytic approaches to understanding early development as the foundation for relationships throughout life also describe mutual processes of recognition that involve a delicate balance between the fulfilment of one's own needs and internalised awareness and consideration of the other's. Both sides of this dialectic, which Herrmann links in his concept of double asymmetry, are essential in understanding the dynamics which have lead to climate change, as well as in finding pathways towards necessary transformation. After describing two climate-relevant recognition-theoretical approaches, we continue in the next section with Orange's alterity-theoretical psychoanalytical thoughts on the climate crisis.

(II) Psychoanalytic reflections on subject and other in the face of the climate crisis

Subject in a perverse culture

Man-made climate change inevitably leads to destruction of the environment by destabilizing cycles and processes on planet Earth. This poses a crucial psychological threat to human beings, because the basic assumption of humanity as nature's master is strongly challenged. One's sense of security, self-worth, and identity is threatened, as well as self-efficacy and internalized expectations of a desirable future (cf Andrews et al 2019: 6-7).

For Paul Hoggett (2019), a psychoanalyst and social policy analyst prominent in climate psychology, the lack of an appropriate response to the climate crisis seems to be one of the greatest current mysteries, because climate change and environmental degradation threaten the subject with powerful and painful feelings which it would prefer to avoid, for example loss, guilt, fear, shame and despair. It is, however, precisely these strong feelings that mobilise defences at the individual and societal level, undermining the human capacity to address and deal with this vital issue.

The alteration or destruction of one's habitat can be experienced as a loss and consciously accompanied by emotions such as grief (Randall 2009), melancholy (Lertzman, 2015), fear and panic (cf Andrews et al, 2019; Cianconi et al, 2020). Affects, on the other hand, are perceived less consciously, so stress and anxiety may initially only be experienced through visceral-bodily correlates; for Andrews et al (2019), this is the reason for climate change denial. Awareness of feelings is a pre-requisite for their containment, because only then do thoughts and reflection find an object (cf Andrews et al, 2019: 5-6), and can mentalisation take place (Fonagy et al, 2002). In interviews conducted by Randall et al (2019: 258), they identify a social defence – even in climate scientists – that prevents them from bringing up certain climate-related findings due to social pressure from colleagues or policy makers.

The merit of Hoggett's interdisciplinary, climate psychology approach lies in the use of psychodynamic concepts (enriched with ideas from systems and complexity theory) and methodology to make human responses to the climate crisis understandable. In addition to the individual perspective, he also examines the societal context. Hoggett (2013) introduces the term '*perverse culture*', using an individual psychological term to describe the socially widespread phenomenon in wealthy industrialized nations of antisocially asserting one's own desires at the expense of reality.

Hoggett (2013) points out that human alienation from nature is accompanied by an attitude of domination toward nonhuman nature and other humans. His is a conception of humankind in which a struggle rages in the subject between aggression and libido. This conception is rooted in classical psychoanalysis and the old Frankfurt School, which oppose an intersubjective perspective. It stands in contrast with Honneth's conception of humankind as fundamentally prosocial (see above), with narcissism understood as a primary desire to be loved rather than as an expression of a primary egoism (cf Altmeyer, 2000).

Tragic position in a culture of uncare

The object relations psychoanalyst Sally Weintrobe (2013; 2020; 2021) has been a key contributor to psychoanalytic climate discourse for many years. She postulates

a primordially rooted relationship of humankind to the environment which is fundamentally positive, based on love and agreement (Bayer et al, 2011). She places caring/carelessness at the centre of a critical view on capitalism, neoliberalism, and the self-defeating notions of growth or progress that they produce: "Endless growth on a finite planet is not possible unless one thinks differently about growth." (Weintrobe, 2021: 68).

She describes the self as being torn in a conflict of ambivalence between (narcissistic, self-idealizing) carelessness and caring. Both sides of the conflict are real; they must be acknowledged and tolerated, though ambivalently, within the individual. For Weintrobe, the climate catastrophe is not primarily an environmental problem, but rather a humanitarian crisis. She speaks of a '*culture of uncare'* characterized by short-termism, instrumental reasoning, and devotion to omnipotent triumph over reality. In doing so, she describes an ongoing, fundamental struggle between caring and uncaring in politics, culture, and the individual. Healthy, caring people reach a '*tragic position*' in the face of the climate crisis (Weintrobe, 2020 lecture, referencing Irma Brenman-Pick), that is, the climate crisis is acknowledged in its catastrophic magnitude, but it becomes increasingly difficult to endure reality in light of the irreversible damage to the environment – a nightmarish realisation, as the Earth also symbolizes the early mother on a psychodynamic level. Weintrobe's (2021) starting point for change is her demand that rich, Western-socialized people take responsibility, that is, abandon their narcissistic denial, which leads to destructive forms of idealisation and omnipotence whenever reality imposes constraints on their sense of entitlement. From a recognition-theoretical point of view, such a subject uses denial to defend a seemingly superior position (master) while avoiding reality.

The subject as the "other's keeper"

The intersubjective psychoanalyst Donna Orange theorizes on the relationship between recognition needs and responsibility for the other, formulating an ethical turn for psychoanalysis under the term *'my other's keeper*' (cf Orange, 2016). For Donna Orange, trying to understand the climate crisis inevitably leads to a confrontation with the systematic, socially organised and historically rooted exploitation of people by other people.

Orange's intention to provide a psychoanalytical and philosophical foundation for the concept of 'climate justice' lies at the centre of her theoretical reflections on the climate crisis. Looking at aspects of US-American history (colonialism, slavery, racism) that can be generalized into a critique of capitalism, she develops a concept of historical unconsciousness within the framework of psychoanalytic social psychology. In relation to the climate crisis, she reflects on the attitudes that have brought us to

the crisis and how we conceal them from ourselves. The connection between climate justice and social justice is central and inherent. She analyses various factors from anthropological and clinical points of view, including shame and envy as contributors to consumerism and ethical blindness. She interprets the concept of radical ethics in terms of a 'social ecology' and concludes in Lévinasian terms: responsibility for the other "is the essential structure of subjectivity" (Orange, 2017: 115, citing Lévinas et al, 1985: 95). Orange (2017: 114) concludes, "I am indeed my brother's keeper, and there is no escape. There is no escape from the climate crisis, no escape from the suffering and injustice our comfortable and mindless 'lifestyles' are creating." For her, too, the climate crisis is an extreme humanitarian emergency. The suffering of the other transcends the subject's need for comfort, so that the material needs of the other, the neighbour, become the spiritual needs of the subject.

Therefore, transformation begins with the capacity for shame, and specifically the shame that victims of oppression and violence experience (Primo Levi, 1988 in Orange, 2017). People from rich industrialized countries need to find this shame in the faces of suffering others. Images of children's faces especially engender this kind of shame, linking the perpetrator-victim relationship to the reproductively ingrained asymmetry of the parent-child relationship. This jarring appeal to parental caring that directly involves and engages us is a form of 'good violence' (Lévinas).

Realizing their voices have been neglected in climate psychology research, Caroline Hickman (2019; Hickman et al, 2021) conducted interviews with children and adolescents. The results of Hickman et al's (2021) large-scale study indicate that the lack of adult responses to climate change, that is, the failure of policy makers to take responsibility, negatively impacts the vulnerable young. This is reflected, for example, in increased climate anxiety and distress.

The non-human environment

We have considered the social aspects of the climate crisis in terms of recognition and alterity theories. Both theories are also relevant with regards to the meaning of the non-human environment for the subject. Nature-culture dualism is a central aspect of Western naturalistic thinking (Descola, 2013). We are conscious of the fact that our reflections on the climate crisis come from a specific cultural standpoint and do not include other cultures' ways of constructing meaning, for example, as in animistic or totemic societies (cf Horkheimer et al, 1984: 9), in which nature has a more equal status. However, we do wish to mention the work of Harold Searles (2016), a psychoanalyst and psychiatrist who has pointed out the importance of the non-human environment for human personality development. He postulates that the phylogenetic traces of the experience of being un-living or non-human are

so existentially threatening that corresponding thoughts and fantasies must be repressed into the unconscious.

People living in Western industrialized nations must take responsibility not only for climate injustice, but also for environmental destruction itself. Horkheimer and Adorno's (1984: 1) assertion seems to apply here, that humanity, "instead of attaining a truly human quality, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism" (*own translation*), namely by destroying nature, its own strongest sphere of resonance (Rosa, 2017). Deep ecology links psychodynamic, spiritual, and ecological approaches that address humanity's relationship to non-human nature. In relation to the humanitarian emergency, however, the deep ecology approach does not go far enough, because it (a) marginalizes the problem of social justice and attaches too little importance to solidarity vis-à-vis the survival of impoverished 'brothers and sisters' and (b) underestimates social power relations, overlooking the fact that ecological problems result as collateral damage from the exploitation of people by people (cf Orange, 2017).

Because of the strong binding forces between subject, society, and non-human environment, efforts to adapt to a pathological environment can engender mental disorders. Based on the concept of the double asymmetry of the social, mental illness can be understood as resulting from a – thoroughly socially embedded – imbalance between dependence on recognition and assumption of responsibility in the subject, but also between subject and society (Hickman et al, 2021), both of which increase vulnerability. In the next section, we describe a critical perspective that views mental illness as both meaningful suffering from social ills, as well as an articulation of precisely the same ills.

(III) Pathologising concern for climate justice as 'climate anxiety'

The concern for climate justice has a significant social and political dimension. The climate crisis and climate injustice can affect people in different ways: physically, psychologically and socially. People suffer directly because their livelihoods are threatened or even destroyed by the consequences of the climate crisis. But people also suffer because of their fear of impending consequences of the climate crisis (for example threat to the ecological basis of life and increased social tensions) and in particular because of their concern for future generations. All these fears and worries are neither neurotic nor dysfunctional, but quite realistic. Climate fear is realistic fear. If the logical inverse of the pathologisation of fear of the consequences of the climate crisis were considered to be true, namely that the absence of climate fear should be seen as a characteristic of mental health, then Theodor W. Adorno's thought (1951: 70, *own translation*) would seem bitterly ironic: "At the bottom of these prevailing notions of health lies death."

Under certain biographical and psychodynamic circumstances, however, climate anxiety can combine with other (unconscious) anxieties and cause psychological suffering that can be classified as a psychological disorder. To understand psychological stress in connection with climate anxiety, however, it is of elementary importance to see the social context (climate injustice). In principle, this is true for all mental disorders: that they can only be understood and adequately theorized if the social context is taken into consideration. From the point of view of disease models of psychopathology, however, mental disorders appear to be detached from their social context, because social contexts either do not appear at all in the models or are only seen as secondary factors (cf Dreitzel, 1968, Keupp, 1972, Fellner, 1997). This theoretical strategy goes back to a psychological conception of the subject that fails to reflect on its social conditionality and dependence on social interests, which is a second-order social pathology in the terminology of Honneth and Herrmann. A subject thus understood consists – whether mechanistically, cybernetically or holistically – of a number of mental entities, and mental illness can be one of these, or result from the sum of various entities. This results in an 'ontologisation' of mental illness: it is conceived as something that exists in and of itself. In a philosophical, epistemological sense, the illness appears as a kind of substance that can afflict or emerge from the individual – and not as a meaningful expression of a certain relationship between individual and society that exists in the innermost part of the subject.

Thus, psychopathology can be deconstructed as an ideological superstructure of social exclusion mechanisms (cf Parker, 1995) and "the expression of a system that until now believed it could reject and eliminate its own contradictions by simply pushing them aside and ignoring their dialectic – striving to understand itself ideologically as a society free of contradictions" (Basaglia, 1971: 151, *own translation*). In order to disrupt this ideological function of psychopathology, a socio-theoretical and culturally critical perspective on the objects of psychopathology is required (Turkle, 1980; Keupp, 1987). Analysis of the social construction of mental disorders is the central approach to demonstrate how psychopathology plays a role in the social production of truth (cf Castel, 1979).

As we have shown, the pathologisation of individual forms of suffering can be understood as an ideological strategy to obscure their social genesis as well as their inherent socio-critical potential. This perspective makes it possible to understand emotions and psychological distress as signals and starting points for emancipation and processes of social change. Reflecting from this point of view, psychopathology can be seen as a critique of society.

(IV) Climate Justice Now!

After looking at individual attempts to adapt to social ills, we now return to the climate crisis as a social pathology – and to the social forms of resistance to its societal production. Since the 1990s, German social psychologist Josef Berghold has been examining correlations between our Western lifestyle in the Northern Hemisphere and phenomena such as global warming and species extinction (cf Lancet Countdown, 2019). Some of his work includes: "Social Psychology of the Climate Crisis," "Reality Denial as a Decisive Contributory Cause of Our Crises," and "Psychopathology of Neoliberalism." As a hindrance to necessary, enormous social transformation processes, he refers to the widespread contemporary phenomenon of referring to the demise of the world rather than imagining its change (Berghold, 2014: 21, referring to Rosa, 2005).

In the last few years, however, there has been no shortage of voices calling out for change and demonstrating that the abovementioned social and psychological forces preventing transformation can be made conscious and are susceptible to change. A common slogan in climate demonstrations is: "What do we want? Climate Justice! When do we want it? Now!" Of the multitude of slogans used in the context of climate strikes, this one references the fact that the climate crisis is not simply an environmental, but also a political and therefore a global problem. Climate Justice Now! is an international network of more than 400 non-governmental organisations working to ensure that environmental, social and gender justice are taken into account in international climate policy. For the first Global Climate Strike on March 15, 2019, Fridays for Future protagonists called for participation in the Global Climate Strike For Future, a worldwide student strike to save the planet. In total, there were about 1,700 rallies in more than 100 countries, according to media reports. In Germany, more than 300,000 students went on strike in over 230 cities; in Berlin, about 25,000 people took part. Brussels counted 30,000, Paris 50,000 participants. The organisers of the strikes reported that more than 2,000 protests in 125 countries had taken place, with more than one million participants in total. During the second Global Climate Strike on May 24, 2019, more than 1,350 protest actions were announced worldwide, in which 1.8 million people participated, according to the organisers. In Germany, 320,000 people took to the streets in more than 200 cities. Organisers in 17 European countries mobilized about 40,000 people to participate in the first centralised, international large-scale strike in Aachen on June 21, 2019, under the slogan "Climate Justice without Borders – United for a Future" (see #AC2106; Climate Justice Now; Fridays for Future). All of these movements are united by their intent to reveal that which is concealed, and they all strive for liberation from suffering (cf Honneth, 2020). Of course, this cannot be said about all social movements – some even consciously apply the concealment tactics of a deregulated society, engendering more trust in

disinformation than in critical analysis (see Latour, 2020). The difference between these regressive movements and those fighting for the climate is the non-violence of the latter. Judith Butler (2020) sees non-violence as a practice that consciously rejects destructive aggression, while embracing the radical recognition of differences, which does not preclude aggression per se. Referencing the idea of a "militant pacifist", she sees aggression, anger and rage – always under the premise of radical non-violence – as being necessary to counteract destructive processes.

In 2015, Gail Bradbrook and George Barda founded Compassionate Revolution Ltd. in the United Kingdom, which initially developed the Rising Up! campaign and eventually Extinction Rebellion (XR). XR was founded in October 2018 and quickly gained global media coverage through mass protests, flash mobs and sit-ins organised initially in London. Its stated goal is to use civil disobedience to force action by governments against mass extinctions of animals, plants, and habitats, as well as the possible extinction of humanity as a result of the climate crisis. As of March 2020, XR reported 1141 local chapters in 67 countries on six continents.

In the action project "Hope dies – Action begins: *Stimmen einer neuen Bewegung* ("Voices of a New Movement", *own translation*)", XR's three demands, as well as its 10 principles and values are explained and commented upon by different voices from the movement and thus made available to the German-speaking world. Movements around the world have thus gained momentum to promote climate justice (Forwarding Climate Justice; Extinction Rebellion Hannover, 2019).

Beyond societal and psychological influences that protect or work to transform the status quo, change on the macrolevel also requires individual transformations on the microlevel, in everyday life. From the social philosophical perspective of the new Frankfurt School, Eva von Redecker (2020) explores the necessity of individual and collective changes in values and actions. Her vision of a new form of social coexistence starts where awareness is drawn to the climate catastrophe:

> *"As Fridays For Future and Extinction Rebellion participants shine a spotlight on the catastrophe, an attitude already emerges that breaks through the blunt indifference to the world beyond one's own property that characterizes us as modern Sachherrscher:innen* [note: own translation see below]. *We (...) might be able to reproduce other patterns in our everyday actions."* (von Redecker, 2020: 15, own translation)

In her discussion of Rousseau's "Discourse on Inequality" (1755), von Redecker's core recognition-theoretical hypothesis suggests that a new form of property has come to

exist since the early modern era. Although it can provide freedom from serfdom, it adds a proprietary quality to social relations, resulting in modern, proprietary expressions of social control and power, such as racism as a sign of modern slavery. She describes this as social *Sachherrschaft* (socio-economic control, *own translation*), which is "... control over aspects of living others as if they were property" (von Redecker, 2020: 32). This ownership claim expresses itself as *Phantombesitz* (phantom possession*, own translation)*, as a control claim without an object. *Phantombesitz* is a cornerstone of modern identities, implying various positions along a relational spectrum: a subject can have and/or be phantom possession, that is, control others and/or be subject to their control (cf von Redecker, 2020: 34-35). Systematic, historically established conditions creating inequality, injustice and impingements on freedom, that lock certain individuals and groups to the "being" pole of phantom possession, represent particularly dire identity constraints, due to the heightened vulnerability of the people concerned.

A culture of neoliberal *Phantombesitz* does not place responsibility on subjects to perceive and respectfully respond to the other's need for recognition (see above), but instead feeds into the desire to subjugate or be subjugated (Herrmann, 2013). Among the mechanisms used to reinforce societal inequalities, violence (including state-sanctioned violence; see Butler, 2020) is central. In contrast, the idea of a double asymmetry of the social describes a strong social bond which draws its obligation from the dialectic between dependency and responsibility (Herrmann, 2013). This approach provides a framework that makes room for non-violent difference (cf Butler, 2020), destigmatisation of real (as opposed to neurotic) anxiety and the anger it produces, recognition of and responsibility for the other instead of bilateral subjugation, and mutual vulnerability as a driving force for change in both subjects and systems, on the road to healing social pathologies.

Von Redecker's (2020: 147) starting point for transformation, which "stands in the way of the destructiveness of capitalist society" (*own translation*), is the ubiquitous transformation of everyday life. To the routines of everyday live she assigns qualities reminiscent of Winnicott's maternal care and the gradual development of internal representations of interactional experiences with early caregivers. For von Redecker, it is not the sudden turnaround that changes our everyday patterns of living, but rather the repetitions of new routines and behaviour patterns based on steady practice. Von Redecker focuses on our duty to care for land, livelihood and fellow human beings, and argues for the development of behaviour patterns that are capable of providing connection and care while transcending inclusion/exclusion of particular groups of people. In summary, von Redecker dialectically contrasts the new values with the old: caring for property rather than controlling it, sharing goods rather than exploiting them, regenerating labour rather than exhausting it, saving life rather than destroying

it. Like Orange (2017), she thus seeks alternatives that lie beyond previous conceptions of social bonds. These are usually considered particularly strong when they are based on identification with others who are seen to be similar. In terms of alterity theory, however, a new ethical obligation to connect across group identity borders arises.

Extensive critical reflection can lead to transformative processes that motivate subsequent action (as opposed to acting without reflection, resulting in '*more of the same*', cf Bion, 1962; cf Hoggett, 2019). Such action can create hope that humanity is not doomed after all. This hope is expressed by Christiana Figueres and Tom Rivett-Carnac (2021: "The Future We Choose": 64) when they speak of the future being in the hands of decision-makers: "It will be shaped by who we want to be in the years to come. The coming decade is a turning point – it is time to turn away from indifference or despair and toward a persistent, determined optimism."

We have analysed current approaches to climate discourse from the perspective of well-established critical social theory (Frankfurt School) and its contemporary interpretation. If the transition from the more theoretical sections to the final section seems abrupt, a headlong leap of sorts, then we have adequately symbolized the leap into the unknown (cf Hoelscher, 2021) which is a fundamental intergenerational aspect of climate discourse. Here, social and individual change requires not only gradual transition and transformation, but ultimately an inevitable break with old ways. It would have seemed like an illegitimate appropriation to impose the academic thought patterns of the Frankfurt School on this nascent voice, especially considering that the young generation calling for change has no lack of "emotional literacy" (cf Randall et al, 2019: 260).

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