When we turn to others, what is it that we want from them? It is not easy to see how to answer such a question, for the social motivations of human beings are mixed and manifold. There are all sorts of reasons why we invite other people into our lives, but the complexity of human desire—that fact that we want both different things at different times and different things at the same time—makes it difficult to know exactly what those reasons are or how much weight each one carries individually. The difficulty of determining what we want from others is in part attributable to the irreducible complexity of social life, for we associate with one another in many different ways—as friends, lovers, competitors, and the like—and find correspondingly different forms of satisfaction and frustration in these different forms of association. It is, however, also true because our social motives are themselves often obscure and indeterminate. We do not always know what we want from others when we enter into relationships with them. Sometimes this is because we do not know enough about our new associate to determine what needs an association with him will satisfy, but other times it is because we are ignorant of what our own needs actually are. It is, in fact, tempting to say that we cannot have such information. Indeed, since our needs themselves are at least partially a product of the associational environment in which we are embedded, such ignorance may well
be a permanent condition. At the very least, it means that knowledge of self and of other are necessarily related phenomena: we must understand ourselves reasonably well in order to understand others and how they fit into our lives, and if we lack knowledge then we shall also lack a clear understanding of what it is we hope to accomplish in and through social relations. So long as we knowers remain unknown to ourselves, so, too, will the life of the other remain a mystery.

No less an authority than Thomas Hobbes invites his readers to reconsider the sources of their behavior and presents his own *Leviathan* as a sustained meditation on what he finds when he explores his own motivational field: “When I shall have set down my own reading [of human nature] orderly and perspicuously,” he tells his reader, “the pains left another will be only to consider, if he also find not the same in himself. This doctrine,” he rather importantly adds, “admitteth no other kind of demonstration” (*Lev. Pr.*, 3). Hobbes’s theories of human nature and political life are the results of rational introspection into his own motives, and the proper way for readers to test their soundness is to systematically interrogate their own social motivations and to compare the results to those of Hobbes. Learning how to look within and “read thyself” (*Nosce teipsum*) is thus the best—nay, the only—way to understand human nature, and anyone who wishes to challenge Hobbes’s own reading of the passions must do more than engage in idle gainsaying or quibble with insignificant particulars (*Lev. Pr.*, 4). He must present a more elegant theoretical alternative.

At least one reader took up Hobbes’s challenge and believed that he had indeed developed a superior account of human nature and social motivation. That reader was Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who left aside “all scientific books” that “teach us to see men only as they have made themselves” and meditated “upon the first and simplest operations of the human soul” (*DI* 95). What he found there was a remarkably limited set of social motivations, one far more restrictive than the relatively exhaustive list provided by Hobbes, who in his haste to characterize human relations as naturally antagonistic had assumed the existence of human relations themselves (*Lev. VI*, 28–33). On Rousseau’s accounting, however, the first human beings lacked both the inclination and the incentive to seek one another out. Drawing freely from nature’s bounty and unable to conceive of anyone else taking an interest in his activities, natural man sought no emotional gratification from others and found the means of his physical subsistence without their help. Conflicts motivated by
scarcity were brief and relatively infrequent, since nature provides plenty and men without pride ultimately have very little over which to fight. Lacking moral needs and possessing the power to satisfy his physical desires independently, natural man had no conceivable reason for social intercourse of any kind.

Because the utility-based motives of necessity and convenience cannot on Rousseau’s view adequately explain the phenomenon of settled social relations, other factors must be at work. For Rousseau, the awakening of social sentiment effects a fundamental change in the structure of desire itself; the newly social subject is confused about what he wants because the desire for recognition—a new and powerful motivational force that will take much time and reflection to understand—has been loosed within him. Emerging with and from this desire to be viewed as valuable by others is a moral desire to merit such recognition. Whereas Hobbes and, following him, Locke account for social life and development in largely utilitarian terms, Rousseau argues that social desiring is in its first phases something indeterminate, vague, and highly confusing. When we turn to one another for the first time, it is not in order to satisfy some predetermined and exogenously given end. To the contrary, we have only the foggiest ideas about what purposes other human beings might serve or what needs they will help us satisfy. Amour-propre is both a cause and consequence of this confusion.

Rousseau’s emphasis on the uncertainty out of which our desire for love and esteem arises has at least four important and somewhat neglected consequences for how human relations are theorized. First, his account affirms the intrinsic value of human relations, for if we enter associations without knowing what ends they can secure then we must have other and noninstrumental motives for seeking the company of others. Second, it highlights the fundamental albeit subterranean role that sexuality plays in motivating human connection more generally. As it turns out, the sexual passion informs moral and social development at virtually every stage—including and especially the earliest ones. Third, it provides a more expansive and possibility-enhancing conception of social relations than those provided by Hobbes and Locke, for attaching to the (well-governed) desire to be esteemed by others is the desire to be estimable. Amour-propre, that is, gives rise to a powerful perfectionistic imperative that leads healthy beings to develop and extend their being in ways that qualitatively enrich their lives. Rousseau’s account of the psyche and his understanding of the emergence of social attachment
are designed to reveal a richer and fuller set of human possibilities than are the more reductive models of Hobbes and Locke, whose theories had not explained human nature so much as explained it away. To the degree, then, that we wish not only to gain the good opinion of others but also to deserve it, the desire for recognition grounds a desire for moral perfection that proves crucially important to Rousseau’s moral psychology. Finally, it allows us to see that the development of the social passions is at one with their disaggregation. To mature socially is to grow into the understanding that there are different forms of association—love, friendship, and so on—that satisfy different needs and create different expectations. This realization ultimately proves more important than it initially seems, for our ability to find comprehensive satisfaction hinges on the extent to which we are able to harmonize our various social roles and effectively negotiate with the irreducible complexity of living with others.

Though the novelty of Rousseau’s noninstrumental account of social attachment is best glimpsed by contrasting it with the narrowly instrumentalist conceptions of Hobbes and Locke, we cannot forget that Rousseau is radicalizing the materialistic intuitions developed by his English forebears in the very act of questioning them. In his quest to provide a naturalistic explanation of human behavior that accounts for the full range of human drives and capacities Rousseau is careful not to assign a grounding function to obscure or rarefied psychic forces like eros or the desire for “extended being” (E 168; cf. Cooper 2004). Without denying the existence or indeed the importance of such forces, he nonetheless thinks them epiphenomenal products of still more fundamental psychological drives and seeks to account for their emergence in terms that are broadly congenial to modern materialism.

**Instruments and Obstacles: Hobbes, Locke, and Bourgeois Motivation**

In his effort to reground moral and social behavior on less narrowly instrumental motives, Rousseau is forced to rethink the structure of human desire itself. His primary target is the rationalistic hedonism of Hobbes and Locke, which turns on the hinges of pleasure and pain and models human decision-making as egoistic computations of expected marginal utilities. Their respective moral-psychological theories each treat desire as the principal spring of action and conceive of it as something omnipresent, highly specific, and
rigidly inflexible. This understanding of the human mind generates an instrumental understanding of human association, for it presumes—incorrectly on Rousseau’s view—that human subjects enter into social relations with fully determined ends and purposes. The moral and social results of such a conception are as unacceptable as the conception itself, for it encourages us to view others as means to private ends, thus leading to the arid, un.rewarding, and highly exploitative social practices Rousseau so memorably characterizes as destructive of city and soul alike.

Hobbes gives especially strong statement to the view that human beings are psychologically unequipped for sustained social intercourse. Without denying that men are susceptible to feelings of love and affection, he nonetheless affirms that such passions are unstable and hence insufficient to serve as a ground for civil society. “It is true,” he avers in *The Citizen*, “that perpetual solitude is hard for a man to bear by nature as a man. . . . I am not therefore denying that we seek each other’s company at the prompting of nature. But civil societies are not mere gatherings, they are Alliances, which essentially require good faith and agreement for their making” (I.2.n24). The “good faith” and “agreement” that make civil society possible are the results of a foresighted and careful coordination of selfish interests, not the spontaneous expressions of natural sociability or the passionate effusions of affectionate hearts. People do not honor their covenants made from a motive of love. Thus, while “mere gatherings” may well be animated by sympathetic fellow feeling, stable and effective associations are founded on the shared apprehension of common interests and are dedicated to the realization of some predetermined purpose discoverable by reason. Associational life thus conceived is an instrument of private felicity—a tool for achieving exogenously given ends—not a force capable of reconfiguring the structure of desire itself.

But it is not just the natural egoism of human beings that leads us to conceive of our associations in instrumental terms. The particular way in which human beings desire reinforces these selfish tendencies and further circumscribes our motivational field. Human desire is on Hobbes’s accounting something infinite and definite, ubiquitous and precise. Desires, whether of attraction or aversion, are caused by encounters with specific and identifiable phenomena out in the world and always arise with respect to those same phenomena. To desire is necessarily to desire some *thing*, and to speak of a want without also mentioning its corresponding object is to speak of an effect without a cause. Hobbes’s definition of felicity—“a continual progress of the desire, from one *object* to the other, the attaining of the former being
still but the way to the latter”—underscores the insatiability of and lack of ambiguity in human desire (Lev. XI, 57; emphasis added). Desiring, then, is a process in which the want of one thing is replaced by the want of another; one’s wish for some good X is satisfied (or frustrated) and instantaneously replaced by a desire for some other good Y. Our desires change if and when their “objects” change. Even the generalized anxiety lurking behind our specific attractions and aversions—that “restless desire for power after power” Hobbes puts in all men—is not itself felt as a generalized desire for something infinite and unrealizable in the world, but rather is experienced in a piecemeal, incremental fashion. To the degree that it is felt obscurely, it is to be disregarded as a dangerous and illusory longing for we know not what. We do not want something infinite—infinity, after all, is unrecognizable—so much as we infinitely want finite things. Hobbes’s phenomenology of desire thus presumes not only that men are always desiring but also that their discrete desires have a fairly clear and determinate character. The passions speak to human beings with extraordinary precision and irresistible persuasiveness.

Though Locke softens Hobbes’s insistence on man’s natural asociability and more openly acknowledges the necessity of traditional social virtues, his hedonistic moral-psychological outlook and instrumental conception of human association are Hobbesian in important and even essential respects. He, too, insists on man’s natural selfishness, rejects the existence of a natural good (ECHU 269), holds that opinions concerning good and evil are statements of subjective preference rather than reports about the character of moral reality (259), acknowledges that hope of pleasure and fear of pain are the “hinges on which our Passions turn” (229), and claims that the fulfillment of desire—what he calls “Happiness”—is the fundamental aim of human action (258). Hobbes, it seems, may be more justly decried than dismissed.

Locke also follows Hobbes in giving to human desire a high degree of specificity and exactness. He understands desire as a felt absence, a “state of uneasiness” caused by the lack of some valued good (ECHU 251), and characterizes the anxiety of desiring beings not as an indeterminate longing for something comprehensive and all-encompassing but rather as a set of specific anxieties, a complex of discrete and distinguishable impulses: “We being in this World beset with sundry uneasinesses, distracted with different desires, the next enquiry will be, which of them has the precedency in determining the will to the next action?” (257). The practical problem posed by desire is
one of prioritization rather than precise identification; we are not ignorant of what we want so much as of how to order our pursuits in a way that best suits our fundamental interest in happiness. Locke reiterates this point a few paragraphs later: “There being a great many uneasinesses always solliciting, and ready to determine the Will, it is natural, as I have said, that the greatest, and most pressing should determine the Will to the next action” (263). These passages reveal that Locke views human desire in much the same way as Hobbes, for we see in human being not a generalized anxiety or uneasiness but rather a series of specific and identifiable uneasinesses. Indeed, Locke’s Hobbesian conception of desire as something infinite and definite is reflected in his very framing of the problem it poses: the difficulty with “Happiness,” for Locke, is that we lack sound rules for determining which of our specific desires deserve priority over others, not that we want something indeterminate and enigmatic (e.g., wholeness or erotic transcendence). There is, then, nothing mysterious or vague about human ends themselves, for we are at all times beset by any number of discrete desires that make clear and distinct claims on our attention. We make mistakes not about the things we want but about the order in which we pursue them.

Hobbes’s and Locke’s disenchanting conceptions of desiring generate unsurprisingly and unapologetically instrumental conceptions of human association. For both thinkers, when we enter social life we do so with a full complement of predetermined interests, and when we seek others out it is in order to realize those interests. Thus conceived associations are products rather than sources—consequences rather than causes—of human desire. Because men are not doubtful about their ends, it is natural and even beneficial for them to employ one another as instruments in the service of their predetermined wants and needs. Of course these wants and needs are not necessarily sinister and need not entail the brutal exploitation of others (though for Rousseau that was their likely consequence), but the crucial point is that socialization thus conceived does not problematize the process of end-construction or ask us to rethink or revise our fundamental interests in any serious way. We shall see that Rousseau, without departing from the hedonistic essentials of Hobbes’s and Locke’s respective moral-psychological theories, seeks to rethink both what it means to desire and what it is that is desired, and in so doing to reconceive human relations as catalysts and creators of human desire rather than as simple instruments of its satisfaction.
“Nature’s Ignorance”: Indeterminacy and Social Feeling

Hobbes and Locke turned to reason in order to solve the social problem both because they believed in the primacy of self-love and because they thought human passions too unstable and unpredictable a basis on which to build a political society. Rousseau, though as convinced as his predecessors of the centrality of self-love, nonetheless turns their pessimism about the human passions on its head. Indeed, Rousseau believes the passions must govern reason as often as reason governs the passions, for it is reason that teaches us to isolate ourselves from others and to think of them as instruments of our private purposes. Our natural passions, appropriately directed and developed, connect us to others in a very different and more sympathetic way: far from inspiring a taste for dominion, we instead learn to regard one another as beings entitled to moral respect, as sources of dignity who deserve fair treatment and whose well-being is a part of our own.

It is clear Rousseau regards Hobbes and Locke as sources of the erroneous doctrine that rational self-interest can solve the social problem, for he explicitly engages both thinkers on precisely this point at different places in his writing. A most interesting example occurs in *Emile* (103), where Rousseau criticizes Locke for misunderstanding the psychological mechanics of an important other-regarding virtue: liberality. Locke advises tutors to educate their pupils in the way of generosity by showing them that the liberal man always comes off better in the end. “As to the having and possessing of things,” he tells us in *Some Thoughts concerning Education*, “teach [children] to part with what they have easily and freely . . . and let them find by experience that the most liberal has always most plenty” (81). Locke appears to be relying on something like the principle of operant conditioning: the child, rewarded repeatedly for generosity, will eventually develop a taste for giving to others. However, it would seem that there is in Locke’s account a certain confusion of cause and effect, for it is not due to his liberality that the rich man “has always most plenty.” It is wealth that makes a man liberal, not vice versa. Rousseau notes Locke’s deliberate gloss and claims that it is only a matter of time before a child trained in a Lockean mode will discover it for himself and come to dismiss liberality as spurious. The lesson he will learn is not that it is good to be generous but rather that he should only give when he expects to be compensated with interest. Far, then, from inspiring genuine liberality, the self-regarding generosity Locke recommends instead creates a “miser” who practices a paltry and usurious liberality that “gives an egg to
have a cow” \((E 103)\). As a bon mot this can hardly be bettered, but Rousseau’s clever parry is more than a witticism. Indeed, his retort is based on an instrumental understanding of reason that Locke himself accepted. Rousseau adds, however, that reason thus conceived does not and cannot solve the social problem because it inevitably subordinates the dignity of others to private purposes and destabilizes the social bond by making it contingent on considerations of narrow self-interest \((DI 195–97)\). The calculations Locke commends to his tutor will produce only a mercenary virtue and will never serve as a stable foundation for human community.

Rousseau bypasses the coldness of instrumental reason and seeks instead to instill sociable virtue through a restructuring of the affective field. He turns to “the habit of the soul” rather than to rational calculation in order to teach the virtues essential to the maintenance of civil society and premises his account on the assumption that our initial social impulses are highly indeterminate \((E 104)\). This indeterminacy puts our ends in doubt, thereby making it virtually impossible for us to use others as means to them. Rousseau takes up this argument at the start of Book IV of \textit{Emile}, which marks the awakening of social sentiment and the revolution in self-understanding that it initiates. Before Emile’s social desires are aroused, he embodies everything good and solid in the moral-psychological models of Hobbes and Locke. He cognizes the world in terms of pure usefulness—he knows the “what’s it good for” in everything he does—and disregards everything whose utility cannot be shown. His ideas, however limited, are clear and distinct as far as they reach, and his mind is wholly devoid of prejudice \((207)\). Emile has at age fifteen all “the virtue that relates to himself” and a moral disposition perfectly suited to his limited purposes: he “considers himself without regard to others and finds it good that others do not think of him. He demands nothing of anyone and believes he owes nothing to anyone” \((208)\). Unaware of human will and the threat it poses to his self-sufficiency, Emile does what he wants but wants only what he himself can do. He is deliberate, industrious, prudent, resolute, courageous, patient, and moderate. He is, in short, a model bourgeois.

He is, of course, also profoundly unsocial. The instrumental psychology that allowed Emile to so effectively cognize the physical, depersonalized world of “dependence on things” will not suffice in the social realm, because consciousness of human agency introduces complications into the process of desiring that overwhelm the tidy cognitions of childhood. These complications are embodied in Rousseau’s description of our first social desires, which
he characterizes as highly indefinite: “A long restlessness precedes the first desires; a long ignorance puts them off the track. One desires without knowing what. The blood ferments and is agitated; a superabundance of life seeks to extend itself outward. The eye becomes animated and looks over other beings. One begins to take an interest in those surrounding us; one begins to feel that one is not made to live alone. It is thus that the human heart is opened to the human affections and becomes capable of attachment” (*E* 220). The first social impulse we sense within ourselves is subjectively experienced as all encompassing but utterly directionless. It is a compound passion, one that contains within itself a complex of distinct desires for different kinds of attachment. Of course, these desires can and ultimately must be distinguished in order to be developed in an “ordered” way (235), but a properly educated adolescent does not know the difference between love and friendship. He hence has little idea of how to give concrete expression to the “superabundance of life” within him that “seeks to extend itself outward.” His first desire for communion with others is an undifferentiated and indeterminate want of connectedness; he has “an interest in those surrounding [him]” and he “looks over other beings” with a new intensity and feeling of recognition, but this recognition is limited by the ambiguity of the passion that actuates it. It is therefore the source of considerable confusion. He senses that others are good for something, but if pressed he could not explain the “what’s it good for” in his new desire (207). He does not yet know exactly what he wants from others and is needful of much instruction if he is learn how to go about getting it. This newfound desire to be with and seen by others is thus not experienced as a precise and identifiable want or need—like a craving for a hot dog or a wish to take a nap—but as a generalized longing to project oneself into the world, to reach out beyond the narrow and narrowing restrictions of selfhood and connect with other beings.

Rousseau emphasizes the ambiguity in rather than the specificity of our initial social impulses and, in so doing, argues contra Hobbes and Locke that when we turn to others for the first time we lack a developed sense of what purposes they might serve in our lives. To treat others instrumentally presupposes that we already know what they are to us and what we want from them, but if we “desire without knowing what” it is we want from them, then we cannot say in advance what ends they might serve as a means to, what goods they can help us obtain, or how exactly we wish to be connected to them. We do not, in short, know what they are for, and yet they are still wanted, and deeply. The company of others has a value beyond its utility; we
want nothing from them but them. It will take time to learn to distinguish the different forms of recognition and the various needs to which they give rise, but this occurs at a later stage of moral development. For now it is enough to see that Rousseau’s genesis of social attachment begins out of a salutary indeterminacy that shows how we can want others without wanting anything in particular from them. Human relations are desired by a healthy adolescent soul for their own sake rather than for their beneficial consequences.

The confusion into which we are thrown by our new and perplexing social longing raises the issue of self-knowledge and its relationship to sociability. Rousseau calls attention to the presence of identity confusion very early in Book IV, noting the physical and emotional changes that come with puberty: in addition to his “desiring without knowing what,” we also find that Emile’s “voice breaks, or, rather, he loses it; he is neither child nor man and can take the tone of neither” (E 212). Emile no longer knows what he is, what he wants, or how to explain his needs to others. He must adapt to the cruel irony of life as an adolescent—he has lost the ability to express himself at the very moment he most urgently needs it. The birth of the social passions has thus not only made Emile desire the company and recognition of others; it has also introduced the question of self-knowledge as a question, raising it in a way that makes necessary the assistance, care, and company of others. What he is from now on is social; he can no longer do anything—or at any rate anything interesting or important—without considering the interests and views of others. Human relations, then, are not instrumental but identity-constitutive; they give rise to the very desires they seek to satisfy, and do not help us get what we want so much as give shape and substance to desire itself. They influence our political views, our moral characters, our aesthetic orientations, even our physiognomies. They count fundamentally for who we are and how we think of ourselves. The structure of human being is altered profoundly and irreversibly once the desire for the recognition and esteem of others is aroused.

| Amour-Propre and Moral Ambition |

Rousseau connects the dawning of social sentiment and the development of moral personhood to reveal not only the indeterminacy but also the intensity of our first social desires. When we become social we not only want a new
thing but also want it with a new depth and fervency, for as we are initiated into the mysteries of moral and social life we are gripped by a peculiar mixture of pride and shame—pride at our fuller participation in the human estate, and shame at our new needfulness and insufficiency. We begin to view ourselves as works in progress, as perfectible but imperfect beings in need of us know not what. Rousseau intimates something of this profound but enigmatic longing for perfection in his *Moral Letters*, which are addressed to his onetime and, it would seem, ongoing love interest, Sophie d’Houdetot.³

“Have you,” he asks his *belle amie*, “never felt that secret uneasiness that torments us at the sight of our misery and that becomes indignant about our weaknesses as about an insult to the faculties that exalt us?” He goes on to characterize the effects of this powerful psychic force, arguing that it “enflame[s] the heart with love of the celestial virtues” and “carries us into the empyrean next to God himself.” This feeling, this “sublime going astray that raises us above our being,” exalts the soul and “forbids us to have contempt for ourselves” or anyone else who is “a friend of justice and sensitive to the virtues” (*ML* 88–89). To be human is in some sense to wish to transcend humanity.

Though Rousseau sympathetically depicts this impulse in the *Moral Letters* and suggests that its development is necessarily tied to a full realization of the human good, he is more famous for calling attention to its dangers. Indeed, ever since Voltaire famously quipped that his perusal of the *Second Discourse* made him want to walk on all fours like an animal, Rousseau has been thought to counsel against the extension of this distinctively human desire. The more recent work of Laurence Cooper (1999) and N. J. H. Dent (1988) has, however, decisively undermined interpretations like this and suggests rather that Rousseau’s depictions of *amour-propre*’s destructiveness are not to be viewed as claims about the essential malignancy of the passion itself but rather as evidence of its incredible force, one that can catalyze either the corruption or perfection of human nature. In order to see *amour-propre*’s moralizing force, then, it is necessary to examine its genesis, for in so doing we can glimpse both the destructive danger and the constructive potential to which it gives rise as well as begin to see how it might solve some of the problems its own emergence presents.

Rousseau begins his account on this score from the postulate of self-love, holding that “we have to love ourselves to preserve ourselves; and it follows immediately from this same sentiment that we love what preserves us.” Our very first attachments to others are purely instinctual and instru-
mental: “Every child is attached to his nurse. . . . What fosters the well-being of an individual attracts him; what harms him repels him. This is merely blind instinct.” Hobbes himself could not have said it better. However, during puberty the mechanical promptings of pure self-regard are complicated by the new and powerful realization that others exist and that they have intentions with respect to our well-being. The apprehension that other subjects exist and that they mean to do us good or ill looses the passions of hate and love, or rather creates passion proper: “What transforms . . . instinct into sentiment, attachment into love, aversion into hate, is the intention manifested to harm us or to be useful to us. . . . We seek what serves us, but we love what wants to serve us. We flee what harms us, but we hate what wants to harm us. One is never passionate about insensible beings which merely follow the impulsion given to them. But those from whom one expects good or ill from their inner disposition, by their will . . . inspire in us sentiments similar to those they manifest toward us” (E 213). One does not hate the tree branch that strikes his head, but he immediately despises the person who does the same with a baseball bat. The difference, of course, is that the latter’s behavior is invested with malign intentions while the former is bereft of motive. The awareness of human intentionality thus transports us from a mechanical world moved by impersonal forces to a moral world governed by human will. The impact of this realization is difficult to overstate, but we can begin to understand something of its importance by noting that it is impossible for us to continue depending simply on things—on “insensible beings”—in order to subsist, for now we understand that our environment is structured not just by the uniform and harmonious laws of nature but also by the capricious and conflicting motives of other human beings. Our continued preservation and happiness now depend on our ability to discern the often-obscure intentions of others and gain favorable standing in their eyes.

Awareness of the existence of human will, of the fact that others have intentions toward other people and wish to do them good or harm, greatly raises the emotional stakes of social interaction and gives birth to perhaps the most dangerous passion in the human soul—anger. The importance of this emotion for Rousseau’s psychological theory is suggested rather clearly by the fact that the epigraph to Emile—“We are sick with evils that can be cured; and nature, having brought us forth sound, itself helps us if we wish to be improved”—is culled from Seneca’s treatise Of Anger. The frontispiece to the work also indicates anger’s thematic importance: it depicts the solicitous
Thetis dipping her infant son Achilles—who would develop quite the temper—into the River Styx and thereby rendering him invulnerable. Though Rousseau appears to laud Thetis’s care for her son and advises wise preceptors to emulate her salutary example by steeping their own pupils “in the River Styx,” he subtly chastises her, along with the “cruel mothers” of modern times, for worrying too much about the mortality of their children (E 47; see also Scott 2012).

Obsessed with protecting her son from so many external dangers, Thetis failed to tend to his internal life and, in so doing, cultivated unawares the very passion which would prove his undoing. Her approach to education thus fails by its own standard. But such a failure was inevitable, since the standard it applies is the incorrect one: because mortality is a defining feature of the human condition, education is “less a question of keeping [a child] from dying than of making him live” (E 42). Thetis’s well-intentioned efforts were therefore motivated by a misunderstanding of her child’s true needs: in futilely trying to protect her Achilles from dying she prevented him from making productive use of the time he had, and in failing to understand how to educate his anger she made him its unwitting dupe. Jean-Jacques, far from seeking to render his Emile invulnerable and knowing how susceptible his nascent passions are to corruption, does not follow Thetis’s flawed example but rather charts a new course directed by the theory of natural goodness. This theory puts the education of anger at the center of its pedagogy and, rather than seek to inure men to the troublesome effects of amour-propre by preventing its birth, elects instead to subject them to all its power and force (cf. E 235). This new path is the only one that can be trod, but it is rife with obstacles and dangers.

Anger and all its self-destructive consequences materialize when amour-propre’s wish to be recognized is thwarted by the will of another, and it expresses itself with particular intensity when recognition-seeking behaviors go ignored or affectionate feelings go unreciprocated. Rousseau claimed that the disposition to anger in children “requires extreme attentiveness,” and the disciplining of this dangerous passion would appear to be one of Jean-Jacques’s most important and most difficult tasks. This is because we are, on Rousseau’s view, acutely sensitive to the refusals of others and disposed to interpret them as personal affronts, as hateful insults and denials of our worth. It is therefore not uncommon for us to attribute malevolent intentions to those who withhold their affection or otherwise frustrate our wishes. Our tendency to rashly attribute malicious intentionality to an intransigent
other, even and perhaps especially when there is no clear reason to do so, is a form of demonization through which we administer punishment to him; it is how we rebuke him for refusing to love us as he is loved by us. It is also self-deception on the cheap: having been refused the recognition so earnestly sought, we discredit the motives of the other in order to convince ourselves that such love was not worth having in the first place.

Yet another danger that emerges with *amour-propre* is that our desire for social distinction leads us to seek recognition from the wrong sources. Just as governors make mistakes about how to effect their pupils’ good, so, too, do human beings make mistakes about who and what is deserving of their affection. These mistakes have important consequences, for when the objects of our esteem are themselves inestimable we are inevitably led to think and act in unsociable ways. Indeed, domineering and antisocial behaviors (e.g., schoolyard bullying) are often motivated not by anger or malevolence per se but rather by a desire to be accepted by one’s peers. In such cases it is not the wish to do harm but rather the desire to be loved that moves us to behave in aggressive and unsociable ways. Thus, unlike anger, which motivates us to harm others simply for the sake of harming them, misguided recognition-seeking might lead us to injure some for the purpose of impressing others. Like anger, the unguided or misguided desire for social distinction is a pervasive source of mischief in Rousseau’s moral universe: we constantly seek false goods—wealth and titles of various kinds—in part because we believe that through their possession we will gain the affection of others (whose affection is in most cases not worth having), but in the pursuit of such things we are inevitably forced to undermine the interests of the very persons whose esteem we so desire. Thus does injudicious recognition-seeking help create the zero-sum power dynamics discussed in the previous chapter.

These two dangers hardly exhaust the problems that malignant *amour-propre* can cause, but they are highlighted here both because of their gravity and because they point up the depth and intensity of the desire for social recognition that is awakened with the birth of *amour-propre*. The antisocial tendencies that develop in their wake are, however, clearly perversions of *amour-propre* rather than fulfillments of its basic internal logic. Confronting the willfulness of others need not lead to anger overtaking the soul. Indeed, *amour-propre*—while the source of much evil—is not in itself evil. It is, to the contrary, a “useful but dangerous instrument” in the creation of moral identity, a passion that is susceptible to corruption without being corrupt in itself (*E* 244, cf. 252). Rousseau argues that the normal trajectory of healthy
self-love is “toward benevolence” and that we are by nature disposed favorably toward the other members of our species (213). These natural sympathetic feelings are in principle reinforced rather than undermined by *amour-propre* because, once we understand that others recognize and have intentions toward us, it is immediately obvious that we should want that recognition to be positive and those intentions to be favorable. All things being equal, we would prefer to be remembered for the happiness we inspire rather than the threat we pose, and when we seek to dominate others we do so either because we are responding childishly to their intransigence or because our impoverished moral tastes have led us to look for love in all the wrong places. These problems emerge because we are exposed to human intentionality before we are in a condition to appropriately cognize it (214). Thus, when the healthy adolescent turns to others for the first time—when he is able to process the willfulness of others—he views them as important sources of recognition and validation. As an immediate consequence of the view he takes, he is disposed to desire their good opinion, even as he himself does not fully understand what it is he seeks. The desire for approval thus arises concomitantly with and necessarily attaches to the awakening of social sentiment.

The key to solving the twin dangers of anger and indiscriminate recognition-seeking is to forge a link between the desire for social approval and the desire to *merit* that approval. The crucial importance of this link emerges early in Book IV: “One wants to obtain the preference one grants. To be loved, one must make oneself lovable. To be preferred, one has to make oneself more lovable than another, more lovable than every other, at least in the eyes of the beloved object. This is the source of the first glances at one’s fellows; this is the source of the first comparisons with them; this is the source of emulation, rivalries, jealousy. . . . With love and friendship are born dissensions, enmity, and hate” (*E* 214–15). With characteristic foreboding, Rousseau calls attention to the specifically comparative dimension of *amour-propre* and all the trouble it causes. Men want recognition for its own sake, and since the forms of recognition attaching to “love and friendship” are granted preferentially, not everyone attains the affection they so crave. Suffering feelings of exclusion, the malcontent may angrily lash out against or basely imitate those who won the love they were denied. The effects are uniformly destructive: competition becomes the basis for exclusion, which in its turn becomes the basis for great psychological and social conflict.
However, such dangers can be obviated to the degree that our comparative life is carefully developed, and our wish to be loved can be transformed into a wish to be lovable. This transformation, as it is explained in *Emile*, occurs in two stages: the first is to stabilize the sense of self-worth by subtly gratifying nascent *amour-propre*, and the second is to cultivate a passion for virtue by sublimating his sexual desire. With respect to the former, we may begin by noting that the sorts of interpersonal comparisons made by newly social subjects need not simply be the source of emotional turmoil but rather can actually strengthen their moral identities. Because it is not just “dissensions, enmity, and hate”—but also “love and friendship”—that grow out of *amour-propre*’s need to be recognized and respected, Emile’s first comparisons are designed to stimulate his sympathetic impulses and thereby connect him to his species. He is exposed to the sights and sounds of poverty, and these early experiences inspire two kinds of comparisons that serve to stabilize his emerging moral identity as well. The first and most obvious comparison Emile makes is between himself and the person he is helping, and from this comparison he derives heartening reminders of his own puissance as well as the satisfaction that comes with providing a social service of indisputable worth (*E* 223, 229). This comparison solidifies a sense of self-respect that is still unsettled and hence susceptible to corruption because it helps Emile to see that, no matter how well-off some are, there are still others who require his assistance and care. With this in mind, it is worth emphasizing that the way in which comparative activity is introduced is of the first importance for the ultimate effect on the soul. It is essential to Rousseau that Emile be the victor in the first comparisons he makes with others, for if he were to think of himself as inferior it is very likely he would—just like the conventional pupil who is shown the magnificence of the rich rather than the destitution of the poor—become overwhelmed by envy and, ultimately, by anger (220). “Some are better-off,” he would think, “and *someone* is responsible.” Thus it is only after Emile’s education in pity has established a reasonably stable sense of self-worth that it is safe for him to associate with the rich and magnificent.

Emile compares himself not only to the person who requires his assistance but also to those who could join him in helping the unfortunate but elect not to do so, whether out of laziness or contempt (*E* 224, 244–45). Here, too, Emile compares favorably to his fellows, but for a different reason: he prefers his position to that of others because he better exemplifies the standards of personal and moral excellence he shares with them. Reflecting on
common standards of right and goodness and measuring his own efforts against those who occupy a social position similar to his own, Emile finds new reasons to love and cherish both himself as well as those who need his help. Comparative activity, properly structured, actually helps Emile clarify who he is to others and to himself; his moral identity, his sense of himself as a benevolent person, is stabilized by the contrast he observes between himself and those who share his social advantages. To be sure, this contrast will cultivate a sense of moral superiority, but it does so in a way that encourages him to think of himself as the kind of person whose own dignity is expressed by and conditioned on affirming the dignity of others.⁴

While the kinds of comparison embodied by pity help Emile cultivate habits of thought and action that are favorable to the species, this first step in the development of moral identity is only provisional and preparatory. The next and all-important stage is the sublimation of sexual desire. Indeed, the desire to gain the esteem of others and the desire to be estimable manifests itself with particular clarity and intensity in Rousseau’s treatment of the sexual passion, which he conceives as an intrinsically moralistic and moralizing force in the human soul. Sexuality is a prodigious source of social energy and our sexual experiences have a decisive influence on the final shape of our entire personality; its education is therefore of the first moment. In the Discourse on Inequality, Rousseau genuflects fearfully before the “unrestrained and brutal” impulse that “makes one sex necessary to the other,” noting that the sexual passion is so central to civilized man that it can override even his desire for self-preservation (DI 134).

Though the Discourse’s discussion emphasizes the dangers of the sexual passion, of special relevance here is the way Rousseau’s distinction between “physical” and “moral” love helps us understand how sexuality builds the bridge between the desire for esteem and the desire to be estimable. “Physical” sexual desire is for Rousseau a direct expression of primitive amour de soi-même and, as such, a purely mechanical function of innate self-regard. Men and women in the state of nature engage without emotion or affection, seeing one another as instruments of private satisfaction. Considerations of compatibility, physical attractiveness, and moral character do not govern their relations. However, the desire for physical love is peaceable precisely because it is uninformed by complex, deeply felt desire. Natural man “waits for the impulsion of nature, yields to it without choice [and] with more pleasure than frenzy; and the need satisfied, all desire is extinguished” (DI 135). “Physical” sexuality is the psychic equivalent of scratching an itch.
All this changes, however, when “moral” love emerges and effects two related transformations in the structure of sexual desiring. The first involves the development of discriminatory capacities that sharpen aesthetic and moral taste. Whereas natural man does not distinguish between fit and unfit sexual partners, those under the spell of moral love consider questions of appearance as well as character when seeking an appropriate romantic object. The criteria we use to help us separate wheat from chaff—what Rousseau calls notions of “merit and beauty” (DI 135)—allow us to assess the physical and moral virtues of potential mates and to form preferences on their basis. It is by way of forming such preferences that romantic love moves toward exclusivity, for once we have learned to esteem one person more than another our desire “gains a greater degree of energy” for our “preferred object” (DI 134). It is important to note that both aesthetic and moral criteria—beauty and merit—are relevant to the selection of a partner.

The emergence of “moral love” not only refines but also intensifies sexual desire, and this intensification is due to its interaction with amour-propre. Once moved by the desire to be loved, men and women begin to view one another not as accessories to orgasm but rather as sources of personal validation. That is, as we become aware that others are observing us and as aesthetic and moral considerations begin to complicate the experience of sexual attraction, we start to view both our partners and the sexual act itself in a very different light. Coupling is no longer about the simple gratification of a purely physiological impulse, but rather about the acquisition of a unique and uniquely intoxicating form of recognition. To the moral lover, giving one’s body to another is not simply or even a primarily physical act; it is, rather, the definitive way of sharing what is most deeply and fundamentally one’s own. There is something paradoxical and, as Rousseau so often reminds us, potentially troubling about this kind of giving, for while it suggests something final and ultimate—that there is nothing beyond it that can be given—so, too, does it point beyond itself and toward something still more fundamental. The human good instantiated in the sexual passion is one at which sex only hints but at which only sex can hint, for the enchanting aspirations within and beyond moral love have—as we shall see below—a largely physical basis and must find final expression through the articulacy of action.

Because “moral love” utilizes aesthetic and ethical criteria in order to fix its affection on a particular object, so, too, does it indicate a strong connection—however attenuated in specific cases—between sexual and moral aspiration.
Indeed, Rousseau believes true love “will always be honored among men” because embedded in it are “estimable qualities without which one would not be in a condition to feel it” (E 215). Not even the most despicable Parisian dandy can entirely decouple the desire to be esteemed from the desire to be estimable. And though Rousseau does nothing to hide the dangers involved in the specifically sexual form of recognition-seeking—love “does not exclude odious qualities” and “even produces them”—he also argues such dangers are coextensive with the social enterprise and that they must be run in order for human beings to fulfill their moral potential (215). “How many great things,” he exclaims in a discussion of moralized sexuality, “could be done by means of this motive if one knew how to set it in motion!” (390). So long as love facilitates consciousness of the “estimable qualities” qualities of body and soul—so long as there is a plausible connection between what is loved and what is lovable—sexual desire offers new and delicious inducements to virtue and thus can serve as a powerful catalyst of moral perfection.

| Grounding the Divine Heights: Sexuality and Sociability |

In characterizing the first stirrings of sociability as both obscure and intense, Rousseau not only deviates from Hobbes’s and Locke’s moral psychology but also does much to recall Platonic eros (Cooper 2008). Indeed, the desire for moral perfection described above is a particular expression of a more general longing for perfection of a more fundamental, albeit more enigmatic, kind. For Rousseau as for Plato, the good that human beings seek through their relations is all-encompassing; furthermore, as Rousseau tells his Sophie, encounters with this good in its fullness carry us beyond our being and into the empyrean. Far, however, from following Plato in understanding human relations as the product of erotic desire, Rousseau instead views erotic desire as the product of human relations. And because he departs from Plato in denying the naturalness of eros he must therefore explain how it emerges from sources that are authentically natural. What, then, lurks underneath the indeterminate longings of the newly social adolescent?

A careful reading of the initial pages of Book IV of *Emile* shows how nascent sexuality plays an especially important role in grounding our first social impulses and lends them an intensity that is characteristic of eros. These pages describe the birth of the social passions, and Rousseau begins his analysis of this question with a dramatic pronouncement about the

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Rousseau and the Problem of Human Relations
importance of love and sex. “How rapid is our journey on this earth! The first quarter of life has been lived before one knows the use of it. The last quarter is lived when one has ceased to enjoy it.” He quickly clarifies what the interval between these two “useless extremities” is actually “good” for: “We are, so to speak, born twice: once to exist and once to live; once for our species and once for our sex” (211). The awakening of sexual desire is so crucial for Rousseau that it constitutes nothing less than a “second birth” in which man is “truly born to life . . . and nothing human is foreign to him” (212). Sexuality is essential to the ongoing process of self-understanding, for only through it can one access distinctively human pleasures, pains, and obligations. In short, sexuality makes us human.

Rousseau’s decision to frame his treatment of the birth of social sentiment in terms of sexual development indicates that the two processes are closely related. Indeed, Rousseau comes to the point of arguing that the birth of amour-propre and all its peculiar longings is really the birth of inchoate sexual desire. “As soon,” he explains, “as a man has need of a companion, he is no longer an isolated being. . . . All his relations with his species, all the affections of his soul are born with this one. His first passion soon makes the others ferment” (E 214). The following paragraph, which elaborates specifically and at length on the nature of romantic love, shows clearly that the “companion” now sought after is a lover rather than a friend: “The inclination of nature is indeterminate. One sex is attracted to the other; that is the movement of nature.” Sexuality is crucial to social development not only because it is a powerful source of moral motivation but also because it sharpens the powers of moral and aesthetic discrimination we use in all the domains of social life. Love both presupposes and improves our ability to locate in others certain “estimable qualities”—considerations of merit and beauty—that would otherwise go unperceived or misperceived. Diffused, undirected sexual desire helps ground moral and social impulse; its operations and influence are not restricted to sexual life specifically but are rather felt in all the dimensions of moral life.

We, of course, know that the adolescent Emile does not know any of this and is in a state of constant perplexity both about what he is for others and what they are for him. On this point, we should recall how essential it is that he experience his first social longings in all their indeterminacy, for it is this indeterminancy that allows him to cognize his relations as intrinsic rather than instrumental goods. But there are still other reasons to delay the onset of specifically sexual desire, whose premature emergence is identified by Rousseau as
the danger to be avoided in early adolescence. To this end, he undertakes an extended excursus on conventional sex education in order to show that it actually worsens the ill it was designed to resolve. It does so first by carelessly exciting the child’s curiosity and second by refusing to satisfy it. Offended by the refusals of adults and enticed by their knowing grins, children search in secret for the knowledge their elders will not give them: “The lessons of decency given to [children], the veil of mystery that is supposed to be drawn over their eyes, are only so many spurs to their curiosity” (E 215). Efforts to conceal the great mystery of generation only sharpen the sight of prying eyes.

The effects of precocious sexuality are wide-ranging and destructive. For instance, premature gratification whitewashes other important social feelings, overwhelming with its wild force the still-developing system of social impulses and short-circuiting basic social sentiments like pity. This prevents us from understanding or entertaining—and thus from respecting—the interests of anyone but the love object. On this score Rousseau reports that young people who are “given over to women” too early are always “inhuman and cruel.” The “heat of their temperaments made them impatient, vindictive, and wild. Their imaginations, filled with a single object, rejected all the rest. They knew neither pity nor mercy” (E 220). The sexual drive is so powerful that, if expressed too early, it crowds out other social sentiments that are also expressive of human nature and that are needed to enjoy a full and rich social life. Lovers who see and feel nothing but each other at too early an age never develop a full complement of social feelings and are unable to identify sympathetically with others. They are, in fact, often disposed to view the outside world and its impositions as so many threats to their bond and to either lash out against or attempt a complete retreat from “society.” Even if well motivated, the strategy of escape would appear to be futile, for lovers do not and cannot exist in a social or political vacuum. They are, to the contrary, situated in a complex of social institutions with which they must come to terms in order to sustain their union. Thus it would seem that, to the degree that lovers wish to maintain their relation, they must develop the system of social impulses necessary for their healthy social incorporation.

Rousseau goes still further, arguing not only that precipitate sexuality short-circuits other important social feelings but also that it ultimately compromises the experience of love itself. Premature sexual activity is a prime cause of the moral and existential truncation of modern man. The sexual passion is simply too intense, too complex, and too overwhelming for young
people, who remain “small, weak, and ill-formed” if they become sexually active at too young an age. It is particularly pernicious in cities, where young people “age instead of growing, as the vine that has been made to bear fruit in the spring languishes and dies before autumn” (E 216). Early initiation into the mysteries of sex exhausts man’s vitality before it can truly express itself, stripping sex of its enchantment and robbing us of one of the greatest sources of happiness available to us. This loss is all the more serious when we consider that the passion of love—as we shall see in chapters 4 and 5—is highly unstable and must be supplemented by gentler social feelings (e.g., “pity and mercy”) if the romantic association is to endure at all. If these feelings never fully develop, then resentment and even disgust are likely to follow upon the (inevitable) death of passion and undermine the union. It is in the face of such grave dangers that Jean-Jacques leaves Emile to dwell in aporetic confusion about the source of his desire. It is the first of many assists he will give to nature in the course of his pupil’s moral and social development.

**Distinguishing Love and Friendship: The Many Faces of Amour-Propre**

Because *amour-propre*’s need for social recognition expresses itself with particular intensity in the sexual situation, Rousseau seeks to delay for as long as possible the arousal of specifically sexual impulses. Indeed, one of the more puzzling aspects of Rousseau’s treatment of the dawning of social sentiment is that he insists on the genetic priority of the sexual passion only to delay its expression until the last possible moment. Far from claiming that the first concrete manifestation of the social-sexual impulse should itself be sexual, he instead encourages the tutor to suppress his pupil’s consciousness of sexual identity and to redirect his newfound need for companionship toward friendship rather than love: the “first sentiment of which a carefully raised young man is capable is not love; it is friendship. The first act of his nascent imagination is to teach him he has fellows; and the species affects him before the female sex” (E 220). A sentiment favorable to the species, and to all sentient creatures, must emerge before love even though such a sentiment is itself grounded at least in part in protean sexuality. Is this another of Rousseau’s contradictions?
I submit that it is not, and for two reasons. First, Rousseau’s claim that adolescents are capable of friendship before they are capable of love is not incompatible with his genetic claim that the desire for “friendship” emerges in part from inchoate sexuality. Because the set of responses and sentiments evoked by friendship are more tractable than the highly complex emotions associated with romantic love, Rousseau gives pedagogic priority to the former even though the latter has genetic priority. One must crawl before walking. Though it would appear that, in acting thus, Jean-Jacques works against rather than with the natural order, we shall see below that such appearances are somewhat deceiving. Second, it is clear that friendship and love are on Rousseau’s accounting quite distinct associational phenomena that create different emotional needs and satisfy different kinds of human desire. Though want of both these forms of association share a common source, they become increasingly distinct as they develop and mature. The emergence of discrete social passions is more important than it may seem, for it helps explain a highly significant fact of social life, namely, that *amour-propre*’s demands are not uniform but rather vary according to associational context.

In privileging friendship over love it seems that Jean-Jacques is now working against rather than with natural developmental processes, for it appears that the indeterminate sexuality underwriting many of adolescent Emile’s social impulses is now being actively suppressed by the tutor. However, by allowing his pupil to remain in aporetic confusion about the sources of his desires, Jean-Jacques claims that, far from violating nature, he is in fact its midwife and agent. On this score, Rousseau notes that nature itself only partially determines the specific moment for sexual awakening and thus allows for the influence of mores and education. A degree of indeterminacy is built into the *natural* structure of the sexual passion: the moment of its arousal and the character of its development are contingent on social and climatological factors which are being carefully controlled in Emile’s education. Given that nature has left some room for environmental influence, Jean-Jacques claims that in exercising some discretion on his pupil’s behalf he is actually nature’s agent rather than its opponent: redirecting an inchoate sexual drive toward nonsexual objects “is not an artful untruth” but rather the best way to allow “nature’s ignorance” to enlighten itself (*E* 219). We are reminded that “the time” of sexual maturity “is coming” but are told that to inform one’s pupil too early is far worse than to inform him too late (if such is possible): “Nature’s instruction is late and slow; men’s is almost always
premature. In the former case the senses awake the imagination; in the latter the imagination wakes the senses” (219, 215). Given space and time, our highly indeterminate want of social companionship unpacks itself and becomes discrete desires for specific kinds of companionship. The adolescent, then, is confused because nature wants it that way, not because his tutor is misleading him. In his redirection of diffused sexual energy Jean-Jacques is perhaps not in perfect accord with nature, but for Rousseau’s argument to work it is enough that he not be in disaccord with it.

If the ordered development of the social passions leads us to friendship before romantic love, then it also requires us to distinguish between friendship and love. In so doing, it forces us to recognize that associational life is varied and complex. Though our initial social longing is itself highly indeterminate, there are immanent within it several discrete desires for different kinds of association that have their own particular requirements and are directed toward the fulfillment of distinct psychological needs. Human beings identify with one another in all manner of ways—as lovers and beloveds, parents and children, friends and siblings, superiors and subordinates, citizens and subjects, competitors and fellows—and the kinds of recognition and fulfillment we seek from these various forms of identification are different and distinguishable. What the confused adolescent lacks—and what he gains through the process of social development—is a sense of exactly how others figure into his life and of what kinds of expectations are appropriate to particular interpersonal contexts. Much of what social development is, then, is the gradual disaggregation of the undifferentiated desire for recognition into several discrete desires for distinct kinds of love and recognition. At the very heart of socialization is the realization that different kinds of relationships offer different kinds of satisfaction. The development of sociability, on Rousseau’s account, is then quite literally the transformation of the original social passion—the as yet undifferentiated want of companionship—into discrete, identifiable, and educable social passions. Though this first and highly indeterminate social passion has a largely sexual basis it nonetheless contains within it a whole host of discrete social desires that can be meaningfully distinguished from the specifically sexual desire.

The capacity to distinguish between love and friendship has important implications for how we think about amour-propre. Because social attachment is not a monolithic or undifferentiated psychic phenomenon—because there are distinguishable and discrete forms of connectedness with different
psychic bases—neither is the desire for social distinction something that assumes the same form or behaves in the same way. Different kinds of relationships serve different purposes and speak to different needs in the psychic economies of healthy human beings. Thus the degree and kind of recognition that we seek is in many ways contingent on the specific associational context in which it is embedded. This finding, it must be admitted, is hardly counterintuitive. In arguing as he does, Rousseau is in accord—for him, perhaps, a rare accord—with what might be called common sense, for no special genius is needed to see that human beings find themselves in different sorts of relationships, that such relationships have different psychological sources and effects, and that these relationships help to structure the behaviors and desires of those who are embedded in them.

Curiously, the very feature of *amour-propre* that is evident to virtually anyone who has reflected even momentarily on his own associational life remains undertheorized in Rousseau scholarship. Most scholarly treatments characterize the emergence and development of *amour-propre* as a unidimensional transformation from a self-love that has its origin in natural needs into one that has its origin in arbitrary opinion. In seeking to explain this transformation, the focus has been on the fact of social observation—the realization that others, whoever they may be, are watching us. Judith Shklar, N. J. H. Dent, and Frederick Neuhouser have all provided very sophisticated and helpful statements of this broad problematic and have gone on to adduce many of the psychological possibilities and pathologies that attend the ever-increasing awareness of others and an ever-increasing desire to gain their esteem. What is important in such cases is to know that we are being observed, not who is doing the observing. As a general characterization of *amour-propre* this is correct and even useful as a way of fixing ideas about the kinds of psychic dislocations that can result from the phenomenon of social observation. But to focus simply on the fact of observation in the abstract is to assume that the effects of *amour-propre* are felt uniformly across the entire field of social interaction. It is to assume that we would like to know whether we are being observed but are uninterested in knowing who, exactly, is doing the observing.

It will be a guiding concern in the following chapters to show that this assumption conceals meaningful variation in the way *amour-propre* expresses itself, that it in fact matters a great deal who exactly is watching us. The way in which we identify the observer—whether we are under the gaze of a lover (or prospective lover), a friend, a parent, a teacher (or student), a fellow citizen,
a stranger, or a child—is of the first importance for what we do and how we go about doing it. Not all social anxieties are created equal. Because the differentiation of the social passions is at one with their development, it becomes necessary to look more closely at the various forms of social recognition that recur in Rousseau’s oeuvre, and to look specifically at their respective psychological consequences. In so doing, we shall see that the various forms of connectedness have different psychological statuses, are felt more or less intensely, and in consequence are more or less useful in their contribution to the preservation of human wholeness.