

I

Rousseau's Theory of Human Relations

Margaret greeted her lord with peculiar tenderness on the morrow. Mature as he was, she might yet be able to help him to the building of the rainbow bridge that should connect the prose in us with the passion. Without it we are meaningless fragments, half monks, half beasts, half connected arches that have never joined into a man. With it, love is born and alights on the highest curve, glowing against the grey, sober against the fire. . . . Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer. Only connect, and the beast and the monk, robbed of the isolation that is life to either, will die.

—E. M. FORSTER, *Howards End*

Humans are divided beings, and Margaret Schlegel knew it well. Every day she futilely sought to mend the cracks in her husband's brittle soul, to unite the poles that hemmed in his cramped existence, to harmonize those elements of life—reason and emotion, obligation and appetite, autonomy and attachment, self and society, “prose” and “passion”—that stubbornly resist harmonization. So long as polarities are experienced *as* polarities, so long as uncertainty and moral tension are not brought in the service of a unified purpose, human life is fated to be undefined, empty, flaccid, purposeless.

To be divided, then, is not to be confused about what to do in a moment, nor is it simply to struggle against one's desires in the quest for self-command. It is, rather, to be *truncated*. It is to lack the principles necessary for resolving internal turmoil and to have no understanding of why it would be necessary to struggle against oneself in the first place.

We can, perhaps, begin to better understand the longing for unity and where to look for its most complete satisfaction by noting that it was through her social relations that Margaret sought to "connect" the disparate parts of her personality. Her "sermon" makes the desire for reconciliation the most fundamental in the human soul, claiming that it is most fully realized not in disengaged contemplation or the continual satisfaction of vulgar bodily desire but rather in the social sentiment of "love." Indeed, for Margaret the surest sign of an integrated and thus fully human existence is the presence of a desire for meaningful social relations. In thinking thus she differs from both "the beast" and "the monk," not only because she craves reconciliation and they do not but also because she is able to enjoy meaningful social intercourse and they cannot. Both flee intimacy and seek refuge in "isolation," the latter because he hates his appetites and the former because he hates everything *but* his appetites. In so doing, however, they foreclose on the forms of self-development that are only available through social development; they truncate their own being in the quest to preserve it.

In bringing the themes of individual wholeness and social connectedness together, Forster gives fresh voice to a series of psychological and social concerns previously articulated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau, like Forster, held that the complex and mediated form of life ushered in by modernity had alienated man from his nature and diminished his capacity for social affection.¹ It had stifled the natural movements of sympathy, rewarded domineering selfishness, punished good faith, and crushed up in its iron gears all delicacy of feeling and elevation of soul. Intimacy had been sacrificed to regularization, fineness to mediocrity, spontaneity and sincere affection to efficiency and a superficial, mechanized politeness. The torch of progress so confidently borne by the partisans of Enlightenment had broken into a destructive wildfire that had incinerated rather than illumined the hidden springs of virtue and social feeling.

It is worth emphasizing that Rousseau's critique is not merely a condemnation of this or that form of social organization, but is, rather, a root-and-branch attack on the idea of social organization per se. It holds that the very conditions under which moral personality emerges are those under which it

becomes divided against itself. Socialization itself had done profound violence to human nature by upsetting the natural harmony between desire and power, by punishing authenticity and rewarding dishonesty, by generating relationships of personal dependence and their attendant feelings of jealousy and hatred, and by introducing arbitrary forms of inequality. Love, friendship, and virtue—the consolations of sociability—are overwhelmed by the very conditions that bring them into existence. Thus civil society and its complex of destructive and alienating institutions look to be a garish facade tacked thoughtlessly up on “piles of quicksand” (*DI* 97), a constellation of alluring disappointments that bring the self into being only in order to corrupt it.² Insofar, then, as the divisions within the self are a necessary consequence of man’s introduction into society, the social problem is insoluble and it becomes necessary to return to the forests and live with the bears.

Rousseau himself, however, dismisses this fatalistic conclusion as a deep misunderstanding of his intention for at least two reasons. First, he rejects the possibility of a return to the state of nature, strictly speaking. Human development is not retrograde; neither the individual nor the species can simply “go back” and recover the spontaneous and prediscursive unity of the state of nature. Second, even if such a return were possible it would be *undesirable*. It is important to remember Rousseau’s claim that the pinnacle of human happiness was reached not in the asocial state of nature but rather in the primitive sociability of the “Golden Age,” where the establishment of the nuclear family and the introduction of “conjugal and paternal love” were adequate compensations for the psychological disturbances introduced by the birth of *amour-propre* (*DI* 146–48). Consistent with this, Rousseau remarks in a different context that human being is so “elevated” and “ennobled” by the experience of settled social relations that, were abuses of social power not so likely, we should “bless . . . the moment” we exchanged the stupid animal contentment of the state of nature for the rich satisfactions and challenges of moral and social life (*SC* I.8, 56). Such remarks point toward a more constructive understanding of the social problem than the one initially sketched, for they suggest that though Rousseau believes the problem of human dividedness to have been introduced by social relations he also believes dividedness is not a *necessary* consequence of social relations. In fact, to the degree we wish to preserve our natural wholeness, the disease must become the cure; human association must heal the wounds it inflicts.

To this end, Rousseau sought to resolve the internal and external conflicts that beset us by revitalizing the associational context in which we come

to understand ourselves. He did so by imbuing with new life relations grown arid, unrewarding, and exploitative. Modern political thought believed it could solve the social problem by appealing to the rational self-interest each individual had in respecting the interests and claims of others, but Rousseau argued that this appeal taught us to view one another not as beings possessed of moral dignity but rather as instruments of, or obstacles to, private desire. Modern men, grazing for a century on the antisocial fustian of Hobbes and Locke, had come to view their relations with one another in almost comically narrow terms and were increasingly eager to explain their social motivations in the reductive language of modern materialism. Rousseau viewed all this with great alarm and sought to remind readers of the deep and enduring satisfaction that might be attained through social intercourse. To this end, he wrote extensively of romance and friendship and their relationship to a good life. He painted vivid portraits of primitive peoples dancing under a tree, of lovers in the throes of a turbulent passion, of an omnipotent tutor's unceasing devotion, of friends sharing a morning in sublime silence, of citizens celebrating their solidarity in the public square, of a cuckolded husband's desperate rage.

The diversity of these images, to say nothing of the brilliant colors in which they are painted, provides a clue about the nature of Rousseau's social theory and about what he sought to accomplish through it. They point up a depth of longing and help bring into view a new and richer conception of human association that makes that depth comprehensible. Rousseau does not conceive of human relations merely as instruments of private purposes or as means to exogenously determined ends, for to do so presupposes we know what others are for us and what we want from them. He argues, to the contrary, that sociability is a cause rather than a consequence of desire—it does not merely satisfy preexisting needs but rather brings new needs into being. Social relations are therefore ends rather than means; they instantiate the very good they seek, satisfying the desires they bring into existence. To think of human association in instrumental terms is thus a mistake of the crudest and most life-denying kind, for it cannot explain the intrinsic benefits of social connectedness or the way in which the desire for such connectedness actually comes to be. In order to talk sensibly about the human good and its realization, it is necessary to understand how sociability affects both the substance and structure of human ends.

It is in light of the foregoing considerations that I put to Rousseau the following question: what may we hope for from our associations? Though such a question has clear perennial relevance and implicates a host of questions at the center of Rousseau's enterprise, it has never been directly asked of him. In quest of an answer I analyze the most prominent forms of human relations in Rousseau's oeuvre—romantic love, friendship, and civil or political connectedness—and seek to uncover the function of each in his broader project of preserving human beings in (some workable approximation of) their natural wholeness. The theme of human association provides, I think, an especially productive lens through which to view Rousseau's philosophical enterprise because it allows us to glimpse the radically critical as well as the radically redemptive elements of his social theory. He consistently portrays human relations as deeply problematic but also as deeply rewarding—as the source of our greatest disappointments and our highest joys. Insofar as getting our relationships “right” is a necessary condition for the restoration of psychic integrity, the question of what we may—indeed *must*—expect from our social life sits at the heart of Rousseau's writing.

Our focus on human relations, however, proves useful as a unifying theme for at least three additional reasons. First, it allows us to more clearly view the variety of ways the desire for recognition—what Rousseau called *amour-propre*—expresses itself. There are, of course, already a number of very fine treatments of this central passion (e.g., Dent 1988; Rawls 2007; Neu-houser 2008), but a surprisingly neglected feature of perhaps the most studied term in Rousseau's lexicon is that its demand for approval is necessarily situated in specific associational contexts. This neglect is unfortunate, for if the degree and kind of recognition we seek from others depends in large measure on the kind of relationship we have with them, then we cannot understand precisely what *amour-propre* wants until we understand the particular association in which it is embedded. Using discrete associational forms as units of analysis thus helps uncover meaningful variance that the aforementioned studies of *amour-propre* do not explore.

Second, it keeps us from following the common and, I think, somewhat misleading practice of privileging the political association over other forms of human connectedness. This kind of privileging, as I shall argue toward the end of this chapter, lacks a sound justification in Rousseau's own texts; in fact, it is driven more by the needs of interpreters than by the intentions of the author. Focusing on human relations provides greater traction

in understanding where and how Rousseau's political philosophy fits into his thought as a whole by encouraging us to understand politics in terms of the broader problem of human association rather than vice versa. The approach taken here, far from attempting to bring Rousseau's teachings on love and friendship into the service of his political thought, instead views them as direct instantiations of the human good and, thus, at some remove from—and sitting in some tension with—the demands of political life.

Third, our focus on human relations helps clarify the specific function that each form of association has in the more general human quest to recover wholeness through connectedness. In so doing, it allows us to approach more productively the all-important question of realizability: to what extent *can* we actually achieve through our relations the wholeness we so crave? On this score, I argue that each associational type suffers from specific kinds of limitations that make that realization all but impossible. Rousseau writes about human relationships not only to show how they give rise to new and interesting psychic possibilities but also to show how such possibilities are ultimately frustrated. His final teaching on the question of human connectedness thus has a tragic character: even under the best possible circumstances, social relations—in whatever form—ultimately fail to satisfy the desires to which they give rise. Though consolations, even meaningful ones, do emerge from the process of socialization, the salient and even defining characteristic of man's life in society is his congenital weakness.

The arguments I shall make concerning both the relationship of the political association to its domestic counterparts and the pessimistic character of Rousseau's social theory owe much to Judith Shklar's pioneering *Men and Citizens* (1969), which powerfully evokes the pessimistic or tragic dimensions of Rousseau's thinking. Yet Shklar's portrayal itself relies on a somewhat reductive understanding of Rousseau's social vision, one that neglects the aspirational or perfectionistic drives that Rousseau finds in human nature and emphasizes, instead, the role of pity in order to highlight man's status as a victim. I, on the other hand, shall seek to understand Rousseau's pessimism about human relations in light of his ambitious and possibility-enhancing account of human desire—for to the degree that Rousseau is especially concerned to depict the sort of suffering that occurs when our highest and best aspirations are frustrated, we must move beyond Shklar's oversimple accounts of human desire and moral motivation and look more carefully at the expansive impulses that so intransigently resist satisfaction.

Rousseau is on some level an unlikely subject for a study of human association. As a man, he was hardly a model of generosity or kindly social feeling, and even those who defended him conceded that he was irascible, unpredictable, and difficult. Accordingly, his social life was marked by acrimonious conflicts with figures as influential as Voltaire and as affable as David Hume (Zaretsky and Scott 2009). As a philosopher, he is commonly and not unreasonably seen as an apostle of solitude and a champion of individual freedom, but not as a theorist of human relations. His theoretical works exalt emotional independence and self-sufficiency, deny that human beings are naturally social, and insist the defining characteristic of good collective life is the absence of personal dependence. His autobiographical works tell the story of a social outcast who ultimately had to abandon society in order to recapture his natural goodness. What could such a seemingly unsocial person and individualistic philosopher possibly tell us about human connectedness?

Without denying Rousseau's personal peculiarities or his philosophical emphasis on themes of solitude and individual freedom, I submit not only that he has a theory of human relations but also that it deserves our serious attention and that its articulation was among his most important philosophical intentions. Indeed, it has such importance for Rousseau that we find him singing the glories of human connectedness not only in his political and novelistic works but also in the place where we might least expect to him to do so—an autobiographical work called *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*. Written at the end of Rousseau's life and seemingly intended to reveal the happiness he found *outside* society, the *Reveries* wistfully evokes the shade of a now-absent social affection. Even when engaged in reverie—the most private of acts—Rousseau's mind inevitably turned toward his associational life, so much so, in fact, that the work's first and the final walks frame the entire text in terms of social relationships. He begins the *Reveries* by claiming his decision to quit society was not his own but rather was forced on him by others: "The most sociable and the most loving of humans has been proscribed from society by a unanimous agreement" (RSW 3). Rousseau would have happily remained with his fellows if they had allowed it. That he was *forced* to live at the margins of society indicates something about its choice-worthiness, as does his somewhat generous self-description (the "most sociable" and "most loving" of his species). For all civil society's corruption and

hypocrisy, Rousseau never ceased to value the commitment to the activity of mutual perfection and the sentiments of love and sociability that it embodies. To give up on that commitment, as Rousseau did only after he was *forced* to do so by his fellows, is to give up on something important indeed.

Though the first walk concludes with Rousseau claiming to have found a tranquility in solitude that eluded him in society, the final walk gives us some reason to wonder about the truth of this claim. There, we find Rousseau confessing an ongoing need for social affection as well as revealing something about the *kind* of affection he sought. His *promenade dernière* leads him back to Les Charmettes and his time with Mme de Warens, which he recalls with almost unqualified fondness. Only at this Edenic site, in the Oedipal embrace of his *chère maman*, could he “genuinely say that [he] had lived” and that he had done so “fully, without admixture and without obstacle” (RSW 89). Rousseau felt no opposition within or without: the lack of a need for pretenses with Mme de Warens or anyone else meant he could be his true self, and the lack of resistance from his environment meant he could show his natural benevolence “without obstacle.” Life at Les Charmettes glided effortlessly along, as on a frictionless plane; the young Rousseau enjoyed fullness of social feeling without the trappings of social obligation. This was an existential limit point that may have never been surpassed, for Rousseau goes on to portray his philosophic life and the exile that followed it not as choiceworthy in its own right but rather as a kind of martyrdom he suffered for love of his mistress and maternal stand-in: he began his literary and philosophic career to find neither fame nor truth, but rather as a way of recompensing Mme de Warens for her generosity.³ It was, then, his love of others that ultimately forced him from their midst. Philosophy itself was undertaken for non-philosophic reasons.

The disintegration of the boundaries between self and other that Rousseau ecstatically evokes at his *maison maternelle* is presented again in a revealing personal disclosure from the *Confessions*: “I am repeating myself. I know it; it is necessary. The first of my needs, the greatest, the strongest, the most inextinguishable, was entirely in my heart: it was the need for an intimate society and as intimate as it could be; it was above all for this that I needed a woman rather than a man, a lover rather than a friend. This peculiar need was such that the closest of union of two bodies could not even be enough for it: *I would have needed two souls in the same body*” (C 348; emphasis added). Rousseau again brings together the themes of unity and sociabil-

ity, disclosing that his quest for comprehensive fulfillment—for a complete oneness with his surroundings—is felt most strongly as a social (and quasi-sexual) desire. The erotic longing for wholeness through connectedness that Rousseau evokes through the image of two souls inhabiting the same body is the first and most fundamental of his desires. It is not a compound passion that can be reduced into simpler or more fundamental elements, nor is it wanted because it might be useful in attaining some other and more basic good. Rousseau's characterization of his own desire is, rather, a clear and compelling statement about the character of the human good and how it is best realized. That which he sought was indivisible and intrinsic: self-transcendence is achieved via social interdependence, and social interdependence is achieved via self-transcendence. The themes of wholeness and connectedness are thus of a piece and must be understood together to be understood at all.

The desire to recapture natural unity through associational life is not restricted to Rousseau's autobiographical works and is poorly understood if it is thought to be the idiosyncratic private desire of a unique man. Indeed, Rousseau's diagnosis of alienation in *Emile* discloses that the entire species—humanity tout court—shares his need for deep emotional connection and suffers from its absence nearly as much as he does. We, Rousseau explains, are only halfway social: we are unable to rid ourselves of the lingering want of social connection but are equally unable to commit to its rigorous requirements. Our lives are therefore defined by a disproportion between what is good for us and what is expected of us: always “appearing to relate everything to others and never relating anything except to themselves alone,” always “floating between his inclinations and his duties,” always following a “composite impulse” that only reinforces our dissatisfaction, we die “without having been able to put ourselves in harmony with ourselves and without having been good either for ourselves or for others” (*E* 40–41). As in the *Reveries* and the *Confessions*, Rousseau links social interdependence to the restoration of psychological unity. However, this time he does so in a way that makes this reconciliation the aim of a broader social and political agenda rather than a personal desire. In order to restore ourselves to our original “harmony” we must find a way to remove the contradictions built into society's basic institutions, to neutralize the major sources of interpersonal division and social conflict. So long as we subsist in civil society, unity without is the essential condition of unity within.

| Rational Performances: Bourgeois Dividedness and the Crisis of Meaning

Rousseau's concern with halfway sociability and the dividedness that attends it is an extension of his critique of modern political thought and its restrictive conception of human relations. Rousseau's most important, though far from his only, interlocutors in this context were Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, both of whom sought to ameliorate the religious and political conflict that defined their century by restricting the aims of human community. The classical conception of political community handed down from Aristotle and his Christian heirs and assigns held that society was a partnership in virtue and a constitutive component of the human good. However, this conception had proven philosophically unsatisfactory as well as destructive in its practical effects. The religious persecution that had destabilized England and Europe as a whole revealed how unsuitable the traditional notion of political community was for modern times: far from inspiring feelings of fraternity or creating a brotherhood in Christ, it had instead loosed wild and sanguinary enthusiasms that undermined the sound functioning of society's basic institutions and turned God's children into enraged and bitter enemies.

Both Hobbes and Locke held that many of the disputes that had had such serious practical consequences were actually absurd on their face. The new science had exposed serious flaws in the teleological conceptions on which traditional notions of cosmos and society were based. The "good" at which political society was presumptively aimed was in fact an Aristotelian illusion with no ground in fact or nature. Human ends were expressive of subjective attractions and aversions but could not be justified by their correspondence to an objectively determined authoritative good—for there was no such good—and to argue over the nature of something that did not exist was the height of Peripatetic absurdity. Since the teleological conceptions of person and society could not make sense of political life, it was necessary to identify a more workable foundation for both concepts.

Both Hobbes and Locke found one in rational self-interest. A properly scientific account of human nature showed that it was necessary to begin from the premise of human selfishness, not the principle of sociability, to produce a more stable and more just political society. Human association was best understood not as an expression of our nature or as a constituent part of the good at which it naturally aims, but rather as an instrument to be utilized in the service of an essentially private felicity. Though this reconcep-

tualization of human association and public life restricted the scope of political possibility and narrowed the motivational field of political subjects, it was claimed that this more scientific understanding of human nature and society could secure social stability and justice more effectively than could traditional notions. It so happened that the aim of political society was not the joint realization of the human good or the thick moral community that made that pursuit possible, but rather the protection of private holdings through the rule of law and the maintenance of social conditions that were favorable to mutually beneficial exchange. Such a system did not make inaccurate or heroic assumptions about human beings and their capacity for or disposition toward civic virtue, but instead claimed that, under the appropriate institutional conditions, directed rational selfishness could motivate the political agent to honor his covenants and obey the law. Modern political and social institutions thus sought to make men calculable by making them calculating, by tamping down the moral enthusiasm that had proven so unpredictable and destabilizing.

Hobbes was especially adamant in his attempt to reduce political life, and human association more generally, down to egoistic calculations. He rigorously rejected the classical principle of natural sociability, treating man's "aptness to society" as a function of his desire for self-preservation (*Lev.* XV, 95; XVII, 106).⁴ He also flatly denied the classical belief in the existence of an authoritative human good: "There is no such *Finis Ultimus* nor *Summum Bonum* as is spoken of in the books of the old moral philosophers" (XI, 57). Eschewing the language of mutual perfection and adopting the patois of economics, Hobbes interprets love and friendship as essentially private phenomena, understood only by their effects on an agent's utility function. The desire for deep and serious communion is either reduced to instrumental considerations or viewed as a form of fanaticism—an illusory and dangerous longing to be purged rather than educated.

Following the "justly decried" Hobbes on this score, John Locke adopts a restrictive understanding of human community in the *Second Treatise of Civil Government*. While acknowledging that human beings have an "inclination" for society, he nonetheless explicates an asocial and utilitarian psychology and emphasizes the motives of "necessity and convenience" in his account of the formation of civil society (2*Tr.* 7, 42).⁵ He also provides a depoeitized and unsentimental account of conjugal society. Husbands and wives, Locke says, have no obligation to each other beyond what is necessary for rearing children, and once children reach the age of reason the conjugal

bond “dissolves of itself” and both husband and wife are “at liberty” (7, 44). Underneath this restrictive and instrumental conception of human relations is a narrow conception of the human good. Indeed, Locke follows Hobbes in relegating the *Summum Bonum* to the philosophical junk pile: “The mind as well as the palate has a different relish; and you will as fruitlessly endeavour to delight all men with Riches or Glory . . . [as with] cheese or lobster. . . . Hence it was, I think, that the Philosophers of old did in vain enquire, whether *Summum bonum* consisted in Riches, or bodily Delights, or Virtue, or Contemplation” (*ECHU* 269).⁶ Locke’s denial of the existence of a consummate human good undermines the possibility of a political community—indeed *any* community—founded on its pursuit. Like Hobbes, then, he believed the path to justice and stability required a more modest conception of social relations.

Enter Rousseau, who found in the work of his predecessors a cure worse than the disease. Hobbes and Locke argued that rational self-interest fashioned an adequate ground for political community, but Rousseau countered that narrow selfishness—far from teaching us our duties—instead taught us the dishonesty necessary to evade them. The belief that egoism could serve as its own cure did not motivate citizens to become lawful, industrious, and tolerant; to the contrary, it had only succeeded in introducing another contradiction into the soul—that between speech and deed. *The Discourse on the Sciences and Arts* and *The Discourse on Inequality* are united by a concern to show that the model of human community advanced by Hobbes and Locke fails even on its own modest terms. In the former, Rousseau complains that the loss of “sincere friendships,” “real esteem,” and “well-founded trust” is due in part to the “suspicions, fears, coldness, reserve, hate, [and] betrayal” that hide underneath the “false veil of politeness” required by enlightened society (*DSA* 38).⁷ No one acts as he speaks or speaks as he feels, and such widespread dishonesty contributes to a social atmosphere characterized by division, distrust, and bad faith.

The Discourse on Inequality develops and radicalizes this line of argument, arguing that rational self-interest is unable to solve the social conflicts it creates. “If,” Rousseau thunders, “I am told that society is so constituted that each man gains by serving others, I shall reply that this would be very well, if he did not gain still more by harming them” (*DI* 194–95). Civil society introduces a zero-sum dynamic in which one person’s gain always comes at another’s expense and thus “necessarily brings men to hate each other in proportion to the conflict of their interests” (193). Those who follow the

advice of Hobbes and Locke inevitably find that their interests are best served not by following the law but rather by “finding ways to be assured of impunity” (195). Because honest gains are always surpassed by dishonest ones, reason itself recommends criminality: there “is no profit, however legitimate, that is not surpassed by one that can be made illegitimately” (195). So long as private and particularistic considerations are harnessed to narrow instrumental rationality, they will mediate man’s relation to the other and make his social life unstable and antagonistic. Association premised simply on the prospect of mutual advantage—friendship subject to Pareto optimality constraints—not only had failed to deliver the piddling felicity it had promised but had subjected us to debasing forms of personal dependence and made us miserable.

Rousseau was, of course, neither the first nor the last to argue against instrumental rationalism, and his novelty consists less in his insistence that egoism cannot solve its own problems than in his diagnosis of egoism’s final effect on the psyche. He uses the language of *dividedness* to sum up these effects, arguing that the root cause of modern man’s trouble is that he is at all times directed by two opposed masters—by interest and obligation, by desire and duty, by passion and reason, by self and society. These divisions force him to deploy his powers in opposite directions and to undo with one hand what was done with the other. All his exertions thus cancel each other out, and all his striving for power after power is simply so much sound and fury, signifying less than nothing.

I shall, however, be at pains to emphasize that to be divided in the Rousseauan sense is not simply to experience internal turmoil or to be of “two minds” at any given moment. Such experiences are inevitable and even characteristic of lives Rousseau himself considered exemplary. Dividedness is the condition of being *defined* by indecisiveness; it is to lack a principle of identity that provides a way of reconciling inner conflicts when they *do* occur. Thus, when Rousseau contrasts the divided bourgeois with those who are “something” and “one,” he emphasizes that where the former spends his life “in conflict and floating” between unrealized possibilities, the latter follows a set of coherent impulses that give his life continuity and direction. Unified beings make decisions “in a lofty style” and stick to them, but the bourgeois—who delusively believes in the proposition that the human good is realized through the successful pursuit of narrow self-interest—operates under the false assumption that difficult choices do not need to be made (*E* 41). Acting on the basis of this false belief had left him in a kind of developmental purgatory

where no particular vision of the good can be realized because all visions of the good are being simultaneously pursued. Like the democratic man of Plato's *Republic*, Rousseau's bourgeois is relegated to a haphazard and halfhearted pursuit of free-floating, disjointed, and unrewarding pleasures.

To be divided in the precise sense, then, is not simply to be uncertain about what to do in a moment. It is, rather, to be *truncated*, for to the degree that we lack the moral courage to confront and resolve the difficult dilemmas that life imposes, our lives will lack unifying purpose. Thus we find Rousseau complaining of the deeply impoverished character of modern man's moral experience in the context of his discussion of dividedness: he characterizes the life of the divided bourgeois as fundamentally meaningless and unpurposive, going so far as to call him a "nothing" (*rien*) (E 40). To be a bourgeois is to be a nonentity, a site of undeveloped possibility: this is why he "breathes" but does not "live," for he cannot give organized expression to his capacities for moral and social feeling. His obsession with self-preservation and his blithe disregard for love and virtue operate as a kind of affective anesthesia, diminishing the vitality of his passions and preventing genuine engagement with the human good. To follow the promptings of narrow self-interest, then, is not only to foment antisocial desires; it is to undermine the vitality of *desire itself*. Passional enthusiasm, and with it moral potential, are dried up at the source. All sentiment and social affection are reduced to a "secret egoism" that "prevents [men] from being born by . . . detaching them from their species" (E 312n). The condition of dividedness, then, does not simply reduce our stock of utiles so much as it lowers our threshold for experiencing pleasure.

Rousseau's critique of bourgeois society has met with considerable resistance in the twentieth century, with critics like Robert Nisbet (1943), J. L. Talmon (1952), and Isaiah Berlin (1990) viewing his alternative vision of human relations as illiberal Pollyannaism. Less distinguished commentators too numerous to count have scolded Rousseau for his utopian flights, arguing that his quest for wholeness through connectedness is at best futile and, at worst, more destructive of human happiness than the dividedness he blames. And it is indeed tempting to listen when we are told that there is no final harmony to be had, that the contradictions we face are built into the structure of the world and thus do not admit of final resolution, that conflict and division are coextensive with life itself, and that our experiences of reconciliation are momentary and misleading flashes rather than poetic intimations of the great unity of being. The prudent course, it is urged, is to accept our dividedness and attempt to manage its effects rather than eliminate its causes. Adopting this stratagem

will ultimately maximize net satisfaction by inuring us to the false and dangerous charms of an unreasonable erotic enthusiasm.

But we can already see how misplaced this objection is, for though Rousseau's social theory is more ambitious in its aims than is the instrumentalism of Hobbes and Locke, it is motivated not by an optimistic belief in the infinite goodness and perfectibility of man but rather by a comprehensive critique of the crypto-utopian proposition that narrow self-interest can solve the problems that it creates (Melzer 1983). Rousseau denies that the fragmentation caused by the halfway sociability of modern life admits of the partial resolution sought by his critics, because he claims that fragmentation is itself *the product* of an attempted partial resolution. Unity is the essential precondition for healthy and productive human life, and a social theory that seeks anything less will be attended by all the frightful psychological and political consequences Rousseau diagnoses. What is more, Rousseau's conception of unity is not as utopian as it is made out to be: as will become clear, Rousseau was a long way indeed from believing that all the sources of suffering could be eliminated or that all conflicts could be neutralized. Even the best and happiest lives are full of travail; episodic frustration and discontent are part of the human estate and must be borne with that in mind. What he denies, rather, is that the causes of dissatisfaction in modern life can be accepted as the sunk cost of living in the best of all possible worlds.

Rousseau's very way of framing the problem of social and political order is thus a comprehensive response and challenge to the bourgeois alternative of Hobbes and Locke. The hope of creating a stable and just political society on the basis of narrow self-interest is a soul-shrinking and self-destructive dogma masquerading as a science of politics. It had succeeded only in multiplying the sources of human conflict, narrowing the scope of human desire, and undermining the psychological sources of virtue and social affection. Legitimate social institutions must offer deeper compensations than the empty felicity of Hobbes and Locke, and a satisfactory account of human relations must comprehend more than the impoverished and arid associations to which that anemic conception of happiness had given rise.

| Rousseau's Third Way: Reimagining Self-Love and Human Relations

If Rousseau criticizes modern thinkers like Hobbes and Locke for failing to take the social passions seriously enough, he does so as a practitioner of and

believer in modern science. Rousseau's own modernity is reflected in his strong rejection of the classical premise that man is naturally social and political (*DI* 95–96) and in his steadfast refusal to interpret man's sociability as evidence of its naturalness. To the contrary, Rousseau follows and even *radicalizes* the reductive, asocial, and materialistic tendencies of Hobbes and Locke. He argues that man in the state of nature is distinguished from other animals only in potentiality, claims that this man is a solitary and aconceptual brute whose natural needs are limited to “nourishment, a female, and repose” (116), rejects natural teleology, and founds his own social and political teaching on (properly understood) self-love. Thus, though Rousseau seeks to develop a more ambitious and more satisfying conception of human connectedness than do his modern predecessors, he does so by utilizing the conceptual tools and resources provided by modern science (Strauss 1953; Melzer 1983; Hulliung 1994).

Nowhere is Rousseau's effort to reinvigorate social life through a reinterpretation of broadly modern political principles more evident than in his revolutionary account of self-love. Though very pessimistic about the social utility of narrow self-interest, Rousseau insisted no less strongly than did Hobbes on the strength of human self-regard. Indeed, self-love defines and determines human life like no other passion and is thus the theoretical key to any effort to understand political and social life aright. It is therefore unsurprising to read in *Emile* that self-love (*amour de soi-même*) is a “primitive, innate passion, which is anterior to every other” and “the origin and principle” of all other desires. He goes on to say that “love of oneself is always good and always in conformity with order” and that we are perfectly justified in ignoring the well-being of others if our own is materially threatened (*E* 212–13). However, Rousseauan self-love has a dynamic and expansive character that allows for a far closer kind of social identification than Hobbes's static and restrictive conception would appear to allow. Whereas Hobbes, as we have seen, posits a very definite and ineliminable distinction between self and other, Rousseau holds that the boundaries of the self are elastic and hence can be stretched to incorporate another or many others. Self-love is itself malleable and susceptible to transformation and generalization. The capacity to extend and generalize self-love to include other beings—either individual persons or abstract entities like the state—is the psychological premise that enables the kind of intimate social connectedness Rousseau saw as a necessary condition of social as well as psychological unity. Through the lens of expansive self-love others may be viewed not as discrete from but

rather as extensions of the self and its purposes; to deliberately harm the incorporated other would, in the limiting case, be as absurd and incomprehensible as deliberately harming oneself.

There is a second facet of Rousseauan self-love that both differentiates his conception from that of Hobbes and increases the emotional stakes of social relations: the emergence of *amour-propre*. Rousseau distinguishes this (much-debated) passion from what he calls *amour de soi-même* on the grounds that (1) it is *artificial*, or inactive in the native constitution of man, and that (2) it requires for its satisfaction some measure of *social recognition* and validation. The relativistic features of *amour-propre* make it both a uniquely powerful and uniquely dangerous spring of moral motivation in the context of Rousseau's psychological theory and open up social possibilities on which the more restrictive bourgeois conception of self-love would appear to foreclose. Indeed, Rousseau posits that *amour-propre* grows out of a non-Hobbesian developmental process through which we learn to recognize others as important sources of validation rather than as competitors or instruments of our will. Consciousness of the other begins not with an attempt to bend them to our preexisting purposes but, alternatively, with a desire to bend to theirs. What *amour-propre* wants above all is to obtain the recognition of others. Thus the source of good (and evil) is the desire for love and approval.

Properly trained, *amour-propre* has an expansive effect on the soul and suffuses the wellsprings of human vitality and power. It alters the human personality so fundamentally, and activates so many capacities relevant to the process of moral and social development, that Rousseau likens its awakening to a "second birth" (*E* 212). All meaningful social possibility—love, friendship, paternal and fraternal relations, and so on—requires the activation of *amour-propre*, for only after its birth can we begin to understand agency and intentionality, engage in the process of mutual esteem-seeking, and enter into emotionally rewarding social relations. The awareness of such possibilities gives us access to the consolations and hopes of the social world and serves as an invitation to "man's estate" (*E* 213). And yet this invitation is fraught with danger, for malignant *amour-propre* threatens to corrupt human character at its source and undermine the use of the very capacities to which it gives rise. Indeed, Rousseau claims that the desire for social approval and distinction is the cause of "all the evil that men do to each other"; further, he claims that its operations have transformed society from a cooperative venture into a site of vicious and underhanded contestation (*DI* 222).

It is, as an extensive and combative secondary literature will attest, very difficult to pin down precisely what *amour-propre* is and to isolate its effects on the human soul. Part of this is due to Rousseau's elusive and seemingly evolving presentation of the concept, but much of the difficulty we have in nailing down the impact of *amour-propre* is due to its intrinsic embeddedness in specific associational contexts. We rarely, if ever, observe *amour-propre* acting in isolation or hear it speaking its own language; it is always nested within particular forms of association and assuming their voices and tones. To put it a bit differently, the kind of recognition we expect or hope for from other people depends in large part on what kind of association we have or seek to have with them. In order to understand *amour-propre* correctly, then, it is necessary to understand how its demand for distinction changes as it interacts with other social passions and as it is embedded in different associational contexts.

Rousseau's expansive and relativized conception of self-love allows him to explore rather ambitious social and existential possibilities without having to deny the psychological salience of self-love. Thus he is attempting to utilize the conceptual resources of modernity in order to generate a conception of social life more rewarding than his predecessors had envisaged. The complex relationship Rousseau has with his modern forebears is captured perfectly in the first few pages of *Emile*, which both attacks and subtly confirms the largely materialistic bases of modern political thought: "One only thinks of preserving one's child. That is not enough. . . . It is less a question of keeping him from dying than of making him live. To live is not to breathe; it is to act; it is to make use of our organs, our senses, our faculties, of all the parts of ourselves which give us the sentiment of our existence. The man who has lived the most is not he who has counted the most years but he who has most felt life" (*E* 42). On the one hand, Rousseau is clearly critical of the crudely reductive and possibility-destroying tendency to boil everything down to the animal imperative of self-preservation. Because this narrow focus kills men before they are even born, he seeks to expand the scope of his own inquiry beyond these meager existential provisions. It is not enough for civilized man to use his "organs" and "senses" in the same mechanical way a beast does, for—as Rousseau makes clear in another context (*DI* 113–16)—human ends and human being are undetermined in a way that animal desire is not. Animals are moved by mechanical "instincts" which are peculiar to them and which admirably, if imperfectly, guide them toward their own good. Human beings, however, lack instincts in the strict sense. We are not,

at least in the civilized state, passive conduits for alien forces; rather, we are self-conscious and self-determining agents who create the sources of our own desires and aid in the creation of our own moral identities. These identities serve us in much the same way that instinct serves the nonhuman animal: they provide coherence to thought and action and, if properly constructed, tend to guide us toward our own good. Because human being is by nature open-ended and malleable, the development of moral identity demands continued reflection on the character of our desires and their correspondence (or lack thereof) to our self-conception. The distinctively human power of identity creation is therefore taxing and dangerous (*DI* 115), but it is also exciting and generative of tremendous moral possibility. We develop and deploy our “faculties” and powers in the service of the “sentiment of existence,” a diffuse and distinctively human pleasure that one takes in the conscious apprehension of his own life and being. It is the feeling of this “sentiment,” the quotient of felt life, which a human being should aim to maximize; he should care less about living long than about living well, and the good life involves the activation and coherent direction of our capacities for rational thought and—most especially—for social feeling.

On the other hand, however, if Rousseau reopens a set of moral and social possibilities about which previous modern thinkers had expressed serious doubt, then he does so by redeploying the philosophical tools of modernity itself. If learning to feel the “sentiment of existence” is supposed to enrich human life in ways that Hobbes and previous modern thinkers had failed to take seriously, it is nonetheless the simple operations of our biological equipment—our “senses” and “organs”—that make that enrichment possible. No rational soul or divine essence is posited; no Natural Laws are invoked; no world of forms is apprehended; no noumenal realm is postulated; no immaterial substance is conjured (cf. Williams 2007). Feeling the “sentiment of existence” is surely a complex existential phenomenon that should not be squeezed into the cramped categories of crude materialism, but it still obtains in the sensible world and is susceptible to empirical analysis and rational explanation. For all its complexity and elevation, the sentiment of existence is still just a “sentiment” that does not transcend sensory experience so much as enrich it and channel it upward. Rousseau thus affirms Hobbes’s tough-minded empiricism while claiming that Hobbes’s failure to grasp the malleable nature of human being had led to an impoverished understanding of the sources of moral personhood. Hobbes was right to say that we learn using the senses, but he failed to teach us how to *feel*.

The broad and exciting social possibilities that promise to gratify the sentiment of existence are not created by expansive self-love alone. Rousseau posits that two other forces in the soul connect us to others: sexual desire and pity. Like self-love, which undergoes an important transformation once it is placed in a social context, both sexual desire and pity differ greatly in their primitive and developed forms. In what follows, I briefly explain how these two natural passions develop, how they serve as the ground for love and friendship, and how they fail to realize the comprehensive satisfaction to which they point.

In the state of nature, the sexual passion is a direct expression of self-love and is shorn of intersubjective meaning. Sex carries no social or emotional significance because partners see each other—to the extent that they do so at all—as instruments of private pleasure rather than as sources of love and approval. Only when “physical” desire transforms into “moral” love does the sexual drive become an important spring of moral and social motivation (*DI* 134–45). Indeed, as we shall see in more detail in chapters 4 and 5, this transformation effects two important changes in the structure of sexual desire. First, in conjunction with the development of other cognitive capacities, it *refines taste*: whereas natural man does not distinguish between fit and unfit sexual partners, moral lovers do make distinctions like this on the basis of ethical and aesthetic criteria. It is by way of such distinctions 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). Second, the emergence of moral love greatly *intensifies* the desire for sexual communion. This intensification is due to the interaction of sexual desire and *amour-propre*: once we begin to view each other not as instruments of private satisfaction but rather as important sources of recognition and validation, the sexual act acquires profound and even revolutionary significance. In fact, Rousseau goes so far as to call the experience of exclusive romantic attachment *the* human good—it determines “the final form” of moral character and makes a person “as happy as he can be” (*E* 416, 419).

It is, of course, not simply the recognition of the beloved that one seeks when he selects a partner. Few human choices are subjected to as much scrutiny as the choice of a mate, and the assessments of others inevitably influence our decisions in this regard. When a couple marries, they make a

public affirmation about who and what has final value in life; it is an announcement about what qualities of body and soul one most admires. Thus it is an announcement both about what kind of person one believes himself to be as well as about where he stands in the social order. Our mates are reflections of us in part because they are reflections *on* us, and part of why we seek out the specific persons we do is because they possess the physical and moral virtues deemed to be desirable by others. Thus do our liaisons take on even greater significance once they are embedded in and receive (or do not receive) validation from society's basic institutions. It is important, then, to recognize that love is both a private and public act; it involves the incorporation of two lovers as well as the incorporation of the newly formed marital unit into civil society's primary institutions.

Unhappily, both of these incorporative processes are beset by difficulties that ultimately overwhelm even the happiest and best-educated couples. The fusion of "two into one" that romantic love seeks (*E* 479) is ultimately undone by the disproportion between the idealized imaginary love object and the imperfect beloved. As husband and wife are forced by the very intimacy that they so desired to confront each other's flaws, they grow disillusioned with and alienated from each other. What is worse, the attempt to live together after love's passing proves as impossible as maintaining love forever: the feelings of resentment and distaste that set in make the transition from love to friendship very difficult. The fragile psychology of romantic love is not the only complication with which young lovers must deal. They must also cope with the process of integrating themselves into a larger society that is all-too-often corrupt and corrupting. The threats to happy marriage come from within and without: husband and wife must sustain the fragile illusions they have about each other in the face of social forces that threaten their collective happiness at every turn.

The sexual passion, though an especially powerful source of social connection, is not the only natural basis for human relations. Indeed, in *The Discourse on Inequality* Rousseau argues that we are also connected to other members of our species through pity (*pitié*). This sentiment, which like self-love exists "anterior to reason," inspires in human beings "a natural repugnance to see any sensitive being perish or suffer" (*DI* 95). Pity, however, is not simply an internal or emotional response to the sights and sounds of suffering. After sufficient development it can motivate a range of virtuous actions and generate sympathetic associations: pity, Rousseau claims, is the psychic basis for social virtues like "generosity, clemency, and

humanity,” adding that “benevolence *and even friendship* are, rightly understood, the products of a constant pity fixed on a particular object” (131–32; emphasis added).

If pity is the ground of friendship, then what type of friendship does it ground? In chapter 6 I shall emphasize two primary points. The first is to show that friendship lacks the psychological power to restore human beings to wholeness. On this point I shall be at pains to show that friendship operates somewhat at the margins of our psychic and social lives, and that it does more to relieve our sadness than to restore our happiness. The sentiments to which friendship gives rise—and the range of action it inspires—are circumscribed by the very circumstances that make it necessary. Friendship, thus conceived, provides a very real kind of comfort for divided beings, but the comfort it provides does not make us happy but rather makes our sadness a bit more bearable. It is, in fact, our ineliminable dividedness that makes friendship relevant and even important: fallen man needs friends, but much of the reason he needs them is *because* he is fallen. The second, related to the first, is to show that Rousseauian friendship is not a catalyst of virtue or moral perfection in the way that Joseph Reiser (2003) has persuasively argued. It is, rather, a palliative, a way of coping with life’s inevitable disappointments and hardships. We need our friends not because they show us our good—for this we are needful of intellectual and moral *superiors*—but because they can sympathize with and console us in our failings, moral and otherwise.

| To Nature or to Denature? The Moral Ecology of the Just Regime

For the most part Rousseau chooses to paint his portraits of love and friendship in a domestic or private context, remote from the disruptions and disturbances of large-scale social institutions. Indeed, it often seems that considerable distance from large-scale social institutions and their corrupting tendencies is necessary in order to preserve sympathetic association, for when we incorporate fully into civil and political life we subject ourselves to the arbitrary private wills of others and to an overwhelmingly complex and chaotic system of social forces. Yet because these social forces are of our own making—because, however alien and hostile they may seem, they are themselves products of human agency—they may be restructured in a way that is conducive rather than injurious to human happiness. Indeed, it may seem that this restructuring is not only possible but *necessary*, for the household—

the site of domestic happiness—is not an independent entity free of social control; rather, it is itself a social institution that must be incorporated into civil society and exist in accordance with its laws and customs. Unless the society of which the household is a part is tolerably just, then it is only a matter of time before our domestic relations are corrupted by the sinister social forces around it.

Recently, a number of scholars have sought in various ways to show the compatibility of Rousseau's domestic and political visions. Most do so by reading the pedagogy of *Emile* into the political program of the *Social Contract*. Tracy Strong (1994, 138), for instance, claims that Emile's education "*requires and will generate, come what may, a political society*" because "that which makes him human requires that he be a citizen." Frederick Neuhouser (2008, 23) has also emphasized the politicizing functions of the work, saying that Emile's education "produces individuals who in the end can assume the role of citizen . . . in a manner consistent with . . . being a man." John Rawls (2007) and Joshua Cohen (2010) are at one with Neuhouser in pointing to the complementarity of *Emile* and the *Social Contract*. Still other scholars view Rousseau's novel *Julie* as providing an alternative, and perhaps more promising, bridge between the domestic and the political spheres. Nicole Fermon (1997, 119), for instance, claims that *Julie* presents a "vision of the 'private worlds' of citizens" that "fleshes out human aspects of the common life left out of *The Social Contract*"; she argues further that the household as depicted in *Julie* cultivates "sound moral habits" necessary to good citizenship.

Though I shall ultimately be critical of these interpretations for seeking a continuity between Rousseau's domestic and political visions that I do not think he provides, I also think that, in pointing to the irreducible multiplicity of man's social obligations and, hence, to the need to order them in some coherent way, they do help to recast Rousseau's understanding of the political problem in a more helpful light. That is to say, these various interpretations are right to point out that our different relationships—far from existing in vacuums—must instead be lived out at the same time and that we must find ways to reconcile the different, and often competing, obligations they impose on us. Political societies are complex and confusing places that necessarily place us under cross-pressures: the things we owe to ourselves, our parents, our children, our friends, our beloveds, and our fellow citizens are not always compatible, and the tensions that arise within our associational lives can have destructively decentering effects on our identities. This presence of such cross-pressures is especially problematic in the context of a

political project like Rousseau's, which emphasizes both the need for and fragility of psychological and social *harmony*.

With this background problem in mind, I characterize Rousseau's political thought as an effort to balance the different and seemingly incompatible forces and obligations that constitute social life. I thus conceive of Rousseauan political society as a kind of "moral ecology" in which citizens, due to their embeddedness in a balanced and harmonious social environment, may approximate the psychological wholeness they would have enjoyed in the pure state of nature. On this conception, each citizen is an ordered whole existing within the larger ordered whole of the just society, attending to a coherent and jointly realizable set of socially defined obligations and, in so doing, discovering the internal unity that has eluded social man for so long.

Ultimately, however, the cross-cutting pressures that constitute social life overwhelm all efforts at comprehensive resolution, and the hybrid character of political life ends up producing the very dividedness it was set up to prevent. Citizens have a dual existence as both private selves and as public beings, and therefore they have attachments and obligations in both the political and the private spheres. The tensions that exist between these private and public obligations are never reconciled and are ultimately reproduced in the psyche, thus leading to the alienated self-centeredness Rousseau identifies in the *Social Contract* as both the cause and consequence of political corruption. The individuated self brought into being by social institutions is also torn asunder by the incommensurable obligations they impose on him. Rousseau temporizes brilliantly with this problem but cannot resolve it. It is important to add, though, that Rousseau's inability to resolve the problems his own thought creates is not, as has so often been claimed, evidence of his intellectual incoherence. It is, rather, the source of a rich and deeply coherent account of the sources of human fragmentation, dislocation, and disappointment. Rousseau gives us a way to reinterpret the very social experiences he so deeply problematizes.

| Men, Citizens, and Scholars: A Politic Digression

In arguing that Rousseau's solution to the political problem is "ecological" in nature I stake out a controversial position in the scholarly debate over the character of civic education, which is perhaps the central controversy in contemporary Rousseau scholarship. In *Emile*, Rousseau plots a course of

education intended to reconcile self and society and claims that the “double object” of making a human being good, both for himself and others, might be achieved through one of two different educations. The first is civic or political education: it is “public and common” in character and creates “citizens” who are defined by their relation to and affection for their homeland. Citizens are “denature[d]” by their education, which “transports the *I* into the common unity” and makes “each individual . . . no longer one but a part of the unity.” Such an education, though lauded by Rousseau, is nonetheless rejected on the grounds of impracticability. “Public instruction,” he avers, “no longer exists and can no longer exist, because where there is no fatherland there can no longer be citizens. These two words, *fatherland* and *citizen*, should be effaced from modern languages” (*E* 40; see also Shklar 1969).

Because genuine civic education is unavailable in modern times, we are left with “the domestic education or the education of nature,” which seeks to reconcile the tensions between self and society through the development of individuality and the establishment of intimate sexual connectedness. The result of this form of education is not a “citizen” who finds wholeness only by discovering his place in the polis, but a “man” who is “an absolute whole” unto himself (*E* 39). The attempt to make a man *and* a citizen out of the same person is doomed to fail: “One must choose between making a man and a citizen, for one cannot make both at the same time” (39). Rousseau, then, does not present the educations of “citizens” and “men” as interdependent parts of one pedagogic program but rather as discrete and incommensurable alternatives. They are different and uncombinable answers to the same question, not separate steps in a unified solution (41).

Despite Rousseau’s insistence to the contrary, we have already seen that many contemporary scholars argue that the education given to the eponymous hero of *Emile* is best understood as an effort to reconcile the individualistic and broadly modern characteristics of “man” with the civic-minded virtues of the classical “citizen.” In the introduction to his excellent translation of the *Social Contract*, Victor Gourevitch summarizes this increasingly popular position concerning the character of both Emile’s education and Rousseau’s intention as an author. “One important reason for regarding Rousseau as preeminently a political thinker,” he holds, is “that we are moral agents by virtue of being citizens, or at least members of political societies; we are not moral agents first who then may or may not become political agents” (Rousseau 1997c, xiv–xv). This is a plausible statement of the view taken by Rousseau scholars of many different interpretive persuasions, and it

suggests that Emile's full completion as a human being is contingent on his full incorporation into a political society and his becoming a "citizen." At one level this claim is quite correct: Emile's social consciousness could not properly develop were it not for some semblance of broader social order and decency; upon marrying his beloved Sophie, he must choose a country in which to settle and a set of laws to which he and his family are to be subject. The political is ubiquitous, and the impossibility of escaping it requires that Emile himself become political.

But does it require him to become a *citizen*? The necessity of social incorporation does not necessarily enjoin the necessity of incorporating after the specific manner of a "citizen" as Rousseau understands the term.⁸ The Rousseauan citizen is defined by his devotion to the common good and is exemplified by the Spartan Pedaretus, who consoled himself after losing an election on the grounds that there were three hundred other citizens even more worthy than he. "This," Rousseau exclaims with relish, "is the citizen" (*E* 40). The difference between Pedaretus—whose identity is defined by the political institutions of his fatherland—and Emile—who has no fatherland and is told by his tutor not to run for political office unless he is *forced* to do so—could not be clearer (40, 473–75). I shall develop this line of argument further in chapter 4, where I show that the way Emile and his family integrate into and understand their role within political society is indeed at odds with Rousseau's thick notion of citizenship.

The attempt to turn Emile into a "citizen" leads not only to an inaccurate interpretation of *Emile* but also to an unduly restrictive account of Rousseau's intention as an author. The direct textual evidence most commonly cited in support of this view comes from the *Geneva Manuscript* and the *Confessions*.⁹ In the former Rousseau remarks that "we do not really begin to become men until after we have been citizens," and in the latter he reports that he had come to understand that "everything depends radically on politics" and that "no people would ever be anything other than what it was made into by the nature of its Government" (*GM* I.2, 161–62; *C* 340). These passages make the point that political institutions are among the important determinants of moral character. But they do not say that they are the *only* or even the most important determinants of moral character, or that political institutions are exogenous and freestanding causes of subpolitical life. To arrive at this conclusion we are obliged to forget Rousseau's claims that the modern men were intellectually and morally incapable of authentic republican politics (*E* 39–41), that true civic education is no longer possible

(*E* 39–41), and that political institutions—far from determining the shape of the identity of a people in some simple, unidirectional way—should themselves be adapted to the preexisting cultural and climatological circumstances (*SC* III.8). It is one thing to say, with Rousseau, that everything depends on politics and quite another to say, as many interpreters of Rousseau seem to, that everything depends *only* or even *principally* on politics and that such dependence is nonreciprocal.

An important feature of the present interpretation is that the political association is treated as an important organizing force in social life without being made its *primum movens* and final justification. Rousseau himself turned his attention to politics because it grows out of social life and represents a systematic effort to resolve the complications to which social life gives rise. If politics is meant to solve or at least ameliorate the problems that inevitably arise in the course of shared life, then our first efforts must be directed to understanding the character of the “social problem” (Charvet 1973) which exists prior to politics and which brings it into being. It is, then, the antecedent problem of human association that leads Rousseau to theorize the political; far from looking to understand social relations in terms of politics, he sought instead to understand politics in terms of social relations. In so extensively treating the wide array of human relationships he does, and in treating the vast majority of them *outside* the agora and in relative isolation from the demands of political life, Rousseau asks his reader to consider not only what relation our private associations have to the polis but also what relation they have to one another and, indeed, to living a good life.

I believe that the attempt made here to comprehend political phenomena within the broader problem of human association allows not only for a more authentically Rousseauian understanding of politics, but also for increased explanatory leverage in understanding the character and consequences of *amour-propre*. N. J. H. Dent’s (1988) pathbreaking work, developed in different directions by O’Hagan (1999), Rawls (2007), and Neuhausser (2008), distinguished *amour-propre*’s “healthy” and “malignant” forms in an effort to correct the older, and erroneous, idea that *amour-propre* is necessarily corrupt and corrupting. This characterization of *amour-propre*, though helpful in many regards, often makes us feel that the desire for social recognition is something monolithic and undifferentiated, that its effects are insensitive to context and felt uniformly across the entire social domain. The analysis here, however, points to the context-dependent character of *amour-propre*: the varied and complex responses that the desire for social distinction

elicits show both that our associational life is itself varied and complex and that the kind of recognition we seek from others depends greatly on the associational context in which that relationship is embedded. We act and interact not just as equals and unequals but also as husbands and wives, citizens and subjects, parents and children, friends and enemies, and so on. The variety of our associational lives gives rise to variation in the ways in which *amour-propre* expresses itself, variation that is often concealed by conventional treatments but which nonetheless deserves our serious attention.