

AXEL HONNETH

THE
POVERTY
OF
OUR
FREEDOM



The Poverty of Our Freedom

The Poverty of Our Freedom

Essays 2012–2019

Axel Honneth

With translations by Gabriel Borrud, Mitch Cohen, Blake Emerson,
Alex Englander, Felix Koch, Arvi Särkelä, and Daniel Steuer

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Preface

Of the Poverty of Our Liberty

Most of the essays collected in the present volume are attempts to fill gaps in my book *Freedom's Right*, gaps I recognized only in hindsight.¹ When the first substantial responses to the original German edition of the study appeared in 2012, pointing to certain shortcomings in my reflections, I began to clarify the questions that had been left unanswered, and to expand on theses that had not been worked out in enough detail. Looking back over these pieces, written over a period of seven years, I decided to bring them together in a volume arranged around the notion of "social liberty." In almost all of the essays, I attempt to shed further light on the meaning of this concept of liberty, whether by engaging with its tradition, pointing out areas in which its normative content has yet to be sufficiently developed, or, finally, tracing the impulses that continue to emanate from it. The title of the resulting volume, *The Poverty of Our Freedom*, is a minor variation on the title of one of the pieces it contains. In that essay, I try to use Hegel's conception of "ethical life" to illuminate the idea of social liberty. The claim that we suffer from a poverty of liberty refers to the fact that our efforts at putting the normative promises of modern society into practice have not been successful in realizing the principles of social liberty where they are needed most.

Readers of *Freedom's Right* will know that Hegel's doctrine of ethical life forms its backbone, and the doctrine is also at the center of the essays that form part I of the present collection. This part further elaborates the notion of social liberty chiefly through an engagement with the philosophical tensions between Hegel and Marx. The intellectual constellation between Hegel and Marx is of particular relevance for the project of a critical theory of society. But

beyond this, a look back at this crucial nineteenth-century debate is of particular importance because it was taken for granted, back then, that the idea of social liberty was an independent approach to understanding what it means for us to be free. Hegel and Marx were both convinced that the individual's freedom can exist only in the context of successful intersubjectivity, for without affirmative recognition by the other, an individual is not able to realize her intentions and impulses without constraint. The difference between the two thinkers lies in the very different ideas they went on to develop about the social institutions that make this kind of successful intersubjectivity possible. All the essays in part I, except the last, examine the alternatives developed by Hegel and Marx, and try to establish their value for our social self-understanding today. The last essay, however, tries to sketch the systematic core of the idea of social liberty through a discussion of competing concepts of liberty in the modern philosophical tradition, although I am still not fully satisfied with the results of these reflections.

The title of part II, "Deformations of Social Freedom," is meant to indicate that the essays in this part, except the first, are attempts to work out why there is such a lack of social opportunity to realize this kind of liberty today. The first essay is a renewed attempt to outline a key concept in my analysis of the contemporary situation, "social pathology," in a way that departs from the concept as it appears in *Freedom's Right*.² The attempt treads new paths that, if they were explored further, would lend some of the thoughts in *Freedom's Right* a more radical edge. The other essays discuss three social areas in which the lack of any serious effort to promote social – as opposed to mere "negative" – liberty is particularly blatant. The first deals with a social institution of "ethical life" whose significance I completely overlooked when writing the book, possibly because of an overly strong adherence to Hegel's model. Like Hegel – who fell behind Kant in this regard – I almost entirely disregarded the enormous significance of public education and its institutions for the stabilization of democratic (in Hegel's terms "civic") attitudes and dispositions.³ The essay on the role of schooling in the democratic process, which draws on Kant, John Dewey, and Émile Durkheim, is an attempt to compensate for this unfortunate omission. The final two pieces of part II have a more experimental character, but also pursue the question of how our ideas about central areas of social life would need to change if we seriously wanted to transform them into spheres for the realization of social – and not just "negative" – liberty. The essay on the social

role of work explains, in far more detail than *Freedom's Right*, why a crucial condition of democratic will-formation is a fair, inclusive, and transparent division of labor. In the essay on childhood, I tentatively try to uncover the deep-seated premises that inform our liberal ideas about children, and ask which of them might be preventing children from developing voices of their own and thus acquiring democratic autonomy.

The title of part III, "Sources of Social Freedom," might at first seem somewhat artificial, for the section brings together three essays that not only derive from very different occasions but also pursue questions that do not appear to have a lot in common. However, although they set out from very different starting points, they all concern individual or collective experiences that, properly understood, reveal the need to move on from a notion of liberty couched in purely individualist terms to one that is grounded in non-coercive mutual social relations. The first of these essays uses the logic of the humanities disciplines to show that our engagement with the cultural-intellectual conditions of our social world compels us to see ourselves as members of an active community that advances its own interpretations in a struggle against forms of dependence that only seem to be naturally given. The second essay takes up the old question of whether there is such a thing as an emancipatory interest.⁴ It argues that repressed groups can begin to liberate themselves only through a cognitive mobilization against a naturalizing understanding of the existing social order that rests on frozen hegemonial patterns of interpretation. The final essay of part III is a reminder to Europeans: that we can recover solidarity only if we come to terms with the global injustice and harm caused by European states right up to the very recent past. We must do so in the spirit of social liberty, and with the aim of creating normative mechanisms that prevent us from perpetrating similar offenses. This text may seem to lie outside of the bounds of the present volume, but to me its inclusion was important, for it points to the political actuality of some of the ideas set out in the other pieces.

Once again, I have to thank Eva Gilmer, who accompanied me on the way toward the publication of this collection of essays with her characteristic diligence, circumspection, and helpfulness. My thanks are also due to Jan-Erik Strasser, who read and corrected the final manuscript with great expertise.

Axel Honneth, January 2020

Translated by Daniel Steuer

Part I

Forms of Social Freedom

1

The Depths of Recognition

The legacy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau

In 1932, when Ernst Cassirer published his long essay *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, he must have been certain that he had finally found the key to an integral understanding of the philosopher's fissured work.¹ Today, however, some eighty-five years later, Cassirer's suggestion is almost forgotten; scholars continue to puzzle over where, if at all, unity can be sought in the seemingly contradictory writings of the great thinker. No other modern philosophical author, with the exception of Nietzsche perhaps, has elicited more starkly opposed interpretations of his work; no other author has therefore remained so constantly the eternally young, always provocative and disturbingly contemporary. Depending on the reader's attitude and the contemporary historical context, one could discover in Rousseau the anthropologist invoking a model of human nature, a theorist who stresses feeling and emotion like the English moral philosophers, or a progenitor of democratic self-determination who paved the way for Kant. When the times called for different philosophical emphases, one could also find in Rousseau the pioneer of a totalitarian conception of democracy, the fervent defender of republican equality, or the advocate of an ideal of personal authenticity. As heterogeneous as they might appear, all these interpretations of Rousseau have had to struggle with the same great problem of being able to refer only to some parts of his work while sweeping other, contradicting parts under the rug. Only a few have succeeded, like Ernst Cassirer, in suggesting a reading that could interpret the philosopher's disparate writings and thoughts as stages in the realization of a single basic idea.

Cassirer saw this convergence point of Rousseau's work in the idea of the human will's capacity for self-determination in spite of all social and political hazards.² And yet Cassirer's interpretation soon faced many emphatic challenges from ongoing research. Not only did such a reading, making Rousseau the direct precursor of Kant, seem to place too little emphasis on the collectivist tinge in Rousseau's *Social Contract*, it also seemed to ignore what can be read in Rousseau's other writings on the mutual dependence of subjects, indeed on their being at the mercy of each other.³ This element of his work, rooted in the notion of *amour propre* or self-love (which is constitutive both for Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*⁴ and his *Emile*),⁵ came increasingly to the fore in more recent interpretations. This, however, did not offer a key to the underlying idea of the whole of Rousseau's work as long as it remained unclear how Rousseau's pessimistic diagnosis of the ever-increasing dependence of the modern subject on the esteem of others could be brought together with the more confident lines of thought developed in the *Social Contract*.⁶ After all, where the notion of *amour propre* was the theme in the early writings, it was only in the context of the danger of the complete external control of the subject. However, in the *Social Contract* – the constructive part of Rousseau's work – the same subjects are suddenly conceived as having an irreducible capacity for self-legislation. The breakthrough to a connection between these two elements and thus to an integral interpretation of Rousseau's oeuvre did not emerge in the research literature until the concept of *amour propre* was fanned out to include a positive variant as well as the negative. With this suggestion, which we probably owe to the ground-breaking study of N. J. H. Dent,⁷ it became possible to conceive of Rousseau's idea of the constitutive dependence of the subject on the other as the fundamental hinge between the two parts of his work by spelling out the negative form of the notion of *amour propre* in his cultural critique and the positive version in drafts of the *Social Contract*.

However, Dent's reinterpretation probably achieved more than he himself originally intended. Giving only a little twist to his interpretation, it was easy to develop from it the thesis that, with his bipolar notion of *amour propre*, Rousseau had become the founder of the whole tradition of recognition theory. The step toward this thesis – which is of downright subversive significance in the history of ideas – was probably first taken by Frederick Neuhausser in a major study.⁸ Neuhausser asserts that the idea that

human subjects owe their social agency to the recognition granted by other subjects was not Hegel's invention, as had been assumed hitherto, but can be traced back to Rousseau. The significance of this reformulation and the degree to which it relocates Rousseau's oeuvre become clear only in light of its distance from Cassirer's overall reading. While for Cassirer Rousseau stands as a lone precursor to Kant because he is seen as engaging in a lifelong effort to elaborate the active, self-legislative aspect of the human will, those who follow Dent's interpretation see the unifying thread in Rousseau's work in precisely the opposite thesis – that for good or evil, the human will is dependent on the affirmation and esteem of other subjects.

In what follows I would like to elaborate on this second thesis, first showing where it is justified and then highlighting its limits. As I would argue, throughout his life Rousseau was too uncertain about the real significance of intersubjective recognition in the structure of social life to be able to clearly make this intersubjectivity the foundation of his entire theory. Specifically, the first section of the chapter addresses Rousseau's intellectual development to the point where he becomes aware of the necessity of a socially sustainable, egalitarian form of mutual recognition against the harmful forms of *amour propre*. From here it will be easy to survey the enormous influence Rousseau's bipolar conception of social recognition has had on modern philosophical discourse. In the second section I discuss how the negative aspect of this conception, that is, the human need to surpass one's fellow creatures in social esteem, is reinterpreted in Kant's writings on the philosophy of history as a driving force of human progress, and how Fichte and Hegel further develop its positive variant of mutual respect among equals in the direction of a recognition theory of law and an ethical social life. Not until the third section of the chapter will I proceed to address the skepticism that Rousseau always exhibited (increasingly toward the end of his life) toward the dependence on others inherent in *amour propre*. In his late writings, as earlier in the *Discourse on Inequality*, he plays again with the idea that it might be advantageous for people's peace of mind if they became fully independent of intersubjective recognition. In this respect, Rousseau's works exhibit two fundamental philosophical motifs that stand in constant conflict with each other: the Stoic idea of personal independence from all external attachments and the intersubjective idea of a deep-seated dependence on others.

I

The motif from which Rousseau initially draws his central concept of *amour propre* emerges more clearly in his early critique of theater than anywhere else. Already in the *First Discourse*, he subjects what he derogatorily refers to as “play-acting” to an extremely negative analysis;⁹ this critique matures in his *Letter to d’Alembert*. For Rousseau, the theater is not merely one cultural institution among others, in which an enlightened audience learns through the contemplation of or engagement with works of art. He regards the stage and the theater hall as a special instance where the behavior of actors can infect the audience with the virus of “mere appearance.” In contrast to the museum or the concert hall, where the viewer might at least imagine in the presented work of art the authentic intention of the artist, Rousseau regards the theater-going audience as initially confronted solely with a form of behavior through which the actor wants to reveal his skill at “putting on another character than his own.”¹⁰ But the still-innocent audience is thereby encouraged to practice gestures and expressions that serve no other goal than disguising their true character. From such critical observations, Rousseau draws the far-reaching conclusion that the creation of theaters does great harm to any republican commonwealth because the arts of disguise presented in the theater undermine precisely those attitudes and behaviors that are necessary for political institutions built on the will of the people – duty, honesty, and civic pride. As Rousseau puts it in the *Letter to d’Alembert*, the actor develops “by profession the talent of deceiving men.”¹¹

Admittedly, Rousseau believes that the danger of infection from the playacting on the stage merely reinforces a cultural tendency already powerfully operative in a wide variety of places. Four years before the *Letter to d’Alembert* was published, Rousseau, in his *Discourse on Inequality*, already sought to analyze the genealogy of those new behaviors of pretentious disguise and the craving for social esteem he experienced so intensively in Parisian society. In searching for the anthropological roots of the individual affectation with prestige that the theater merely intensifies, he found in his *Discourse* a specific form of the human relation to the self. While he did not regard it as being of natural origin, its cultural proliferation still seemed to establish it as a kind of second nature. Rousseau named this form of behavior *amour propre*. This concept not only

forms the basis of his entire critique of society; it is also the key to understanding what he will contribute to the development of a theory of intersubjective recognition.

In the genealogical logic of the *Discourse on Inequality*, *amour propre* does not play as prominent a role as its importance for the overall design of that study actually demands. Certainly, Rousseau uses the term now and then when identifying the causes underlying the emergence of social inequality,¹² but he restricts his attempt to clarify its meaning to a single long note whose weight, however, can hardly be overestimated. Here, in note XV of the text, Rousseau outlines the significance of *amour propre* in contrast to *amour de soi-même*, drawing distinctions between the two on the basis of the standard of evaluation that each presupposes.¹³ For Rousseau, *amour de soi* is a natural human disposition – a form of self-interestedness that contributes to human self-preservation by letting each human being rely solely on his own individual, vital criteria of the right and the good. In the later and thus somewhat artificial phenomenon of *amour propre*, by contrast, the normative standard of self-interestedness shifts to take the opinion of others as the yardstick of opportune behavior. Rousseau explains this difference most trenchantly in a remark where he takes from Hume's moral theory the formulation already prefiguring Adam Smith's notion of the impartial spectator: in the feeling or striving of *amour de soi* the subject is the sole spectator of himself, whereas in *amour propre* the subject regards others as judges of his actions and omissions.¹⁴

If the differences between the two kinds of self-interest are explicated in this way, it initially remains completely unclear why the second attitude, that of *amour propre*, should be at all tied to a tendency toward the negative or problematical. On the contrary, from Adam Smith's perspective, it could be said that, in terms of consideration and appropriateness, orienting one's actions toward the internalized judgment of initially merely external others is far superior to an act that is purely self-referential.¹⁵ But in his commentary, Rousseau focuses on a different aspect of this intersubjectively mediated self-assessment that no longer seems compatible with the wholesome effects of Smith's impartial spectator as described in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. For Rousseau, the other who has become the judge of one's actions is not an instance for correcting one's own judgment, not a power fostering cognitive and moral decentralization, but rather a source of constant urging to prove oneself superior to one's fellow citizens.

What the *amour propre* of the *Discourse on Inequality* becomes, then, is a form of self-interestedness that transforms into a spur to social esteem, thereby making the activity needed for self-preservation dependent on assessment by others.

Yet even upon closer observation, it is not at all easy to accurately identify where Rousseau's account of the status of the internalized spectator deviates from the description Smith provided only a few years later. This difficulty arises because both authors initially aim at a similar assertion, that the socialized human being usually judges the appropriateness of his actions in terms of a presumed evaluation by a generalized spectator. However, one difference in their readings, serious in its consequences, consists in Rousseau's expansion of this bilateral relationship between the subject and his internalized spectator by adding another, second kind of relationship. This relationship emerges because real, empirical others observe the subject in his attempt to orient his actions toward his intersubjective judge. According to Rousseau, when a subject is confronted with these two perspectives, he is driven to present his action to his internal observer in such a way that it seems superior or nobler than those of the other persons present. Thus, *amour propre*, in contrast to self-assessment by imagining the perspective of an impartial spectator, is the expression of a tripartite set of relations of the socialized human being: once the individual has learned, as an effect of ever denser social interactions, to orient his behavior toward the judgments of generalized others, he will strive to present himself as favorably as possible in relation to these judgments so that he can expect also to be positively evaluated by those contemporaries. For Rousseau, as he repeatedly notes, what is perfidious about this dependence on others' judgment is not the mere fact that someone pretends to have properties that he does not believe he has; what is disastrous here is that *amour propre* permits individuals to deceive themselves, because they must not only be able to present themselves externally to their fellows, but also to their internal judge, as persons with the best possible attributes. What an individual driven by *amour propre* desires is not just social affirmation, but self-affirmation – that is, a consciousness of his own worth.¹⁶

All the social pathologies that Rousseau discusses in the *Discourse on Inequality* have their roots, he argues, in the craving for social esteem arising from *amour propre*. In bourgeois society, people are restlessly at work developing the attributes that might make them appear superior to their contemporaries in the eyes of their

internalized spectator. Once set in motion, this “petulant activity of our *amour propre*” knows no limit;¹⁷ it exhausts every distinguishing trait due to its merely relative character, thus forcing the subject to make new efforts to plausibly demonstrate his superiority. And, as a result of its social spread, every quality of wealth or power or beauty that was the sign of individual superiority yesterday must be trumped today, so that every field of status competition is dominated by a tendency to spiral ever higher in the search for distinction.¹⁸ As we have seen, in this cultural process the theater merely assumes the role of an institution that intensifies sophistication. The reason Rousseau despises the theater so much is that here citizens so convincingly learn to feign behaviors associated with status, that eventually they themselves believe in the authenticity of such performances.

Already in *Emile* – which Rousseau began drafting only a few years after publishing the *Discourse on Inequality* – it is obvious that Rousseau is not content with this merely critical diagnosis of *amour propre*. Here the same term appears repeatedly again, but without the same automatic and immediate derogation that was apparent in the context of the earlier cultural critique. If in addition to *Emile* we consider the *Social Contract*, which he was writing at about the same time and which does not speak directly of *amour propre* but does speak of related attitudes, we can make out a trajectory in Rousseau’s thinking that reveals a growing effort to differentiate its guiding concept. Dissatisfied with his inability to find a way out of the pathologies of bourgeois society, from the early 1760s onward the philosopher wrestles with the possibility of asserting a beneficial, socially acceptable form of *amour propre*. But it is not easy for Rousseau to shift from a wholly negative presentation of *amour propre* to an account that suddenly sheds a favorable light on this concept. Necessary for such an achievement would be an account of the conditions under which the intersubjectively mediated self-assessment could escape the need to present oneself as superior to one’s fellows. *Emile* has a number of formulations that clearly show how Rousseau first struggles with the difficult task of pinning down such conditions. In every instance where he begins to speak of the unavoidable development of *amour propre* in his tutee, he investigates at the same time (as if in an experimental setup) what measures could prevent the danger of the ensuing striving for prestige.¹⁹

The solution Rousseau finally offers to this problem is a suggestion that at first glance seems rather puzzling: “Let us

extend *amour-propre* to other beings. We shall transform it into a virtue, and there is no man's heart in which this virtue does not have its root."²⁰ This formulation makes sense when one realizes that an extension of *amour propre* would mean seeing every other person orienting his own activity in the same way toward the judgment of a generalized observer. If such a change of perspective is carried out, Rousseau seems to say, we recognize all fellow subjects struggling in the same way for the approval of their internal judge; and then the drive to outdo them in reputation and status must vanish. This reasoning can be understood more clearly if, instead of an inner judge, we regarded subjects as equally depending on a generalized approval from the surrounding society. To speak of the extension of *amour propre* is, then, nothing other than suggesting to the subjects the insight that they reciprocally need each other's recognition and should thus forgo a competitive striving for higher reputation. Rousseau tries to prevent the poisoning of his pupil's *amour propre* by trying, given the need for social recognition that all human beings share, to teach him to be satisfied with social prestige that expresses precisely this mutual dependence. Respect among equals is the formula that expresses a form of social recognition tempered in this way, and that seems to reproduce adequately Rousseau's suggested solution.²¹

Summarizing this way the educational therapy of *amour propre* in *Emile* enables us, for the first time, to make sense of why Rousseau can appear today as a theorist of recognition. From its first introduction in the *Discourse on Inequality*, the concept of *amour propre* apparently meant more than mere human passion to prove oneself superior to others and to struggle for ever higher levels of social esteem. Beneath such forms of striving as a driving force lies the human desire to count as someone in the eyes of members of society in general and to enjoy a kind of social value. Before *amour propre* becomes the desire for prestige and special esteem, it therefore has the innocent form that it would assume in Adam Smith's internal spectator.²² Its essence is to let us be dependent in our self-esteem and self-image on social recognition from the society around us. For Rousseau, this dependence on the generalized other acquires the negative form of a compulsive drive to compare oneself and feel superior to others only when we neglect the accompanying awareness that we all share the same basic need for social approval and affirmation. In such a case we lose sight of the fact that, together with all other members of society,

we are part of that court of an inner judge from which we expect approval of our behavior. Thus it is only logical that, in his writings on education, Rousseau advises teachers to employ pedagogical measures that convey a sense of social equality to pupils from an early age. For only when an individual learns to understand himself as an equal among equals can he also grasp himself as a contributor to the generalized other, upon whose verdict the satisfaction of his own *amour propre* depends.

This last formulation is manifestly chosen in anticipation of Rousseau's design to solve the problem of *amour propre* in his *Social Contract*. In *Emile* we already find the thought that respect for and from one's peers satisfies the fundamental desire for social recognition, but not yet the much farther-reaching idea that this enables the individual subject to understand himself as the co-author of judgments on which his understanding of himself will thereafter depend. With the concept of the general will, with which Rousseau crowns his *Social Contract*, he clearly hoped to outline such an idea of a standard of judgment for social recognition, a standard created by those subject to it. The self-esteem of citizens in a republic is thus no longer subject to an external instance of the generalized other, because in a previous spontaneous act of consultation they have agreed on a common will – in whose light they now can recognize each other in a way that they collectively hold to be right.²³ Rousseau seems to think that in such a society all those uncontrollable standards of individual worth, forced upon each person and hitherto responsible for the corrupt influence of *amour propre*, will have vanished. Instead, only self-imposed and transparent sources of social recognition will remain. This would ultimately mean that the members of this society respect each other as free and equal persons.

And yet the final chapters of Rousseau's *Social Contract* also seem to imply that he was not entirely convinced that *amour propre* could be completely satisfied only through this mutual respect. His discussion of civil religion and republican patriotism seems to imply that the individual strives for a stronger sense of self-worth than recognition as a free and equal citizen can provide.²⁴ In *amour propre* – the need for other members of society to see one as worthy – excessive claims burgeon that are hard to satisfy, even when egalitarianism reigns. Therefore, Rousseau apparently seeks additional resources of social recognition even in a republican community.²⁵ These other sources must not provide a basis for the easily inflamed version of the craving for recognition; hence they

must be sufficiently generalizable in society, but they should also permit individuals to enjoy special esteem for virtuous action. Democratic patriotism, civil religion, and indeed all forms of constitutional patriotism are, for Rousseau, sources of social recognition that supplement the general will. Like other well-known representatives of the republican tradition – for example, Montesquieu and Tocqueville, to name just two – Rousseau believes that even democratic societies always face the ceaseless task of establishing sufficient scope for the satisfaction of the individual's desire for reputation and esteem.²⁶ But before discussing this further complication of Rousseau's theory of recognition, I would like to briefly outline the enormous impact his thematization of *amour propre* had on subsequent discussions in modern philosophy, for later thinkers have independently taken up and further developed many of the aspects of Rousseau's key concept.

II

If we look at the very different aspects of Rousseau's *amour propre* so far discussed, it should be no surprise that the most diverse conclusions were drawn from it in the subsequent philosophical discussion. Depending on whether one based one's reading upon the negative pole of pure craving for recognition or the positive pole of egalitarian mutual recognition, the notion could support diagnoses with diametrically opposed interests. The great host of Rousseau's successors certainly subscribed to the political program of the *Social Contract* without seeing, however, that the latter resulted from a complicated reinterpretation of the initially negatively employed notion of *amour propre*. Other successors of the Genevan philosopher tied in exclusively with the *Discourse on Inequality*, whereby their pessimistic diagnoses of the times lacked any prospect of the therapeutic remedies developed only in Rousseau's later writings. But there were also thinkers who were intuitively aware of the whole spectrum of meanings of this notion that was so central to Rousseau's thought, and who could therefore probably envisage the internal connection in his writings – which are so difficult to read consistently. These rather rare exceptions in the history of Rousseau's reception may have included Immanuel Kant. In his work, depending on the particular philosophical interest pursued, the notion of *amour propre* appears either in its positive or in its negative meaning. The differences are

already marked in his choice of terms. Whether Kant adequately comprehended the systematic connection of both aspects of the human need for recognition is less important in this context than the astonishing fact that he was familiar enough with both modes of *amour propre* to be able to employ them for his purposes in a targeted way.

Well known, of course, is how much theoretical inspiration for his moral philosophy Kant drew from Rousseau's notion that only those general laws that every individual can recognize as self-imposed may be regarded as valid. Kant even shared with his lifelong role model the ensuing consequence that such a common procedure of self-legislation leads to a relation of egalitarian recognition among those involved, summed up in the term "respect" (*Achtung*).²⁷ Less well known, however, is that Kant not only takes up Rousseau's positive reinterpretation of *amour propre* but also designates a precisely determined place for the use of the originally purely negative version of *amour propre*. Beyond many references to the anthropological role of comparative self-love, which clearly bear Rousseau's conceptual stamp, an idea of the social craving for recognition is at work particularly in the drafts for his philosophy of history.²⁸ The inspiration for this notion can have come only from an intensive reading of the *Discourse on Inequality*. The role assigned to this exclusively negative notion of *amour propre* in Kant's philosophy of history stems from the aim Kant has for this philosophy of history within his overall work: it has to protect us from despair in the face of the solely transcendental, and hence empirically ineffective, validity of moral laws by tentatively creating a picture of human history (with the aid of the faculty of judgment). This picture contains sufficient clues of progress toward betterment so as to motivate and spur our moral efforts in spite of everything.²⁹ To achieve this objective, however, Kant has to endow his hypothetical draft of the course of history with at least as many clues of real moral progress as are necessary to ensure that it does not lose all credibility for his contemporaries. Precisely at this point in his philosophy of history, where the empirical plausibility of a moral progression of history is at stake, Rousseau's negative conception of *amour propre* comes into effect in a downright paradoxical way. Entirely against the intention of the *Discourse on Inequality*, Kant attempts to give the craving for recognition (which he too regards as constitutive for humankind) a twist that will explain why moral betterment will arise from this desire after all.

Due to their “unsocial sociability,” human subjects – so the train of thought goes in Kant’s *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose* – always strive to distinguish themselves by achievements for which they can find recognition within a social community. At a certain threshold in history, this vanity-motivated struggle for distinction reaches a point where the rivaling subjects retain no other potential for distinction than to attempt special achievements in the domain of moral behavior and the ability to discriminate.³⁰ Thus, for Kant, what was initially just a craving for public esteem leads eventually, in the longer run of human development, also to progress in moral relationships, so that we can summon the courage for further moral improvements despite our empirical reservations. Quite ingeniously, Kant has thereby unified the two poles of meaning of *amour propre*, whose internal connection in Rousseau’s work he may not have even realized. The positive version of the notion, referring to reciprocal respect among equals, has the task of elucidating the normative aspect of morality, while its negative version has the function of yielding a hypothetical explanation of the path toward this moral standpoint. One could also take a step further and posit that Kant resolved the difficulties resulting from the double meaning of *amour propre* ontologically by relegating its divergent meanings to two different spheres: on the one hand to empirical reality, on the other hand to the noumenal. In the causal realm of history, human self-interest-edness appears in the shape of the craving for social recognition; in the rational realm of moral laws, by contrast, it takes the shape of moral respect.

Even Kant himself, however, could not have been entirely convinced by such a simple solution, for in his essays on the philosophy of history he endeavored to build a theoretical bridge between factual history and the ideal – in order to keep the gap between the two realms from widening. It thus seems more likely that Kant did not generally realize that, at least for Rousseau, both the craving for social recognition and the striving for moral respect could originate from one and the same motivational source, namely from *amour propre*. If Kant had known about this internal connection in Rousseau, he would not have bothered considering the causes for the shift in the underlying human need. Rather, he would have picked up two notions from the writings of his great role model Rousseau, each appearing, independently from one another, to possess such explanatory force that he would have attempted to draw upon them at different places in his work.

Even more difficult, however, is an appraisal of the dependence on Rousseau's notion of *amour propre* in the case of thinkers who wanted to transcend Kant's theory immediately after his death, with the aim of preventing from the outset the emergence of any gap between the two realms of empirical causality and noumenal reason. We can note that at least Hegel, though not Fichte, was intuitively aware of the origins of his own theory of recognition in the heritage of Rousseau's thought. Although Hegel, to my knowledge, does not mention the notion of *amour propre* and also takes his entire terminology of recognition more from Fichte than from Rousseau, many remarks in the *Philosophy of Right* allow the conclusion that Hegel conceived of *Sittlichkeit* along the lines of Rousseau's *volonté générale* – namely as the result of reciprocal recognition among individuals limiting themselves in their subjectivity.³¹ If one considers that Hegel traces “vanity” and “hypocrisy” to the failure to recognize how the need for recognition binds subjects together, a contextual-notional dependence (if not a direct one) on Rousseau's horizon of thought seems plain. Like the great Genevan, so too the German philosopher perceives the subjective craving for recognition and mutual recognition, that is, vanity and equal respect, as two sides of the same human striving to be acknowledged as a person of social worth in the eyes of other people.³² But, as in Kant's case, it is extremely difficult to make out the extent to which Hegel really understood the double meaning of *amour propre* in Rousseau's work; although the *Philosophy of Right* makes distinctions similar to Rousseau's between decadent and successful forms of the need for recognition, it is doubtful that Hegel's distinctions originate directly in an adaptation of the notion of *amour propre*. One reason why later generations had such difficulties seeing the whole range of meanings of Rousseau's key notion may be that Rousseau himself never shed a certain reservation concerning the relationship to the self thus designated. To the end of his life he struggled with the question whether, on the whole, it would not be more conducive to a good life to mentally overcome our dependence on others.

III

Looking back at what we have learned about Rousseau's theory of *amour propre* before this interim overview of the history of ideas, the enormous range of this concept is as striking as its inherent character

of constant unease: *amour propre*, as opposed to mere *amour de soi*, is a self-interestedness mediated by others. For Rousseau it does not even lose its boundlessness and insatiability when, due to the insight of shared dependence, it has taken the form of a mutual respect among equals. As identified by Frederick Neuhouser, the anthropological realism of Rousseau's thought lies in the fact that, after the loss of contented self-love, the individual retains a constant craving to be recognized as an especially esteemed member of his social community. Thus a socialized individual cannot be satisfied merely by being acknowledged as an equal among equals in a republican community, but must strive beyond that for a social esteem that accrues to skills and attributes that differentiate him from all others.³³ Such an excess in the striving for recognition, which compels Rousseau to seek out additional sources of personal worth and reputation in the *Social Contract*, is itself grounded in the structure of the attitude to the self that is characteristic of *amour propre*. Taking up this relation, we have lost all standards of self-assessment that might have arisen from our natural needs, so to speak; hence we are now able to assess our merit only in the reflection offered by those who, taken together, form "public opinion" or the "generalized other." The uncertainty whether our accomplishments are actually honored appropriately by such public judgments remains even if, as co-authors of the *volonté générale*, we are involved in achieving universally binding standards of value. To preclude any possible misinterpretations of our personality, even under the condition of equal respect, we thus must still strive for a recognition that makes us stand out from all others. Unlike Adam Smith, who could imagine the external observer as so completely generalizable as to have lost any actual features of arbitrariness and even as identifiable with reason as such,³⁴ Rousseau cannot believe in the possibility of such a complete rationalizability of the general judge.³⁵ For him, the extrinsic judgment that the individual is exposed to in the relationship of *amour propre* to the self always contains the danger of remaining unrecognized to the extent that a pre-emptive pursuit of special esteem is not only widespread, but also culturally justified.

On the other hand, this risk of failure to be recognized, by which Rousseau means not simply a lack of respect for individual merits but the absence of their cognitive perception, is also a constant source of anxiety for Rousseau. He sees the tendency of the social environment to misjudge the true nature of the individual and fail to recognize his special talents as the real danger posed by the moment of civilizing transition from *amour de soi* to *amour propre*.³⁶

This diagnosis, which may be easily overlooked but consequently emerges as the core of Rousseau's theory of recognition, imperceptibly shifts the reference points of social dependence upon the other from the moral to the epistemic. The internalized authority of public opinion, on which the individual's self-assessment depends, no longer presents itself as a moral but as a theoretical judge, who is to assess the qualities a subject actually possesses. With this transition, of course, there is also a change in how *amour propre* prompts a person to action. Just as a person should be able to demonstrate his social value and individual abilities as long as the generalized other is a moral instance, he must also be able to prove the merits and talents he actually has if he interiorizes an epistemic judge.

A look at Rousseau's writings makes it seem rather improbable that he gave a sufficient account of his own oscillation between a moral and an epistemic understanding of *amour propre*. Wherever he addresses the pathological desire for recognition and recommends as therapy the republican spirit of egalitarian respect, the normative notion of the generalized other predominates. Yet as soon as he begins speaking about the more fundamental harm of being dependent on the other, the epistemic model often presses imperceptibly into the foreground. In this shape of an internalized instance – not of moral evaluation, but rather of theoretical assessment – Rousseau's *amour propre* has had an enormous effect on the development of French philosophy. Up to Sartre and Lacan, we find remnants of the idea that dependence on social recognition is inevitably linked to the cognitive failure to recognize the core of one's subjectivity.³⁷ For Rousseau, however, the epistemic notion of an "inner judge" repeatedly provides the occasion to approach theoretically the radical alternative of overcoming as a whole the relationship of *amour propre* to the self. Rousseau's autobiographical writings, in particular, constantly revolve around the possibility of regaining an individual attitude in which the social recognition of one's own merits and capabilities has lost all existential significance. Such considerations exhibit a Stoic motif in Rousseau's thought and unmistakably contradict the view presented so far – that as socialized beings we inevitably need the recognition of our social value.

If we examine the works in which Rousseau discusses his own relationship to himself – less perhaps the *Confessions* than *Rousseau, Judge of Jean-Jacques*, whose title is already quite revealing, and the *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* – what is immediately apparent is how much they renounce any dependence on the judgment of others.