how, in Part II, the introduction of both artificial social conditions and 
"non-natural" passion enables Rousseau to explain the powerful ten- 
dency of humans to produce scarcity — of many types and of great 
magnitude — and hence to explain why extensive inequalities are near-
unavoidable in the social state.

We are now in a position to summarize the main elements of 
Rousseau's argument in Part I of the Second Discourse that nature 
is not the source of social inequality. His argument can be understood 
as a rejection of three possible natural explanations of social inequality 
(as well as all combinations of the three). First, social inequalities are 
not the direct or necessary consequences of natural inequalities.

Although the latter exist, they explain neither the existence of social 
inequalities in general nor why particular individuals end up where 
they do within existing hierarchies. If natural inequalities matter at all 
in the constitution of social inequality, they play only a very minor 
role and make themselves felt, if ever, only within a context of social 
practices and institutions that humans, not nature, are responsible for 
creating and that therefore could in principle be otherwise than they 
are. Second, the two natural passions of humans — pity and amour de 
soi-même — provide no incentives for humans to seek to establish 
inequalities (except in certain conditions of scarcity) since the final 
ends of each are indifferent to how well or how poorly other individu-
als fare in achieving their own natural ends. Third, there is no 
reason to believe that the conditions under which pity and amour de 
soi-même could lead humans to seek advantage over others as a 
means to achieving their final ends — the conditions of scarcity — 
would necessarily or typically obtain in a world where desires remain 
untransformed by unnatural passions and where artificial social insti-
tutions have not made scarcity a systematic necessity.

The thought that leads us into the topics covered in the next 
chapter is the following: if social inequality is to be understood as 
our creation rather than nature's, we need some way of understanding 
what motivates us to create it, and, as we have seen, amour de soi-même 
and pity provide no such explanation. In Chapter 2 we will examine 
the positive part of Rousseau's view on the origin of inequality, his 
account of how systematic social inequalities are made possible, and 
nearly unavoidable, once a certain "artificial" passion, amour propre, is 
added to his picture of original human nature.

The aim of this chapter is to reconstruct the positive part of Rousseau's 
answer to the Second Discourse's first main question: where does 
social inequality come from? Its task is to uncover the various "non-
natural" factors that, according to that account, must come together 
in order to explain the pervasiveness of inequality in actual human 
societies, and in carrying out this task it explicates one part of the 
Second Discourse's well-known thesis that "most of our ills are of our 
own making" (DI, 137/OC III, 138). Rousseau's positive answer to the 
question of inequality's origin is surprisingly complex and difficult 
to reconstruct, in part because the logic of his position — how the 
various elements of his account work together to explain inequality — is 
buried within a developmental narrative that, as I suggested in the 
preceding chapter, ought not to be understood literally, as a recount-
ing of actual historical events. The narrative structure of Part II; 
Rousseau's repeated emphasis on the search for "origins"; his descrip-
tion of his project as a genealogy (OC IV, 936); his insistence that the 
"events" he describes "could have occurred in several ways" or "might 
ever have arisen" at all (DI, 159/OC III, 163) — all these factors tend to 
obscure the systematic, atemporal, in short, the philosophical, character 
of the Second Discourse's explanation of inequality.

Indeed, it seems likely that most readers when confronted with the 
question this chapter attempts to answer — if nature is not the source of 
social inequality, then what is? — will be tempted to locate Rousseau's 
response in history, not least because the opposition between nature and 
history occupies a prominent place in the Second Discourse, the very

1 Which is to say, philosophical according to Rousseau's (and most of the tradition's) understand-

of what a philosophical explanation consists in.
first page of which highlights the contrast between "man...as nature formed him" and "the transformations that the succession of time and things...produced in his original constitution" (Di, 124/OC II, 122). History, to follow up on this suggestion, is presumably something that humans, given their free will, have a hand in shaping. If history, unlike nature, is in some sense up to us, then making it the source of social inequalities would certainly fit with Rousseau’s claim that these inequalities are created by us rather than imposed by nature. Moreover, if history were the source of social inequality, it would be easy to understand why Rousseau undertakes a project of genealogy: if we could trace the historical record back to the point where social inequalities first arose, we might be able to see not only where, but also perhaps why, they came about—and maybe even whether they are justified.

The obvious problem with this suggestion is that Rousseau’s genealogy is manifestly not a history in any straightforward sense. As we saw in the previous chapter, Rousseau denies that the state of nature depicted in Part I is to be understood as factually true (Di, 117, 132/OC III, 123, 132–3). In addition to this, he also denies—and just as explicitly—that the "developments" that lead humans beyond that state are to be taken for real historical events. Instead, he describes the narrative of Part II as a "hypothetical history" (Di, 128/OC III, 127) that is grounded not in facts but in "conjectures based solely on the nature of man" (Di, 132/OC III, 133). Rousseau repeats this claim at the end of Part I (Di, 159, 160/OC III, 162, 163), and, finally, as if to dispel any doubts that might linger about the historical status of his narrative, he emphasizes the point once more in the Second Discourse’s closing paragraph: "I have tried to give an account of the origin and the progress of inequality...in so far as these things can be deduced from the nature of man by the light of reason alone" (Di, 188/OC III, 193). It is not, then, only the original state of nature but also the "events" depicted in Part II that are to be understood as hypothetical and conjectural positits rather than as attempts to write a factually true history of human development. At the same time it must not be forgotten that the Second Discourse abounds with empirical examples from historical and anthropological sources that appear to be offered as evidence for the hypothetical history it proposes. Before ending our reconstruction of the Second Discourse, then, we must take up the matter of why empirical facts of this kind are nevertheless relevant to a history that takes itself to be only conjectural and hypothetical. (I return to this issue in Chapter 4.)

These initially bewildering features of Rousseau’s narrative merely underscore the importance of figuring out what kind of project he takes himself to be engaged in when inquiring into inequality’s origin. If progress is to be made here, it is best to begin by paying attention to Rousseau’s own description of the task that faces him at the end of Part I: "Having proved that inequality is scarcely perceptible in the state of nature and that its influence there is almost nil, it remains for me to show its origin and progress in the successive developments of the human mind (esprit humain)" (Di, 159/OC III, 162). The important, but also startling, claim of this passage is that the key to explaining inequality’s origin lies in discovering how the human mind must differ from what it is like in the original state of nature if social inequality is to assume a significant place in human affairs. If Rousseau is not concerned with the actual history of human development, it is plausible to suppose that the question that interests him instead is analytic in character, which new element (or elements) of human psychology must be added to his account of original human nature in order to explain why humans create inequalities beyond those that nature bestows on them? That this psychological question is indeed Rousseau’s primary concern is borne out by the story he goes on to tell in Part II. Yet saying that psychology is his primary concern does not imply that it is his only concern, and, as we will see, much of the difficulty in reconstructing the Second Discourse’s argument lies in understanding how psychological and non-psychological factors interrelate in explaining widespread social inequality. For now, however, as a first step, I focus exclusively on the "developments of the human mind" that Rousseau himself singles out as the most important element of his account.

AMOUR PROPRE

Although Rousseau notes a number of developments that take humans beyond their original state—the beginnings of leisure, of language, of families and even nations—what he explicitly points to

3 These are nations without states, peoples united not by political institutions but by ties of blood and a shared way of life.
as “the first step towards inequality” (DI, 165–6/OC III, 169) is a psychological phenomenon: the emergence of an artificial, inherent social passion that he calls (later in the text) amour propre. Here is the important passage in which amour propre, without being named as such, makes its first appearance in the Second Discourse:

It became customary to gather in front of their huts or around a large tree, to sing and dance. . . . became . . . the occupation of idle men and women gathered together. Each began to look at the others and to want to be looked at; and public esteem acquired a value. The one who sang or danced the best, the handsomest, the strongest, the most skilful, or the most eloquent came to be the most highly regarded, and this was the first step towards inequality and at the same time towards vice. (DI, 166/OC III, 169)

If my interpretative claims above are correct, the point of this passage is to reveal the core of Rousseau’s answer to the first of the Second Discourse’s two questions: it isolates amour propre – a passion to be looked at, to be highly regarded, to acquire public esteem or respect – as the principal source of social inequality.3

What, then, is amour propre, and why is it the principal source of social inequality? As its name indicates, amour propre is a kind of self-love, and as we saw in our earlier discussion of amour de soi-même, ‘self-love’ in this context means simply self-interestedness. In the case of humans, to love yourself (in general) is simply to care about your own good and to be disposed to pursue whatever you take that good to be. Yet clearly amour propre is something more specific than self-interestedness in general, since, as Rousseau makes clear in the extremely important Note XV, it differs in both its nature and its consequences from the other, “natural” form of self-love, amour de soi-même.

One must not confuse amour propre and amour de soi-même, two passions very different in their nature and effects. Amour de soi-même is a natural sentiment that leads every animal to attend to its own preservation and that, guided in man by reason and modified by pity, produces humanity and virtue. Amour propre is but a relative sentiment, artificial (factice) and born in society, that leads each individual to set greater store by himself than by anyone else, inspires in men all evils they do to one another, and is the true source of honor . . . (as the true nature of amour propre does not exist. For, since each man in particular regards himself as the sole spectator who observes him, as the sole being in the universe who takes an interest in him, as the sole judge of his own merits, it is not possible that a sentiment that has its source in comparisons that he is not led to make could spring up in his soul. (DI, 218/OC III, 219)

This passage, Rousseau’s most explicit definition of amour propre anywhere, distinguishes the two forms of self-love along four dimensions. The first of these concerns the object, or good, that each inclines those who possess it to seek: amour de soi-même aims at self-preservation and one’s own well-being, whereas amour propre pursues the intrinsically non-material ends of honor, merit, or the regard of others. A being that possesses amour propre, then, is moved by the desire to be esteemed, admired, or thought valuable in some respect by those it regards as its spectators. One could also say – to adopt a term adopted later by Fichte and Hegel – that what amour propre seeks is some form of recognition, an acknowledgment by others of one’s status as a valued subject.4

The second dimension along which the two forms of self-love differ concerns their consequences: whereas amour de soi-même is mostly benign, amour propre is the source of evil – indeed, as Rousseau says, of all the evils that humans, as opposed to nature, introduce into the

3 Although there are often good reasons to distinguish esteem from respect, for the most part abstract from those differences here. I devote extensive attention to this distinction as it is relevant to Rousseau’s theory of amour propre in Rousseau’s Theories of Self-Lov en Rationality, and the Drive for Recognition (Oxford University Press, 2008), 51–70, 145–49.

4 Niko Kolda provides a provocative set of answers to these questions in “The Explanation of Amour-Propre,” Philosophical Review 119 (2010), 165–300.
world. Of course, *amour propre* is not the cause of purely natural evils, such as diseases and earthquakes, but the artificial evils with which the Second Discourse is most concerned — social inequality, for one, but also enslavement, domination, unhappiness, vice, and alienation — are all to be explained as having their psychological source in the desire to be well regarded by others. It is worth noting that Rousseau does not say here, or anywhere else, that *amour propre* has these effects necessarily but only that when they do exist, *amour propre* is their cause. Nor does he believe that there are no good things that owe their existence to *amour propre*, on the contrary, many do, and they include love, appropriately tempered ambition, and the disposition to behave honorably. In fact, Rousseau is much more ambivalent about *amour propre* than this passage or the Second Discourse in general lead readers to assume. The positive potential of *amour propre* is most visible in his later work *Emile*, but even in the Second Discourse Rousseau admits that the "universal desire for reputation," the "desire to be talked about" — in other words, *amour propre* is responsible for "what is best and worst among men: our virtues and our vices, our sciences and our errors" (*DI*, 184/OC III, 189). Moreover, one of "the sweetest sentiments known to man," conjugal love, is unthinkable without the desire for mutual regard, which only *amour propre* can generate (*DI*, 164/OC III, 168). That the Second Discourse is largely silent about the possible benefits of *amour propre* is explained by the fact that, in contrast to *Emile* and *The Social Contract*, its task is mostly diagnostic in character, and in this context — when the point is to explain where the ills of human society come from rather than to devise a remedy for them (*DI*, 201/OC III, 205) — it is only fitting that *amour propre* appears in a predominantly negative light. Understanding why Rousseau regards *amour propre* as the principal source of one of the main ills of human society (inequality) is the central undertaking of this chapter; once we have finished explaining what *amour propre* is and how it differs from *amour de soi-même*, we will return to this claim and reconstruct it in detail.

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2 Understandably, many interpreters deny that Rousseau regards *amour propre* as having the egalitarian potential I ascribe to it here. Admittedly, the evidence for such a potential in the Second Discourse is thin. (I present it in the text immediately following this note.) In *Emile*, however, this is clearer: a successful domestic education is predicated on fostering individuals' *amour propre* so that they understand themselves as the moral equals of all other human beings and are able to find some satisfaction of their *amour propre* in being recognized as such.
guise, as a desire to be regarded as the best in some respect (as the handsomest, most skilful, etc.). Just after this, however, Rousseau explicitly notes the possibility—perhaps even the inevitability—of a quite different manifestation of amour propre:

As soon as men had begun to appreciate one another and the idea of consideration had taken shape in their mind, each one claimed a right to it, and one could no longer deprive anyone of it with impunity. From here arose the first duties of civility...and from it any intentional wrong became an affront because, along with the harm that resulted from the injury, the offended man saw in it contempt for his person that was often more unbearable than the harm itself. (DI, 166/OC III, 170)

The duties of civility referred to here involve a species of regard, importantly different from the acknowledgment humans seek in weighing to be esteemed as the handsomest or the strongest. For the demand to be respected as a "person" expresses a desire to be treated in accordance with standards of dignity or civility that apply equally to all persons, rather than to be esteemed as someone who stands out in some way as better than others. Despite the important difference between the demand to be respected as an equal and the desire to be valued as superior in some respect, both—so Rousseau suggests—are capable of helping to satisfy the general aim of amour propre "to have a position..., to count for something" in relation to others (E, 160/OC IV, 421).

In this respect the relativity of amour propre contrasts sharply with the absolute, or non-comparative, character of amour de soi-même. Here it is helpful to recall one of Rousseau's reasons, explained in Chapter 1, for denying that social inequalities have their source in human nature: there is nothing in purely natural amour de soi-même that motivates humans to seek out inequalities for their own sake since the goods it strives for—the requirements of self-preservation, for example—satisfy its needs and desires irrespective of the level of satisfaction achieved by others. (Recall from Chapter 1 that for being still unaffected by the relative desires of amour propre, the extent to

(Accomplishing this is the task's principal undertaking in Book IV.) Moreover, the equal respect of its citizen is a major theme in The Social Contract, and it is difficult to believe that Rousseau did not regard this as responding in part to the problems generated by amour propre as depicted in the Second Discourse. I discuss this issue in greater detail in Rousseau's Theory of Self-Love, 35, 39-40, 59-60, 61-6, 66-6, 174-9.

Amour propre is the source of social inequality which one's sleep or nourishment satisfies oneself is independent of how much sleep or nourishment those around one enjoy. As it is possible to begin to see already, the fact that amour propre seeks only relative goods will play a major role in Rousseau's explanation of where social inequality comes from.

The second sense in which amour propre is relative to other subjects is that the good it seeks depends on, even consists in, the judgments or opinions of others. As Rousseau expresses it in the note cited above, amour propre, in contrast to amour de soi-même, requires the idea that there are other "spectators who observe" one and other "judges of one's own merit" beyond oneself. Another way of putting this point is to say that the aim of amour propre—some form of esteem or respect from others—is intrinsically social in character. Here, too, amour propre contrasts sharply with amour de soi-même: since the opinion of one's fellow beings is not constitutive of the goods sought by amour de soi-même, it does not necessarily motivate us to establish relations to other subjects. Amour propre, on the other hand, because it seeks standing in the eyes of others, provides humans with a permanent motivation—an urge sufficiently strong and enduring to be considered a need—to enter into relations with others. (This is why I said in the previous chapter that amour propre was a partial replacement for the Stoic principle of sociability: it impels us to seek social relations, and not merely for instrumental reasons.) Since its needs cannot be satisfied in isolation, the passion to count as something for others is a direct and permanent source of human dependence and society.

The final dimension along which amour propre differs from amour de soi-même is that the latter is natural, whereas the former is artificial (justice). A careful reading of Note XV reveals that "natural" refers to three qualities of amour de soi-même, all of which were topics of discussion in Chapter 1: first, it is a sentiment we share with other animals (and so is part of our biological nature); second, it is benign (or good), not itself a source of inequality or of other human ills; and, finally, it is not "born in society" but is (or would be) operative even in the absence of all social relations. Amour propre, on the other hand, has all three opposite qualities: it distinguishes humans from other animals insofar as it relies on faculties—the capacities to compare, to form opinions, and to care about the opinions of others—that non-humans lack; it is the psychological source of all human-made ills; and it is an inherently
social passion (because relative in the two senses discussed above. Picking up on a point I made in Chapter 1, this last claim can be reformulated as follows: whereas it would make sense to attribute amour de soi-même even to human beings who lacked all social relations, the same is not true for amour propre, since its goals depend directly and necessarily on relations to others, who must serve both as objects of comparison and as subjects who take the seeker of esteem or respect as the object of their regard. It is important to recall that by labeling amour propre artificial, Rousseau does not mean to suggest that it is a merely accidental feature of human reality or that humans would be better off without it. Nothing in his claim that amour propre is artificial implies that humans can or should exist without it. Contrary to popular primitivist readings of the Second Discourse, Rousseau does not envision human existence without amour propre any more than he envisions it without love, reason, or language—all of which are just as artificial as amour propre and no less essential to human reality. Indeed, Rousseau’s view is that there can be no genuinely human beings without amour propre, a view that finds expression in the fact that in Part I of the Second Discourse, before amour propre has entered the world, he seems unable to decide whether to refer to the beings he describes as humans or animals. In truth, they are both (or neither): although they possess capacities that other animals do not (free will and perfectibility), they lack most of the attributes—language, reason, passion—that we generally take to be central to human existence. This is an indication that for Rousseau the desire to compare oneself to others and to be the object of their evaluative gaze is so fundamental a part of all distinctively human phenomena—including the need to live with others—that it would not be going too far to define humans as “recognition-seeking animals.”

10 The term primitivists comes from Arthur O. Lovejoy, who convincingly rebuts the common perception of Rousseau as calling for a return to, or in some other way metaphorically idealizing, the original state of nature. See “The Supposed Primitivism of Rousseau’s Discourse on Inequality,” in his Essays in the History of Ideas (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1937), 14-57.

11 This is closer to Aristotle’s definition of humans as rational animals than it appears, since it is possible to read Rousseau as claiming that rationality itself relies on amour propre (and in this light it is interesting to recall that Aristotle also defines the human being as a social animal, as if the rationality of humans were connected to their social character). For the connection between rationality and amour propre in Rousseau, see my Rousseau’s Theory of Self-Love, Chapter 7.

Amour propre is the source of social inequality

It is important to be clear about why Rousseau insists on calling amour propre artificial rather than simply social. Why think of amour propre as something humans made? One reason is that, unlike amour de soi-même, amour propre cannot move human beings in the absence of comparisons and judgments that ultimately rest on the freedom of the judging subject. It is not only that amour propre seeks the (free) judgments of others; it is also the case that it can yield no determinate desires for recognized standing unless informed by some conception, or opinion, of what makes someone worthy of being esteemed, whether this is being the best singer, possessing the most property, or simply being a member of the human species. In short, amour propre requires that both the giver and receiver of esteem be valuing subjects, and valuing is possible only on the basis of judgments that themselves presuppose the free participation of the subjects that make them.

Another way of understanding the claim that amour propre is artificial is to recall Rousseau’s reasons for considering society and the phenomena that depend on it—social inequalities, for example—artificial. His thought is that even though human beings must have social relations of one kind or another (since the distinctively human is impossible outside society), the particular forms that social relations take are highly variable and, more to the point, dependent on human will—though not, of course, on the will of any single individual. It is not, in general, up to humans to live in society or not, but it is up to them, in some sense at least, how their social relations are configured. In other words, the social world is artificial in the sense that the practices and institutions that characterize any particular society are the (mostly unintentional) products of the collective actions of humans and, as we saw in Chapter 1, are sustained only by the ongoing participation and “consent” of their members. Amour propre, then, is artificial in the same sense and for similar reasons; although human beings cannot exist as such without amour propre, the particular forms it takes—how, by whom, and on what basis individuals seek to be valued by others—are highly variable and depend on the kind of social world its possessors inhabit. Processes of socialization, for example, give particular shape to the desires and ideals that motivate individuals, and real social institutions inevitably encourage certain ways of finding public esteem while ruling out others. (Modern
discourse are susceptible to being remedied. If the particular forms
that amour propre takes are shaped by conditions that depend, at least
to some extent, on our own wills, then it is conceivable that certain
kinds of human intervention – education or institutional reform –
might be able to transform individuals such that they are able to satisfy
their desire to have value in the eyes of others in ways that do not
result in the ills that plague modern societies.\footnote{According to
Axel Honneth, my optimistic reading of the potential of amour propre is hard to
reconcile with Rousseau’s later, more self-critical writings. See his “Die Vereinigung
von Joachim Rousseau’s” Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie 66 (2003), 65. But perhaps we are to
understand these later writings as belonging to a different philosophical project from the one
set out in Emile, The Social Contract, and the Second Discourse. My suggestion is that the
later project turns away from social, political, and moral philosophy in its traditional guises
and investigates how one is to live, as happily and with as much integrity as possible, in a
world that is hopelessly corrupt and therefore insusceptible to the remedies proposed in
Rousseau’s earlier work.}

In sum, then, amour propre is a form of self-love that is the source of
the enduring, though highly malleable, need that human beings have
to count as someone of value, both in the eyes of others and relative
to the value of others. As such, it occupies a prominent place in
Rousseau’s theory of the fundamental motivators of human action.
His psychological thesis is that amour propre and amour de soi-même
are the sources of two distinct kinds of motivation, each of which
plays a central role in human life – a thesis that finds expression in his
claim that “all our labors are directed at only two objects: the comforts
of life for oneself and consideration among others” (Du, 219/OC III,
220). (The mention here of only two objects of human activity bears
further witness to the relative weakness of the third source of motivation,
pity.) Distinguishing two sources of motivation does not, however,
only imply that an action can be a manifestation of only one species
of self-love at the same time. On the contrary, most human behavior
aims at satisfying both amour de soi-même and amour propre at once.
The homes we construct, the clothing we wear, the food we eat and
serve to guests – all are typically motivated not only by physical need
but also by opinions concerning how our homes, clothing, and food
reflect our standing for others, both as individuals and as human
beings in general.

It is important to bear in mind that by classifying one of these
passions as natural and the other as artificial, Rousseau is not making a

The extreme plasticity of amour propre – its susceptibility to being
formed and re-formed through human interactions of many different
kinds – is of crucial importance to Rousseau’s account of inequality
and must be borne in mind when encountering passages, such as Note
XV, that appear to ascribe a fixed and usually pernicious character to
amour propre. When Rousseau says that amour propre “leads each
individual to set greater store by himself than by anyone else [and]
inspires in men all the evils they do to one another,” he must not be
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sarily, in all its possible forms. Thinking more highly of oneself than
of others is one way that amour propre commonly manifests itself, but
because the forms it actually assumes are always influenced by con-
tingent circumstances that ultimately depend on human will, it is by
no means necessary that it do so.\footnote{Great care must be taken here. I am distinguishing
phenomena such as setting greater store by oneself and thinking more highly of oneself, on the one
hand, from the broader phenomenon of striving for superior standing, on the other. As I read
Rousseau, the latter is, in some form, a necessary part of human existence, whereas the former are not.
This means that there are forms of the desire for superior standing that do not have pernicious consequences for
social life, for example, the desire to be “loved best” by one other person or the desire to be esteemed
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Treatise of Self-Love, Chapter 5.}
claim about their relative strength or significance as a source of human motivation, nor about their relative value for human beings. His point, rather, is to highlight the necessarily social character of amour propre, in contrast to the (in principle) individualistic character of amour de soi-même. The point of this, in turn, is to draw our attention, in Part II, to the variable and fateful effects that contingent, humanly made social arrangements have on how amour propre manifests itself in specific social contexts. The fact that amour de soi-même precedes amour propre in the Second Discourse's narrative is not an indication of temporal, logical, or normative priority; it is a sign instead of the different sources the two passions have — biology on the one hand, social relations on the other — and of the differences in structure, malleability, and possible effects that Rousseau sees as following from this difference. Understood in this way, his theory of amour propre asserts the following: in one form or another the esteem, regard, or approval of others is a universally desired end of human beings; the drive to acquire a recognized standing for others cannot be extirpated in human beings (except perhaps through measures of extreme repression); and social, moral, and political philosophy must therefore take very seriously the implications of this fundamental human need. Moreover, the twofold relativity of amour propre implies that the impulse to compare one's condition with others', as well as the need to have one's comparative standing confirmed by them, is a basic and permanent feature of the human condition (DI, 183; OC III, 189) that remain at work even in the best of societies.24

As in the case of amour de soi-même and pity, Rousseau's thesis regarding the fundamental status of amour propre is based in part on empirical evidence. As I have suggested, his claims concerning all three basic sources of human motivation derive much of their support from the success with which these few hypotheses about human psychology make sense of the diverse forms of human behavior we are familiar with from experience. In placing amour propre alongside amour de soi-même in his psychological theory, Rousseau is in effect claiming that reflection on our general acquaintance with human reality suffices to show that the desire for public esteem plays a major role in human behavior and social existence, such that the urge to count in the eyes of others is every bit as pervasive in human affairs as the drive to preserve oneself and to secure one's own non-relative well-being. Moreover, Rousseau's texts suggest that this more or less empirical claim finds further support in a more philosophical consideration concerning the centrality of comparison in general to various kinds of distinctively human phenomena and activities.25 Reflection, for example, is born of the comparison of ideas (OL, 268/OC, 396), while language, concept formation, and reason itself are no less dependent on the capacity to distinguish and compare (DI, 147–8/OC III, 149–50; OC, 254/OC 5, 381). Once the capacity (and tendency) to compare is awakened and the basic fact of social intercourse is introduced into the picture in Part II, it is no mere accident that creatures of self-love come to notice and to care about how their positions compare to others'. Indeed, within the narrative of the Second Discourse the newly acquired ability to make simple comparisons is immediately followed by "the first movement of pride (orgueil)" — a consciousness of one's superiority that, though at first only a pride in one's species, eventually turns into amour propre's concern for one's standing as an individual (DI, 162/OC III, 166). Then, once humans develop a more settled existence in which they come into repeated contact with the same individuals,26 they inevitably apply their capacity for making comparisons to the qualities of individuals, which makes "sentiments of preference" possible and, immediately thereafter, the desire to be preferred — and hence compared and evaluated — by others (DI, 165–6/OC III, 169). (I go into the complex relation among comparing, preferring specific others, and concern for one's own rank as an individual in more detail below, in explaining the "origin" of amour propre.) The clear implication is that the tendency to

24 For evidence of this external to the Second Discourse, see E, 231, 245, 389, 436/OC IV, 331, 536, 670, 806.

25 Nisbet expresses a similar view when he locates the origin of civilization in relations in which one person "measures himself against another" and when he claims that establishing equivalences through comparison "constitute[s] thinking as such" (On the Genealogy of Morals, Essay II, §8). Related views about the importance of comparison can be found in Adam Smith, The Wealth of Nations, ed. Edwin Cannan (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 14.

26 This is pride, not yet amour propre, because, first, it is a looking at oneself that does not seek the opinion of others; and, second, the comparative standing of individuals is not at issue. In other words, the two species of relativity that define amour propre are lacking.

27 Recall that these developments are not best understood as temporal events, as if Rousseau were asserting that social relations actually came into being at some point in human history. The introduction of social existence in Part II should instead be thought of as the taking back of an abstraction undertaken in Part I for analytic purposes.
compare the merits of individuals, although artificial in Rousseau's technical sense, is no less basic to human life than the foundations of reason and language.

Finally, even though Rousseau himself does not speak in this way, I will treat the picture of human psychology presented in Part II, where amour propre is added to the sentiments of amour de soi-même and pity discussed in Part I, as furnishing us with what I call an expanded conception of human nature in the non-normative or explanatory sense. The fundamental and ineradicable character of amour propre—that it is in some form motivates all real human beings regardless of time and place—qualifies it as a basic disposition or endowment of the human soul, even if, unlike amour de soi-même and pity, it could not operate in the absence of social relations or in the absence of distinctively human cognitive activities such as judgment and comparison. Like amour de soi-même and pity, amour propre is essential to an adequate account of human psychology because a very large part of real human behavior would remain inexplicable if the desire to acquire standing in the eyes of others were left out of the picture. This means that social and political philosophy must take at least as much notice of amour propre as devising standards for criticizing and endorsing social institutions as it does of the two sentiments that define original (non-social) human nature. There is, of course, an important sense in which human nature in the expanded sense no longer qualifies strictly as nature for Rousseau, which is no doubt why he avoids speaking of amour propre as a part of human nature: this distinctively human passion depends on judgments, and hence on human freedom, in ways that amour de soi-même and pity do not. What I am calling the expanded (explanatory) conception of human nature is, one might say, a conception of human nature, not of human nature.

In invoking the idea of an expanded conception of human nature that adds the passion of amour propre to "original" human nature, I take myself to be denying one of the theses most commonly associated with Rousseau, namely that humans are by nature radically asocial. Of course, if "nature" is taken in the idiosyncratic sense that Rousseau gives to the term "original nature"—denoting what individuals would be like in the absence of all social relations and historical development—then, more or less by definition, humans are indeed "naturally" asocial. But this is not what those who interpret Rousseau as exposing the radical asociality of humans mean to be claiming. Perhaps the view they attribute to Rousseau is best understood as a flat-out rejection of every version of the thesis of sociability, according to which in the absence of extensive artificial formation—by powerful social institutions or the intervention of a great educator (such as the legislator invoked in The Social Contract [SC, II.7])—humans would be naturally inclined to avoid enduring social relations, experiencing no desire or need for them, and would prefer instead to exist in something like the solipsistic condition depicted in Part I of the Second Discourse. It will come as no surprise that the interpretation I am proposing here breaks fundamentally with this common understanding of Rousseau's position. As I explained in the previous chapter, on my view Rousseau rejects the thesis of natural sociability and replaces it with the combination of amour propre and pity—one natural and one artificial element—regarding both as passions (or sentiments) that motivate all real human beings wherever they are found. (The most important difference between the two, recall, is that the latter could in principle motivate human beings independently of the social relations in which they find themselves, whereas the former is a highly malleable, intrinsically social passion that requires comparison, judgments of merit and value, and the idea that (a part of) one's good depends on—consists in—something irreducibly "moral," namely, the opinions others have of them.) It is true that the solution proposed jointly in Emile and The Social Contract to the problems articulated by the Second Discourse require extensive educational measures, but these measures are best understood not as directed at transforming asocial creatures into social beings but at forming the amour propre and pity of beings that are already social—in the sense that they desire the good opinion of others as an important part of their own good—in such a way that their social intercourse avoids the evils depicted in the Second Discourse. Again, this aspect of
Rousseau’s Critique of Inequality

Rousseau’s view is much more visible in texts other than the Second Discourse, most notably in Emile, where Rousseau states repeatedly that the task of good domestic education cannot consist in preventing amour propre from taking hold of individuals, but only in forming amour propre in ways that foster rather than destroy human freedom and happiness. If the Second Discourse is to be made consistent with Rousseau’s other major texts—and Rousseau himself encourages us to seek such consistency—the thesis of the radical asociality of human must give way to the more complex picture of his position that I am proposing here.

AMOUR PROPRE AS THE SOURCE OF SOCIAL INEQUALITY

Once amour propre has been introduced into Rousseau’s picture of human psychology, it is no longer difficult to understand where social inequality comes from—or, more precisely, how it can be our creation rather than nature’s. For whenever humans conceive of their good in comparative terms—whenever our own satisfaction depends on how much or how little of the same good those around us find—the possibility exists that we will seek to do well for ourselves by trying to outdo others. In other words, the concern for relative standing is susceptible to becoming a desire for superior standing, and as soon as one takes the view that an affirmation of one’s own worth requires being esteemed not merely as good but better than others, amour propre requires inequality in order to be satisfied. It is primarily the comparative nature of amour propre, then, that explains why the human desire to be looked at favorably by others constitutes “the first step towards inequality,” for it alone explains how humans can be led to seek our inequalities for their own sake, as public demonstrations of the superior standing they are out to achieve. The range of human phenomena that depend on such an impulse towards inequality is extensive and familiar: the endless pursuit of wealth, ostentatious consumption, the relentless drive to compete and outdo, scrupulously to keep up with the Joneses—all are manifestations of the fervor, inspired by amour propre, “to raise one’s relative fortune, [not] out of genuine need [but] in order to place oneself above others” (DI, 1771, OC III, 175). In other words, amour propre has the potential to drive humans to improve their relative condition for the sole purpose of appearing superior to others, and a passion of this sort is precisely what is needed to explain why artificial inequality is so prevalent in the large majority of the actual societies we know, both present and past.

Thus, the core of Rousseau’s answer to the first of the Second Discourse’s questions, though frequently overlooked, is relatively straightforward. It consists in a psychological claim concerning where the impulse to inequality comes from in humans, and the specific “development of the human mind” that is said to be responsible for social inequality is the awakening and strengthening of amour propre. That Rousseau means to single out amour propre as the main source of social inequality is evident not only in his claim that its workings represent “the first step towards inequality” (and “the same time towards vice”) but also in his description of that passion as the “leaven” whose “fermentation...produced compounds fatal to happiness and innocence” (DI, 166/OC III, 169–79). At the same time, as the latter statement suggests, if amour propre is the principal cause—and a necessary condition—of social inequalities, it is far from being sufficient by itself to produce them. It is important here to take the analogy with bread-making seriously: the drive to be esteemed by others is the cause of social inequality in exactly the sense in which it yields that a loaf of bread to rise. To say that yeast is the cause of the bread’s rising is
not to claim that it has that effect all by itself, in the absence of other conditions it needs — warmth, moisture, flour — in order to do its work. The same holds for the production of inequality. For, as the Second Discourse makes clear, a number of other, non-psychological conditions must be added to the mix — leisure, the division of labor, private property, for example — if the fermenting of _amour propre_ is to be activated and its leavening powers unleashed.

Despite these auxiliary conditions — the number and interdependence of which account for the ultimate complexity of the Second Discourse’s complete answer to the question of inequality’s origins — what makes _amour propre_ the source of social inequality is that, like yeast in the making of bread, it supplies the force, or power, that drives a certain process of growth or transformation: it is to _amour propre_ that “inequality, being almost nonexistent in the state of nature, owes its force and growth” ( _DI_, 188/OC III, 193). In other words, the passion to be esteemed by others is what fuels the spread of inequality, since it alone among the elements of human psychology provides humans with a motive to create inequalities beyond those that nature itself produces. It is the principal cause of inequality, then, because it is capable of moving humans to devise a nearly unlimited variety of new, artificial opportunities for satisfying the desire to acquire a valued standing in the eyes of others, whenever a valued standing is understood to imply superior standing. But if the core of Rousseau’s account of the origin of social inequality is relatively simple, its supplementary details, as any reader can see, are anything but straightforward. For the story told in Part II of how inequality comes to play a dominant role in human affairs also appeals to a wide and complex array of non-psychological factors, which include socio-political phenomena — the division of labor, private property, the state, and class stratification — as well as very general features of civilization, such as leisure, luxury, and technological innovation. As I suggested above, these non-psychological factors figure in Rousseau’s account as auxiliary conditions that must be present in some combination if _amour propre_ is to have the leavening effects it is capable of producing. Unfortunately (but perhaps to Rousseau’s credit), it is very difficult to determine exactly how and in what combination, according to the Second Discourse, these conditions work together to unleash _amour propre_’s latent power. Disentangling these densely woven strands of Rousseau’s account is a delicate and time-consuming enterprise, and the remainder of this chapter will be dedicated to this task.

It is best to begin by attempting to determine why the mere presence of _amour propre_ is insufficient to explain the diverse and pervasive forms of social inequality that the Second Discourse is most concerned with. The first reason is that, although always a comparative passion, _amour propre_ need not, under all conditions, manifest itself exclusively or primarily as a desire for superior standing. For, as I suggested above in considering the demand to be treated in accordance with standards of civility, it is also possible for the quest for standing in the eyes of others to take the form of wanting to be respected as an equal — as simply a “person” or “human being,” for example — who has the same rights and dignity as every other individual. This means that in order to account for widespread social inequality, the Second Discourse must also have something to say about why _amour propre_ so frequently takes the form of a desire for superior standing if in principle it can also seek equal standing (in which case it would supply no motive for creating inequalities beyond those established by nature). One of the puzzling features of the Second Discourse is that it seems to give no answer to this crucial question. Instead, as we saw above, already in its first appearance in the Second Discourse, _amour propre_ manifests itself as a desire to be esteemed more highly than others — as “the handsomest, the strongest, the most skillful, or the most eloquent” ( _DI_, 166/OC III, 169) — and this fact, so crucial to the Second Discourse’s explanation of the origin of social inequality, appears to be left unexplained (though, as I argue below, a careful reading of Rousseau’s texts provides the resources needed to dispel this appearance).

The second reason _amour propre_ by itself is insufficient to generate widespread inequality is that, even when it is configured in many individuals primarily as the desire for superior standing, a number of other, non-psychological conditions must obtain before that desire can translate into the enduring systems of advantage that Rousseau is concerned with when inquiring into the origin of social inequality. As long as the quest for superiority is confined to the simple desire of primitive beings to be regarded as the most handsome or the best singer, significant social inequality cannot arise. This can be seen in
the fact that in the Second Discourse's narrative the desire to be esteemed as better than others in certain respects establishes itself well before society achieves its "happiest and most durable epoch" in the so-called Golden Age (Di, 167/OC III, 171). This is one reason the auxiliary conditions mentioned above must enter into the Second Discourse's complete answer to the question concerning inequality's origin, as can be seen, to take just one example, in Rousseau's remarks at the end of the Second Discourse that whereas "inequality... owes its force and growth" to amour propre, "property and laws" are needed to make artificial inequalities "stable and legitimate" (where with the latter term he means only that those inequalities appear to be legitimate to those who are subject to them). In some way, most of the "developments" invoked in Part II of the Second Discourse—technological advancement; the perfection of cognitive faculties; specialization occasioned by the division of labor; the origin of private property, states, and codes of justice—serve to institutionalize and give permanence to the various inequalities that beings with the desire for superior standing are driven to create. Yet here, too, Rousseau appears to have little to say about why these conditions arise or, more important, about the extent to which they represent necessary, or non-accidental, features of human civilization in general. Instead, he tends to emphasize the contingency or even the inexplicability of these crucial conditions, claiming, for example, that inequality's gaining a foothold in human existence "required the fortuitous convergence of several foreign causes that might never have arisen" (Di, 159/OC III, 162), and implying that the development of latent capacities for language, reason, and other basic cognitive functions (including the knowledge required for metallurgy) cannot in the end be explained (Di, 143–9, 168/OC III, 144–51, 172).

Let us begin with the first of these qualifications to Rousseau's core thesis that amour propre is the principal cause of inequality. It is possible, although only with considerable effort, to extract from Rousseau's corpus as a whole—especially with help from Emile—a complex answer to the question of why, when amour propre first appears in the Second Discourse, it takes the form of a desire for superior rather than merely equal standing (or, if we abstract from the apparent historical character of Rousseau's narrative, why amour propre is so likely to appear as a desire for superior standing, independently of the specific social conditions under which it appears). As I have noted, however, the Second Discourse itself provides surprisingly little help in explaining this crucial feature of its account. Yet the question of why amour propre first appears, or is so likely to appear, as a desire for superior standing is of great importance to the Second Discourse's project. For if the desire for superior standing were merely a product of contingent social conditions, or if, independently of social conditions, it were no more likely to be present than the desire for equal standing, Rousseau's account of social inequality would be affected in two significant ways: his thesis that amour propre is the principal cause of inequality would be considerably weakened (since it would be amour propre only as formed by contingent social circumstances that gave rise to the desire that fueled the spread of inequality); and pervasive social inequality would be shown to be a possibility for human societies but hardly a probable or nearly universal phenomenon. Just to be clear on this crucial but very complex point: Rousseau, to his credit, does not make the problems he is addressing easier to solve by believing that desires for superior standing can be completely eliminated from human psychology or that the social inequalities that result from such desires can be completely eliminated from human societies, and this aspect of his view is expressed in the (unexplained) fact that amour propre makes its first appearance in the Second Discourse in the form of a desire to be regarded by others as, in some very specific respect, superior to others.

In other words, the fact that certain forms of the desire to be accorded preference by others are present already in the Golden Age, and therefore predate the perversion of amour propre by social conditions, should be taken to imply that the desire for some kind of superior standing in the eyes of others is a non-accidental manifestation of amour propre and that it would therefore be unrealistic to want to construct a society in which all forms of that desire were lacking or in which no social inequality of any kind existed. Other passages in the Second Discourse support this interpretation, and it is further

32 In fact, Rousseau never uses this term in the Second Discourse, nevertheless it has become customary to refer to the stage of civilization depicted here as the Golden Age.

33 For a detailed explanation of this important feature of amour propre, see my Rousseau's Theory of Self-Love, Chapter 4.
confirmed by Emiè's description of the awakening of amour propre in an adolescent boy: "the first glance he casts on his fellows leads him to compare himself with them. And the first sentiment this comparison arouses in him is the desire to be in the first position" (E, 335/OC IV, 524). The more difficult question is not whether Rousseau believes that amour propre has an inherent tendency in humans, independently of social circumstances, to appear as the desire for superior standing but why he believes this. One passage in the Second Discourse relevant to this question is its description of how at first comparison and then pride accompany the very earliest advances of civilization, still prior to the awakening of amour propre (or, translated into non-historical language: how, independently of particular social arrangements, the basic practice of making comparisons implies, or tends to lead to, a concern for the rank among the items compared). According to this passage, the capacity to compare distinct things—a component of natural perfectibility, is awakened and developed in humans by natural circumstances in which the ability to make certain comparisons—is that beast before me faster or slower, stronger or weaker, than I?—is valuable for survival and therefore crucial to the ends of amour de soi-même. Once the ability to compare is in place, the development of pride is said to follow in its train:

The new enlightenment that resulted from this development increased [man's] superiority over the other animals by acquainting him with it. He practiced setting traps for them, he tricked them in a thousand ways, and in time he became the master of those that could be useful to him and the scourge of those that could be harmful. This is how the first look he directed at himself produced the first movement of pride [orgueil] in him: this is how, while still scarcely able to discriminate ranks, and considering himself in the first rank as a species, he was from afar preparing to claim the first rank as an individual. (DI, 162/OC III, 165–6)

Although there is much of interest in this short passage—the awakening of self-consciousness, the first taste of mastery over other creatures, the move from comparing to ranking—it is the final point that is more important here: how and why these more primitive phenomena lay the groundwork for the disposition, attributed later to amour propre, to claim for oneself "the first rank as an individual." Insofar as Rousseau has an account here of where this disposition comes from, it seems to proceed as follows: the ability of humans to make comparisons, together with their natural interest in certain circumstances in knowing who is faster or stronger, lays the groundwork for them to become aware of their own superiority (as a species) over other animals—a superiority that pre-exists that awareness but grows even larger once humans become aware of it and interact with their environment in ways that increase it. Moreover, these developments presuppose no new source of motivation; because superiority over other species is advantageous for survival, even consciously intended increases in that superiority can be understood as motivated by (non-relative) amour de soi-même.25 Something new enters this story, however, when humans' experience of their superiority—including, interestingly, their experience of mastery over the less advantaged—brings with it a feeling of pleasure in occupying the higher rank,26 a pleasure identified here as "the first movement of pride." The view towards which Rousseau seems to be struggling, then, is that three things—the capacity to make comparisons, a concern for certain forms of superiority relevant to survival, and the experience of their actual superiority—collaborate to introduce humans to the pleasure that can be had from the awareness of oneself as belonging to a higher rank. This new and unanticipated pleasure then awakens in them a taste for superiority, perhaps even whets their appetite for more of the same, but it does not yet (as far as can be told from the text) furnish them with a positive incentive intentionally to produce conditions of superiority for the sake of enjoying even more of that pleasure. Although it is here still only the superiority of the species that humans have learned to delight in, it is not difficult to imagine how this could be

25 Even though such humans aim in the short term at a relative end (increasing their superiority over other species), theirs is still a non-relative form of self-love because the final end of their action is a good—survival—that is neither defined nor valued in relation to other beings' survival. Superiority is sought only because it serves as a means to achieving an absolute end, and how well others do with respect to survival is irrelevant to the end they ultimately value.

26 In order to explain why being first (rather than last) should evoke pleasure it may be necessary to appeal to the very weak form of self-preference (preferring one's own good to others') built into all forms of self-love, including amour de soi-même. Although this aspect of amour de soi-même manifests itself only rarely in purely natural conditions, it surfaces whenever a zero-sum conflict of basic interests arises: when my survival is incompatible with yours, it becomes clear that, independently of amour propre, there is a sense in which I prefer myself to you (DI, 197/OC III, 116). This element of self-preference does not make amour de soi-même a relative sentiment, for the good sought is not defined in relation to how well others fare with respect to the same good.
transformed into a taste for individual superiority in more complex circumstances, once differences among individuals are noticed, multiplied, and then consciously cultivated.

Something like this is indeed what Rousseau goes on to describe in the next phases of human development. It is an intriguing feature of this account, however, that a further important stage intervenes between pride (humans’ pleasure in belonging to a superior species) and the first appearance of amour propre (the desire to be looked at by others and esteemed as the handsomest or strongest). Once differences among individuals have developed and become salient—which itself requires a certain degree of regular intercourse among individuals, as well as a level of productivity that provides them a degree of leisure—a further step seems to be necessary:

they grow accustomed to attending to different objects and to making comparisons; imperceptibly they acquire ideas of merit and beauty that produce sentiments of preference. The more they see one another, the less they can do without seeing one another more. A tender and sweet sentiment steals into the soul and at the least obstacle becomes an impetuous fury, jealousy awakens together with love. (Di, 165/OC III, 169)

It is only after this scene—though immediately thereafter, in the very next paragraph—that we are presented for the first time with creatures that, looking at their companions and wanting to be looked at by others, long to be regarded as better than others. In short, it is only after the capacity for sexual love has awakened that we are presented for the first time with human beings who are moved by amour propre—or, more precisely, moved by the specific but hardly contingent form of amour propre that, because it seeks recognition of one’s superiority as an individual (in some respect), counts as the principal—that is, the psychological—source of artificial inequality.

The intriguing feature of Rousseau’s account, then, is that intervening between pride and the birth of the desire to be esteemed as better than other individuals is a stage in which humans get practice in a form of according first place to others: they attach “sentiments of preference” to specific objects of sexual love. (This is not the only place in which Rousseau suggests, without really articulating, a deep connection between sexuality and amour propre; in Emile, too, the two passions emerge in tandem, and it is clear there as well that this connection is not accidental.) Assuming that we are to regard this passionate love for a specific other as a condition of the amour propre that comes on the scene immediately after it—and assuming that this point is to be brought together with the earlier discussion of pride—Rousseau’s view appears to be the following: already in noticing their superiority to non-human animals, humans gain experience of the pleasure to be had in occupying a position of superiority. This pleasure is what Rousseau calls pride (although it should be noted that, in contrast to the superbia of Eve and Adam, this pride is thoroughly benign, even good). This first lesson in pride, however, falls short of furnishing humans with an incentive to seek out superiority for its own sake, nor does it yet suggest to them that individuals might also stand in relations of superiority or inferiority to other individuals of the same species. The latter idea comes to them, rather, only through their experience in the context of sexual love of the relative merits, including the beauty, of specific individuals. One individual perceives another as the most beautiful, the sweetest, the most tantalizing—in short, as the best—and he (or she) falls passionately in love with him (or her). According to Rousseau’s account, it is in this experience of passionate need for the single individual one values above all others that the desire to be valued oneself as better than others arises, for my own passion will be satisfied only if I succeed in getting my beloved to see me in turn as more desirable than my competitors.27 The claim, then, is that once this concern to count as more desirable than my rivals in the eyes of another subject has gained a foothold in human psychology, some form of it remains a permanent acquisition, manifesting itself often and most likely (but not necessarily, in every situation) as the desire to count, not merely as good, but as better—even best—in the opinions of at least some other human individuals. Once the aspiration to superior standing that is internal to sexual passion has been generalized and dispersed into other domains of human reality, amour propre, in the very form

27 Similar ideas concerning the relation between sexual love and the desire to be recognized as her can be found at E, 214-17/OC IV, 494.
28 Presumably in the case of real as opposed to merely hypothetical human beings, this draws of sexual desire—together with the birth of amour propre—is enacted already in the infant’s longing to be loved by the mother (or parent). Some passages of Emile appear to confirm this suggestion: (E, 65/OC IV, 280).
it takes when beings of leisure assemble before their primitive huts, has entered the world and become a permanent and fundamental motivator of creatures that are no longer merely animal but now genuinely human beings. (At the end of this chapter I will return to these claims in order to ask what remains of Rousseau’s basic thesis that social inequality does not come from nature, once the desire that fuels it — the longing to achieve some kind of superior standing in the eyes of others — is accorded so fundamental a role in human reality.)

AUXILIARY CONDITIONS REQUIRED TO EXPLAIN SOCIAL INEQUALITY

Having explained why, in general, the desire to be regarded as better than others (in some respect) is no merely accidental manifestation of amour propre, I turn now to the second and more complicated qualification of Rousseau’s core thesis that amour propre is the principal cause of inequality, according to which various non-psychological conditions must obtain if that desire is to give rise to enduring and consequential schemes of inequality. It is easy enough to grasp Rousseau’s general point, that as long as the drive for superior standing does not exceed the simple desire of beings in primitive circumstances to count as the handsomest or strongest, significant social inequality cannot arise. It is just as easy to see how each non-psychological condition, taken on its own, serves to promote, shore up, or “legitimize” the inequalities that the impulse to achieve superior standing leads humans to create. It is considerably more difficult, however, to figure out how the various elements of his account fit together and, once this is accomplished, to determine what implications that account has for assessing the extent to which social inequalities, especially those that will be shown to have pernicious consequences, are inclinable features of human society.

That private property is to play a major role in this account is signaled clearly in the famous opening lines of Part II, where Rousseau attributes responsibility for countless “crimes, wars, murders, miseries, and horrors” — as well as the origin of civil (or political) society — to “the first person who enclosed a piece of land and came up with the idea of saying this is mine” (DL, 16f/LOC III, 164). It is easy to understand how rules regulating private property, especially when backed up by the power of a state, contribute to the growth and institutionalization of inequality by opening up a domain of social intercourse in which new types of comparative standing — differences between rich and poor — are made possible and rendered visible to all. But it is equally clear that Rousseau does not mean for private property to be the only (or explanatorily primary) non-psychological condition that his account of the origin of inequality relies on, for in the very passage in which he highlights the pernicious consequences of private property, he also points out that the idea of property in turn “depends on many prior ideas that could only have arisen in succession.” In other words, private property, once established, plays a major role in creating and stabilizing social inequalities, but it is not the explanatorily primary element in his account of which (and how) non-psychological social conditions interact with amour propre — or, more precisely, with the impulse to achieve superior standing — in order to produce widespread and enduring social inequality.

Once this is recognized, it is natural to ask: which non-psychological factor is then explanatorily primary? Much of the Second Discourse’s bewildering complexity is due to the fact that Rousseau refuses to pick out any of these factors as the single, primary, non-psychological cause of social inequality. This makes his account more difficult to reconstruct than it might have been, but also more interesting and plausible (because more adequate to the complexity of the phenomena it aims to understand). In light of this complexity, my reconstruction of this part of Rousseau’s account of the origin of social inequality will have to address several interrelated questions at once: (1) Which are the various non-psychological conditions that play a role in explaining social inequality? (2) How does each of these conditions, taken alone, contribute in its own way to the creation and spread of social inequality (assuming some desire for superior standing is already present)? (3) To what extent are these various conditions causally or existentially interdependent, and what does their interdependence imply about which, if any, has explanatory priority? (As we will see, some of these non-psychological factors also condition and are conditioned by the appearance and development of amour propre, which adds even further to the complexity of Rousseau’s account.) (4) How are we to understand Rousseau’s repeated and perplexing claims regarding the contingent character
of these conditions and, sometimes even, the unlikelihood of impossibility of their ever coming about, and what implications do these claims have for his position on the extent to which artificial inequality is an inclinable feature of human society in general?

The first task is to attempt to distinguish the various conditions that play some independent role (without being completely independent of one another existentially) in explaining the ubiquity and permanence of social inequality. The Second Discourse seems to invoke six such conditions, which appear in its narrative in roughly the following order: (1) leisure, or recurring lengths of time in which humans are not forced by natural need to seek or produce the goods required for physical survival; (2) leisure’s counterpart, luxury, which is best understood as habitation to goods and pleasures that are biological necessities but that quickly come to be perceived as needs; (3) individual differentiation with respect to character, circumstance, and abilities that is far in excess of natural differences among individuals and the result of differences in luck, effort, and natural endowment; (4) a division of labor, manifested most strikingly in the invention of metallurgy and agriculture and their being practiced as separate branches of production, that increases individuals’ dependence on others for the satisfaction of needs; (5) codified rules of private property, especially in the means of production, such as land; and (6) political institutions (the state). Although in the real world once even minimal conditions of civilization are achieved, these six factors cease to be causally independent of one another—perhaps they never are entirely—it still makes sense to rank them with respect to how fundamental they are in explaining social inequality. Not surprisingly, their “chronological” order in the Second Discourse, given above, corresponds exactly to their order when ranked according to explanatory primacy. (This is a good example of how the apparently historical features of the Second Discourse’s narrative can be translated into non-historical, philosophical claims concerning relations of conceptual or existential dependence.) Thus, for example, Rousseau makes it clear that both private property and the state presuppose some level of leisure, individual differentiation, and the division of labor, and that leisure, as defined above (and in small amounts), presupposes none of the others.

That leisure is among the most fundamental of these conditions can be seen in the fact, already noted above, that it precedes even the birth of amour propre in the Second Discourse’s narrative. We are now in a position to see that this chronological feature of Rousseau’s story reflects his belief that a concern for how one appears to others can be a significant source of motivation for humans only if they have achieved a level of material productivity that not merely allows them to think about something other than how to satisfy their hunger and thirst—a condition they had already enjoyed in their most primitive state—but also, and more important, has awakened some of their latent natural capacities for “enlightenment” (DI, 164/OC III, 167), including no doubt a curiosity for things beyond the merely necessary or useful. (A small degree of individual differentiation seems to be a condition of amour propre as well, but without it there would be no distinguishing features among individuals for the passion to be admired or esteemed to latch on to, but perhaps purely natural differences suffice for this.) That leisure precedes amour propre in the Second Discourse’s narrative is also an expression of the view that it can be explained independently of the desire to achieve standing in the eyes of others, as a direct consequence of amour de soi-même, together with minimal technological advances that enable humans to produce more than mere subsistence requires. (And as this point suggests, the Second Discourse’s mode of explanation has much in common with forms of materialism, like Marx’s, that attribute great

Although Rousseau emphasizes the material division of labor in his claim that metallurgy and agriculture, “civilized men and ruined the human species” (DI, 168–9/OC III, 171–2), he also alludes to the pernicious effects of the social division of labor: “as soon as ... [men] learned that it was useful for a single person to have provisions for two, equality disappeared, property was introduced, labor became necessary, and the vast forests changed into laughing fields that had to be watered with the sweat of men, and in which slavery and misery were soon rears to sprout and grow with the crops” (DI, 167/OC III, 171). As I discuss in more detail below, the existence of distinct economic classes depends on private property—more precisely, on the unequal private ownership of the means of production.

Though, strictly speaking, this holds only for codified forms of private property since “a sort of property”—each family’s informal claim to the bit it has constructed for itself—is said to precede the division of labor occasioned by metallurgy and agriculture (though it does not precede the division of labor that comes with gender differentiation and that Rousseau terms a “quasi-natural feature of human social life.”) These qualifications point out the neatly interwoven complexity of Rousseau’s account and the necessity of simplifying his claims in reconstructing it.
explanatory weight to social changes brought about by technological advancements, which themselves are responses to challenges human face in reproducing themselves materially.¹⁹ For Rousseau, growth productive forces also plays a role in explaining individual differentiation and the further development of the division of labor, and ultimately therefore private property and the state as well.

Leisure is important to Rousseau's account of social inequality, then, because it is a precondition of the very psychological force that gives rise to the impulsion of humans to create inequalities. This not, however, the only role it plays in that account. Leisure is also what makes luxury (or "conveniences") possible, which, by increasing humans' perceived needs beyond those that nature imposes on them, gives them incentives to produce and to possess (though not yet to own) more than purely natural beings could ever imagine desiring.²⁰ Although luxury itself does not necessarily imply inequality, the further humans move away from a condition in which their desires are limited to a circumscribed set of relatively easily satisfied needs, the more room there is for differences in luck, circumstances, and natural characteristics to enter the picture and increase the distance between individuals with respect to skills, possessions, and (artificial) needs. Once these differences are in place, the way is open for forms of amour propre that seek superior standing, eventually abetted by codified rules of private property, to join up with the taste for luxury so as to insure that a mania for amassing goods, and the inequality that inevitably results from it, are unavoidable consequences. (It should be noted that these considerations do not exhaust the significance Rousseau attaches to luxury, as suggested by the ominous statement accompanying the first appearance of luxury in the Second Discourse: "This was the first yoke that, without being aware of it, they imposed on themselves and the first source of evils they prepared for their descendants" (DI, 164–5/OC III, 168)). Luxury plays this central role in the

¹⁹ This is best seen in the fact that what starts the whole train of developments in Part II's difficulties humans face - the height of trees, competition with animals - in satisfying their biological needs (DI, 165/OC III, 165).

²⁰ In unpublished lectures Invain Houre has fruitfully examined the importance of luxury in Rousseau. For related themes in other Enlightenment thinkers, see his "The Luxury Drive in the Early Enlightenment," in Mark Goldie and Robert Wolder, eds., The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 177–42.
tasks are consistent with a "sedentary" way of life (that contrasts with men's more vigorous hunting and gathering), and the fact that he seems not to regard women's tasks as work probably explains why he fails to see this aspect of gender differentiation as another fundamental form of the division of labor.

Like the phenomenon of luxury discussed above, the division of labor is important to Rousseau because of the role it plays in making humans dependent on one another for the satisfaction of their needs. (And, as in the case of luxury, I will return to the pernicious consequences of this aspect of the division of labor in the following chapter.) Yet the division of labor, especially that involved in the development of metallurgy and agriculture, clearly plays a part in explaining social inequality as well.

Things in this state could have remained equal if...the use of iron and the consumption of foods had always been exactly balanced; but this proportion, which nothing maintained,33 was soon upset;...the worker of fields had greater need of iron, or the smith greater need of wheat, and in working equally, the one earned much while the other was barely able to stay alive. (DI, 169–70/OC III, 174)

Rousseau's general point is that the more individuals become differentiated from one another and occupy specialized and mutually dependent positions within society, the greater the possibility that through entirely random, unintended occurrences what was once merely qualitative difference will eventually turn into difference coupled with inequality.

In Rousseau's explanation of this point, the phrase "which nothing maintained" is significant. It expresses a philosophical outlook that deeply informs the Second Discourse's approach not only to artificial inequality but to social phenomena in general. Rousseau tends to think of nature, unadulterated by human intervention, as an ordered and harmonious realm governed by the eternal, beneficent laws its Creator imposed on it. Human action - the intervention of the artificial - invariably disrupts this order, however, and unintentionally introduces into nature (which from this point on is never again merely nature) contingency, discord, and evil. In the present example, the

33 This qualification is one of many examples in the Second Discourse where the absence of conscious control or organization plays an important role in explaining social ill.

more extensive division of labor occasioned by the development of metallurgy and agriculture results ultimately in social inequality because, once humans have interfered with the natural order, there is no natural law or power to guarantee that the initial equilibrium that might have existed between metalworkers and farmers remain in place. In the absence of such a guarantee, the maintenance of equilibrium depends entirely on good fortune, and as time progresses, the disruption of that equilibrium is virtually assured. Left to run its own course, the balance between the two separate but interdependent branches of production is bound to become skewed: too many ironworkers and too few farmers, for example, means that the former are barely able to live from what they produce, whereas the latter profit nicely from their highly demanded products.34 Although the Second Discourse itself does not tell this part of the story, the only hope Rousseau sees for restoring a benign order to a world that has been modified by human freedom is for humans themselves to impose (artificial) laws on the social world - laws that order the very disorder they have unintentionally produced - which leads to the reproduction of some version of the same goods that characterized the natural world (freedom, survival, and the unproblematic satisfaction of needs and desires) before their own deeds ruined nature's design. Articulating what such laws must look like is the task of The Social Contract, not of the Second Discourse, but as we will see in the following chapter, the Second Discourse's account of how (and why) the original state of nature is good helps to lay the normative foundations (fondements) on top of which The Social Contract will construct its vision of a legitimate state and a healthy society.

Once leisure, luxury, differentiation, and the division of labor have been introduced into the Second Discourse's narrative - alongside, of course, amour propre - private property and the first rules of justice are said, somewhat abruptly, to follow necessarily (DI, 169/OC III, 173-4). Presumably this is the point at which Rousseau takes himself to have run through the various conditions - the "many prior ideas" - without which the land-grabbing described in the first paragraph of

34 In fact, as Note IX makes clear (and as Lewis H. Ham has emphasized), Rousseau thought the more likely scenario to be one in which farmers, not metalworkers, were disadvantaged (DI, 203/OC III, 206).
Part II would not have been possible. It is not difficult either to see why those prior phenomena might be necessary conditions of private property, or to understand how the introduction of private property advances the Second Discourse’s account of the sources of social inequality, since it opens up a major new domain in which economic inequality can grow. Beyond this, however, the establishment of private property and the state enables other forms of social inequality to flourish as well. For example, once the state is in place, a new possibility for inequality arises between the governed and those who govern: in other words, political domination (as I call it in Chapter 4), backed up by the coercive power of the state, becomes a possible way of satisfying the desires of some to achieve publicly recognized positions of superiority. Along with this, new possibilities for non-political forms of domination emerge from inequalities in wealth when they are buttressed by the state, ultimately through the threat of violence, and conjoined with increasing economic dependence. These conditions make it possible for amour propre to seek new kinds of satisfaction and to establish more enduring inequalities than were possible when individuals were self-sufficient and roughly equal in terms of the resources available to them (Di, 167/OC III, 171). For alongside the old strategies of striving to be the best singer or dancer, new opportunities for achieving superiority arise, including the possibility of exploiting others’ dependence and economic disadvantage for the purpose of subjugating them. Those who own land, for example, can easily impose unreasonable demands on those who, because they own no land themselves, must labor for them. Although exploitation of this sort—the exploitation of one class by another—clearly brings economic benefits to the exploiters, it also yields repressive advantages: establishing oneself as the exploiter of others, especially when the roles of exploiter and exploited are sanctioned and enforced by social institutions, can be seen as just one more way of finding public confirmation of one’s high standing in the eyes of others.

What is less clear in Rousseau’s account, however, is why the private ownership of things should be a necessary or even likely consequence of leisure, luxury, individual differentiation, and the sort of division of labor necessitated by metallurgy and agriculture. Serious difficulties arise already in the paragraph’s first claim: “From the cultivation of land, its division necessarily followed; and from property, once recognized, the first rules of justice necessarily followed.” It is immediately striking that, just as in the first sentence of Part II, it is the private ownership of land, not of just any commodity, that Rousseau seems most interested in. This is surely because land itself, in distinction to the consumption goods produced by working the land, belongs to what Marx would later call the means of production (those basic goods, such as land, raw materials, machinery, and workplaces, that are materially necessary for production of any kind to take place). This concept is of fundamental importance to Marx because it lies at the center of his definition of economic classes: the principal distinction between the two main classes in capitalism is that the capitalist class owns, and therefore controls, the means of production, whereas workers own no productive forces other than their own labor power, which, because they must eat, they are obliged to sell to the capitalist in exchange for wages. Although Rousseau lacks these precise concepts—the capitalism of his time was a much less developed and less visible phenomenon than that of Marx’s, almost a century later—he is more interested in land than in its products for very similar reasons: owning land, a basic prerequisite of production, is potentially a source of great social power, especially when there are other members of society who own no productive forces other than their own labor power. The situation in which some individuals own land (or factories or stocks of raw materials) and others do not is of great interest to Rousseau because it is a situation in which dependence (requiring the cooperation of others to satisfy one’s needs) is joined with inequality, and this combination, as we will see in the next chapter, produces a noxious brew out of which the various evils of society described in Part II inevitably arise.

As I suggested above, however, it is far from clear why the cultivation of land should necessarily lead to its being divided up and privately owned. One unanswered question is why land, once partitioned, should be owned by individuals. For if cultivation is carried out collectively—as was far the most likely scenario—why would land, if owned at all, not belong instead to the groups that work it? A second problem is that the principle Rousseau appeals to in explaining (and apparently justifying) ownership of the land’s products—that the person who labors to produce the good is its “natural” owner—is, as he himself sometimes seems to be on the verge of admitting, hardly
applicable to land, which of course no human being has produced, is little help to claim, as Rousseau seems to do, that the right to own property is not illusory. To extend the natural law to cover land is, as Rousseau attempts to show, not without a certain logic: if I use this land, I am entitled to use it again in the next, and when this has gone on year after year, do I not own the land itself? Yet, as I argued above, this logic is sufficiently strained to leave one wondering what justifies his remark that the mere fact of "continuous possession" (of land) is easily transformed into property. Whatever accounts for the alleged

"...of this transformation, it is neither, I would argue, conceptual nor causal necessity. Instead, to say that continuous possession easily becomes recognized property is to say that it is not difficult to understand how, without thinking much about it, humans at this level of development could slip from one practice into the other. This means that the later practice is not a rationally necessary implication of the earlier practice (or of the natural law of property itself), nor is it a causally necessary effect of it. In other words, we should understand Rousseau to be saying that private ownership of the means of production is an understandable development but that it is not legitimized or mandated by natural law, nor is it a necessary accomplishment of any real system of property whatsoever in which laborers tend to cultivate the same piece of land season after season. When Rousseau says, then, that "from the cultivation of land, its division necessarily followed," he should be taken to mean: given the specific, primitive conditions hypothesized here — including humans' sometime unsatisfied desire for superior standing (see below), as well as their inability to foresee the consequences of their innovation — the private ownership of land is a more or less unavoidable consequence of its cultivation but not for that reason a rationally justified consequence, nor is it a causally necessary consequence of the cultivation of land under all conditions whatever.

In my view, Rousseau's claim that the continuous possession of land "is easily transformed" into property in land — understood as a claim about what is likely to happen, not about what is right — becomes genuinely compelling only on the further assumption that some motivation is at work in this transformation beyond amour de soi-même's concerns for survival, comfort, and efficiency. Such a motivation could indeed be found in the passion inspired by amour propre, already in play at this stage of the narrative, to distinguish
oneself in a publicly visible manner as a being of value. It is difficult to imagine that the significance of the etymological and conceptual connection between *amour propre* and *propriété*—that which is proper to, or belongs to, oneself—would have eluded Rousseau’s attention and thinking of the two phenomena as mutually reinforcing is consistent with the general contours of the story the Second Discourse tells as well as with the fundamental role it ascribes to both in explaining social inequality and the other ills of developed society. (Indeed, Rousseau explicitly acknowledges this connection when, surveying the results of all these developments just prior to the state of war, he says: “each man’s rank and lot [were] established . . . by the quantity of his goods” (DI, 170/OC III, 174).) In other words, the first man who encloses a piece of land and exclaims “this is mine!” (c’est à moi!) is to be understood as also, and most fundamentally, pointing to this piece of land before others and proclaiming to them “this is mine!” That private property of every conceivable type can serve as an external marker of one’s standing for, and in relation to, others surely accounts for a large part of the mania with which individuals, both in Rousseau’s narrative and in our own society, scramble to acquire ever more, ever better, and ever more conspicuous piles of what their neighbors and associates are constrained to recognize as “their own,” which is to say, as material extensions of themselves and reflections of their standing in relation to others.

It is already possible to anticipate the significance of the distinction on which my reading is based—between property that is sanctioned by natural law and property that is based on artificial conventions (or on interpretive extensions of that law)—for Rousseau’s ultimate position regarding the legitimacy of the private ownership of land, because this species of property belongs to the domain of the artificial, its legitimacy cannot be settled by natural law alone. Instead, as with all artificial institutions, its legitimacy will have to be judged by those principles—formulated first in *The Social Contract* but implicitly at work already in the Second Discourse—that define justice, or right, within human society, principles whose justification derives ultimately from the being the answer to the question: which principles could all members of society rationally consent to be ruled by, if each were concerned only with satisfying his or her fundamental interests as human beings? (I return to Rousseau’s principles of right within society and point out their presence already in the Second Discourse in Chapter 4.)

It is tempting to conclude from the opening scene of Part II that Rousseau will categorically deny legitimacy to the private ownership of land— as the source of so many human ills, how could it be consistent with the fundamental interests of all?—but in fact, as the paragraph immediately following the discussion of the natural law of property reveals, this conclusion would be overly hasty. For Rousseau asserts in the later paragraph that under the right conditions the private ownership of land need not have negative consequences for society (DI, 169–70/OC III, 174). The key point here is expressed in the phrase “things in this state could have remained equal.” In other words, the exploitation and loss of freedom that Rousseau goes on to describe in the Second Discourse could have been avoided, even assuming the private ownership of land, if this ownership had been conjoined with a condition of basic material equality among social members. In such a condition—where dependence existed without significant inequality—the private ownership of land would exist without prejudicing the fundamental interests of any individual, and in that case (and only then) it might well form part of a legitimate system of property relations. Thus, rather than taking an a priori position on the justice or injustice of any species of artificial social arrangement, including private ownership of the means of production, Rousseau is committed to postponing judgment as to the legitimacy of any specific set of institutions until an assessment of its consequences for the fundamental interests of all has been made. If a given system of property relations, when realized under certain specific social conditions, can be shown not to prejudice the fundamental interests of any of its members, then under those conditions it counts for Rousseau as a legitimate and therefore permissible social arrangement, regardless of its relation to whatever natural laws originally govern the legitimate acquisition of property. (This methodological procedure marks the most fundamental difference between the views of Locke and Rousseau [and those of their respective followers] on property. It is no accident that John Rawls, an extraordinarily perceptive reader of *The Social Contract* and the Second Discourse, pursues a strategy very similar to Rousseau’s in determining the legitimacy of social inequalities and in addressing the question as to
whether capitalist or socialist property relations are sanctioned by the principles of justice. I return to this issue in Chapter 5.

What, then, does this complicated account of the origin of property imply for Rousseau’s position concerning how fundamental private property is to human society in general and whether it represents a permanent or instead an in principle eliminable feature of the social landscape? Given his thesis that there exists a natural law governing the acquisition of property, it seems likely that Rousseau takes private property in some form to be fundamental to human society in general and therefore a more or less necessary feature of any real society. This fundamental status of property is bound up with the Second Discourse’s claim that in its most primitive form property depends only on, and is the virtually necessary consequence of, a very limited number of conditions that are themselves very basic conditions of civilization. Rousseau’s implicit claim is that private property, at least in the limited form sanctioned by the natural law of property, follows more or less necessarily once minimal levels of leisure, luxury, and individual differentiation have been attained and (if my argument above is correct) once amour propre is sufficiently active to recommend the acquisition of property to individuals as a partial means to achieving a recognized standing for others. More specific systems of private ownership, in contrast - including property in the means of production - presuppose more complex and increasingly contingent social circumstances (including a more specialized division of labor than the simplest forms of property presuppose), and for this reason it seems unlikely that Rousseau would regard them as necessary features of any human society whatsoever. Evidence for this claim can be found in the great importance Rousseau attaches to the invention of metallurgy and agriculture for the division of labor and the development of economic inequality, conjoined with the difficulty he has, and admits to having, in explaining the necessity, even the likelihood of the discovery of these two arts “that civilized men and ruined the human species” (DI, 168/OC III, 171–2).

Still, even if private property in general is a less contingent feature of human society than private ownership of the means of production, Rousseau is far from regarding the latter as an anomalous or merely accidental phenomenon. For, as I noted above, when he says in the paragraph on property and its relation to natural law that “from the cultivation of land, its division necessarily followed” (DI, 169/OC III, 164) he is clearly claiming that, given the conditions in place, the artificial and not logically necessary extension of the natural law of property to the ownership of land is more than a mere possibility. Recall that I interpreted this statement as claiming that, assuming the basic conditions of leisure, luxury, individual differentiation, and a sufficiently specialized division of labor, together with both the inability of primitive humans to foresee the undesirable consequences of what they are about to do and their awakened but not always satisfied desire to be esteemed in some way as better than others, it is hard to see how the private ownership of land, offering vast new possibilities to an aroused amour propre, would not follow more or less directly once the cultivation of land had become an established practice. The important point here is the following: from the circumstance that under primitive conditions the private ownership of the means of production may be a practically unavoidable development, it does not follow that this type of property is unavoidable for us as well, not that it is (in either case) permissible from the standpoint of justice. This much, I believe, is implicit already in the Second Discourse. It is only in The Social Contract that it becomes clear, in Rousseau’s rejection of nature as the basis of right within human society (SC, I.i.ii), that these two questions cannot be decided a priori but only through further reflection – undertaken by us, as historically situated beings – aimed at figuring out what is (now, for us) practically achievable and which specific possible schemes of property are compatible with the basic requirement of justice, namely, that the fundamental human interests of all participants in such schemes are given their due.

In drawing a very close connection between the private ownership of land and political society (the state) – “the first person who . . . enclosed a piece of land . . . was the true founder of civil society” (DI, 168/OC III, 164) – Rousseau is in one respect merely following Locke, who famously located the purpose of political society in the protection of individual property and explicitly included the private ownership of land, even when distributed unequally, among the kinds of property the state is designed to protect. But while Rousseau agrees that the

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primary purpose of most existing states is the protection of private property, including in the means of production, he regards this (the differences in the ownership of such property are substantial) not as hallmark of those states' legitimacy, as did Locke, but as an indication of the major role they play in institutionalizing and perpetuating social inequalities, and not merely differences in wealth but a host of further inequalities as well — in prestige and social power, for example — that follow more or less directly from economic inequality.

Here, too, it is easy to see why the state of the sort recommended by Locke57 — in “fixing forever the law of property and of inequalities” (DI, 173/OC III, 178) — plays a prominent role in Rousseau’s account of the sources of social inequality. It is equally clear in what ways of explanatory primacy the (Lockean) state stands to the other non-psychological elements of that account: it presupposes all of the latter five conditions, and as soon as private property, especially in land, assumes the role of representing individuals and their standing to others, this condition is sufficient to explain the need for political society. (Political association is said also to presuppose enduring and pervasive conflict among social members — a state of war — but the state of war is itself merely a consequence of the same five conditions that make political society necessary. The intervention of the state of war in Rousseau’s narrative has the interesting consequence that the purpose of the political association he considers here is not only to maintain existing property relations but also to protect the

57 The agreement to found political society depicted in Part II of the Second Discourse (DI, 173/OC III, 176-8) — which “gives new luster to the weak and new power to the rich” — can be understood as a critique of Locke’s version of the social contract. Even though the contract Rousseau describes here is a response to a state of war — and hence not the same as nature in the sense that Locke understands it — the agreement itself is Lockean in the sense that its purpose is the protection of private property, where the latter is taken to include high unequal amounts of property, even in kind, that have been amassed in a pre-political state of nature. Rousseau’s aim here is to argue that a Lockean contract is illegitimate because merely sets in stone the inequalities (and most of the other ill) that precede it and would be necessary. More precisely, Rousseau’s claim is that a Lockean contract is an illegitimate response to a Hobbesian state of war. For the Second Discourse can be read as a defense of Hobbes’s account of the state of war as the pre-political condition that defines the politeness the legitimate state must resolve (and at the same time, of course, as a critique of Hobbes’s claim that the state of war follows from conditions imposed on human beings by nature). To the demand of The Social Contract, then, is set out the principles of political association that eliminate the state of war by imposing an order within which the fundamental interests of individuals can be satisfied.

Amour propre is the source of social inequality

...Because of this the Lockean state can be said to serve legitimate human interests at the same time as it perpetuates the very social conditions that make its imposition of law and order necessary in the first place. This implies in turn that it is not merely false consciousness that drives those who consent to the Lockean state depicted in Part II to embrace their own chains (DI, 173/OC III, 177).

Let us now attempt to summarize the account given in this chapter by citing and then supplementing Rousseau’s own summary on the last page of the Second Discourse of his answer to the question of where inequality comes from: “It follows from this account that inequality, being almost nonexistent in the state of nature, owes its force and growth to the development of our faculties and the progress of the human mind, and finally becomes stable and legitimate through the establishment of property and laws” (DI, 188/OC III, 99). This brief recap of the Second Discourse’s genealogy of inequality touches on three of the four main points elaborated in this chapter: first, although some aspects of existing social inequalities can be traced back to purely natural differences among humans, these natural inequalities account for only a negligible part of the inequality found in actual societies; thus, the overwhelmingly major part of the latter is artificial, coming from us rather than from nature. Second, the principal force that drives humans to invent artificial systems of inequality is psychological. Its sources is amour propre, the passion to achieve comparative standing in the eyes of others, which, when configured — as it very often but not always is— as a desire for superiority, motivates humans to create new forms of inequality for the sole purpose of finding public recognition of the superior standing they desire. (Moreover, this passion itself depends on the development of certain basic cognitive capacities — for comparison and self-consciousness, for example — that humans possess by virtue of their nature.) Third (and omitted in Rousseau’s summary), amour propre’s capacity to produce significant inequalities depends on a number of non-psychological enabling conditions, which include leisure, luxury, artificial individual differentiation, and some degree of the division of...
labor. Finally, social inequalities become truly entrenched, pervasive, and dangerous only with the development of explicitly contested practices of private ownership, which make it possible for things to serve as public representations of persons and their status, thereby opening up an entirely new, nearly infinite domain within which inequalities motivated by *amour propre* can be striven for and established. When this new domain of inequality expands, especially when it comes to include private, unequal ownership of the means of production, states are created, which not only enforce these inequalities by the threat of force but, even more important, give them the false appearance of legitimacy via political philosophy that present the state and its laws as institutions that promote the interests of all social members and to which, for that reason, each could consent (or has actually consented).

All of the non-psychological conditions mentioned in Rousseau's genealogy of inequality play a role in generating new possibilities for inequalities of various kinds to arise and take root in society. In the absence of *amour propre*, however, those possibilities would remain largely unrealized. When they do result in new forms of inequality, it is because an awakened *amour propre*, with an indeterminate longing to do better than others, is able to latch on to them and use them to further its aim of achieving standing in the eyes of others. *Amour propre* does not by itself generate the practices and institutions that allow for all sorts of artificial inequalities to enter the world, but once those possibilities are there, it takes full advantage of them, furnishing the fuel for the inexorable growth of inequality that results finally in the various evils—enslavement, conflict, vice, misery, alienation—whose existence the Second Discourse aims to explain. It is for this reason that Rousseau singles out *amour propre* as the "origin" of social inequality, even if its capacity to originate inequality also depends on other, non-psychological conditions.

Finally, we should ask whether this account succeeds in showing that social inequality does not have its source in nature. Of course, the answer depends, as always, on how nature is defined. When construed in the special sense that Rousseau often gives to the term, his account does indeed avoid locating the source of social inequality in nature, because *amour propre* cannot operate independently of human consciousness and will, it and its products are never, strictly speaking, effects of nature. If this were all there were to Rousseau's position, however, his victory over philosophies that see familiar forms of inequality as necessary consequences of human nature would remain quite hollow. To the extent that he is committed to the view that *amour propre* is a fundamental component of human psychology—an element of human nature in the expanded sense—and that even desires for superior standing of some sort belong permanently to our motivational makeup, it looks like social inequality, too, must be an inextricable feature of human existence. (And Rousseau would agree with this conclusion when formulated this simply.) The key to seeing how Rousseau's position differs from those he means to reject lies in recalling the connection he draws between human freedom and the "could have been different" nature of its products or, in what amounts to the same thing, his emphasis on the nearly infinite malleability of *amour propre* and its products. This thesis applies both to the specific forms that *amour propre* assumes at any particular time and place and to the non-psychological social conditions that play a role in his genealogy. To paraphrase a claim made above: even if desires for superior standing and the inequalities they inevitably produce are, very generally, necessary consequences of human nature in the expanded sense, there is a huge range of possible forms they can take on, and precisely how they manifest themselves is to some significant extent up to us. The important question, then, is not whether social inequalities in general should or must exist but whether those that do produce the pernicious consequences that make artificial inequality detrimental to human flourishing and therefore morally objectionable.

In Rousseau's view, his account of the source of social inequality exonerates human nature by showing that the circumstances that generate the pernicious consequences of social inequalities are not necessary consequences of human nature (not even of human nature in the expanded sense) but, at least in part, the effects of free human action that might have had, and could in the future have, different results. (Strictly speaking, Rousseau's exoneration of human nature is not complete until he writes *Emile* and *The Social Contract*, which together are meant to demonstrate the real possibility—that is, subject to the constraints of nature, both human and otherwise—of a human existence without enslavement, misery, and alienation and in which
The normative resources of nature

The first two chapters of this book attempted to reconstruct Rousseau's answer to the first of the two main questions addressed by the Second Discourse: where does human inequality come from? Chapters 3 and 4 address the Second Discourse's normative question: is human inequality authorized by natural law? To use the terms that Rousseau himself employs in the Second Discourse's title, the first question concerns the origin of inequality, the second its foundations (fondements). The present chapter first briefly examines Rousseau's answer to the question of the extent to which natural law authorizes social inequalities. After doing so, it turns to the more important part of Rousseau's view concerning the extent to which nature understood more generally supplies us with the normative resources we need to give a more complete answer to the question concerning the legitimacy or permissibility of social inequalities than natural law itself is able to provide. As we shall see, the part of Rousseau's account of nature that provides these more extensive resources for judging the legitimacy of inequality is his normative conception of human nature. Here, too, we will need to distinguish original human nature, and the normative picture associated with it, from normative human nature in the expanded sense. Both normative visions of human nature provide accounts of the goods essential to human flourishing, with the only difference being that the weaker of the two (the one associated with original human nature) abstracts from the social character of humans, whereas the more robust (normative human nature in the expanded sense) includes one inherently social good – esteem, or the good opinion of others – among its list of essential human goods. It will help to recall from the previous chapter that the explanatory conception of human nature in the expanded sense merely adds amour propre to the elements of original human nature; in