
Neuhouser’s book is a careful reconstruction of the notion of *amour-propre* which is central to Rousseau’s work. Far from being a single issue monograph, this book is a contribution to central aspects of Rousseau studies, ranging over wide swaths of the *Discourse on Inequality, On the Social Contract* and *Emile*. In presenting his argument, Neuhouser enters into the relation of Rousseau to Kant and Hegel as well as topics in contemporary moral psychology.

Neuhouser’s stated aim in this book is to demonstrate the centrality of *amour-propre* not only in Rousseau’s diagnosis of modern (im)moral life, but also to argue that *amour-propre* is in fact necessary for a just conception of society. In an extended and careful reconstruction of the inflamed or harmful version of *amour-propre*, Neuhouser argues that *amour-propre* is an essentially relational human capacity. This means that, in its inflamed form, it leads to destructive competition between individuals for the esteem of others. Through the right education and the right social structure, however, the inflammation of *amour-propre* can be limited.

In order to maintain the centrality of the relational character of *amour-propre* Neuhouser must argue against the Kantian interpretation according to which the destructive tendencies of *amour-propre* can be overcome by rational reflection and according dignity or respect to all. In other words, the Kantian interpretation does away with the relational character of social experience, replacing it with the abstract notion of the noumenal self. Rousseau, on the other hand, wants to hold on to the essentially situated (and therefore impure) experience of individual human subjects. Against the obvious negative consequences of inflamed *amour-propre* Neuhouser argues both that *amour-propre* is not necessarily the desire to be superior to all others (thus creating a shortage of possible recognition) and that given our drive for esteem, it is psychologically implausible to believe that we can just abstract from the esteem of others by substituting the idea of dignity or respect for persons for it. The idea behind this move, to be made clearer later, is that for Rousseau humans are more tightly interconnected than they are for Kant.

Thus, the claim that the quest for esteem does not necessarily have to lead to inflamed *amour-propre* is central to Neuhouser’s general theory. The argument for the possibility of what one might call productive esteem here turns on the difference between seeking esteem according to some arbitrary standard society happens to hold (fashion or opinion), and seeking esteem for something which is genuinely well done, i.e. something which is actually intrinsically rational. In Rawlsian language, this is the distinction between seeking esteem from others for the right reasons and seeking it for the wrong reasons.

This distinction brings us to the pedagogical part of Rousseau’s project, the part discussed in both the *On the Social Contract* and *Emile*. Though these two texts deal with two quite different topics, the nature of the just polis and the education of a young man, far away from the polis, Neuhouser sees them as working in tandem. Interpreting Rousseau’s dictum that “Forced to combat nature or the social institutions, one must choose between making a man or a citizen […]” (quoted on p. 39) developmentally, Neuhouser argues that one must educate the human before the citizen.
In a very interesting discussion of the origins of amour-propre, Neuhouser shows how the infant’s desire to stay alive, his amour-de-soi, turns into a desire to be loved and hence for the esteem of others. The key point here is that through the interaction with his parents, the child begins to see that its own survival is intimately connected with not only the availability of certain physical objects, but also with its relation to other people. The basic needs of amour-de-soi are thus extended into the intersubjective realm where it splits off into amour-propre. Understanding this means that amour-propre is the basic intersubjective orientation in the world, an orientation which only becomes harmful under certain circumstances. This interpretation of amour-propre is clearly more Freud than Hegel and reveals the non-cognitivist interpretation of intersubjectivity that Neuhouser is interested in. However, it is also more Hegel than Kant, giving rise to a conception of the subject more thoroughly entwined with others than Kantian moral reflection would have it.

Neuhouser’s central claim is that “indirectly amour-propre furnishes humans with a substantial part of the subjective resources they require if they are to become rational beings, attain moral excellences, and realize themselves as free” (189). Neuhouser considers it inadequate to understand amour-propre as merely rational competition between self-interested parties in the economic sphere and such competition alone would also not suffice to produce moral excellence. Rather, Neuhouser argues, amour-propre is itself the path through which we come to understand ourselves as rational. For Rousseau, then, the standpoint of rationality requires both that we can distance ourselves from our appetites and that we can accord a higher value to the fundamental interests of all. This approach must overcome the same problem that Kant faces, namely, to put it in Kantian language, that of moving from the weak autonomy thesis (being able to abstract from one’s desires) to the strong one (that my ideals are in fact valid for all). Egoism, in other words, looms just as large for Kant as it does for Rousseau.

Neuhouser offers an interesting resolution of this dilemma, and one which is of great relevance for German idealism in general. After arguing that Rousseau’s conception of reason is in many ways quite similar to Kant’s (both see the standpoint of reason as universalizing and essentially available to the individual), Neuhouser sets to resolve the paradox of Rousseau’s claim that one can ‘be forced to be free’. The point here is that interpreting Rousseau’s paradoxical formulation of ‘being forced to be free’, Neuhouser argues that the power to generate obligation for both oneself and others depends on something more than the individual’s will. (Hence denying egoism.) This is because there is a skeptical element built into our conception of our own reason. Neuhouser writes: “Part of what it is to be a rational agent— to regard oneself as bound by what reason demands— is to adopt an attitude of suspicion toward one’s own judgments of right”. (207) This skepticism is a decisive move away from the Kantian position of individual reconstruction of social norms toward a more Hegelian conception of the intersubjectivity of reason as requiring other people’s opinion in order to determine one’s own.

Though Neuhouser does not discuss the origins of this skepticism, I think it is fair to say that it must have something to do with the origin of amour-propre in early childhood where the desire for esteem and control over others which constitutes its beginnings receives a dialectical inflection in earlier adulthood to the effect that the subject becomes suspicious of her own motives for reflecting as she does. Our rationality is always situated with regard to concrete other people. This is to put it negatively— put positively, the idea of skepticism is simply the acknowledgement of the finitude of our reasoning capacities, something