



PROJECT MUSE®

---

*Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Smith: A Philosophical  
Encounter* by Charles L. Griswold (review)

Lauren Kopajtic

Journal of the History of Philosophy, Volume 58, Number 4, October 2020,  
pp. 819-820 (Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.2020.0093>



➔ *For additional information about this article*  
<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/770448>

that it exhibits the causal order it does, part of which results in the nominal essences (ideas) of matter and thinking, we should realize that mind-body interaction as problematic is due simply to the way we think about the mind and the body. A superior understanding of the natural world would reveal some property, in terms of its functional role, that would “enable us to see a priori how the phenomena we call ‘mental’ and ‘physical’ are related to each other” (112).

In crafting his functionalist and “substance nominalist” interpretation of Locke, Kim has provided interesting links to various historical (William Carroll, Richard Burthogge) and contemporary (Colin McGinn) “Spinozist” readings of Locke as well as a historical naturalist reading (Joseph Priestley) that have not been in the foreground for some time. He also appeals to twentieth- and twenty-first-century metaphysics of the mind (Frank Ramsey, Jaegwon Kim, Donald Davidson, Colin McGinn) to shed more light on various arguments. Some may object to doing the history of philosophy by appeal to contemporary thinking. I think Kim has done a good job of allowing Locke to be Locke and also providing interesting historical contextual and contemporary filters for gaining a better understanding of what Locke might have been up to.

Although I would prefer to see more references to, and explanation of, current competing and sympathetic scholarship on Locke to see in a more nuanced way how Kim sees himself in relation to others, he does bring in some older scholarship and contextual arguments that we do not hear much about anymore. All told, Kim provides thought-provoking arguments in a clear writing style that Locke can be seen as a functionalist, as having a kinship to Spinozism, as a naturalist about the mind, and as having a workable solution to the mind-body problem without really taking a stand on the intrinsic nature of substance.

SHELLEY WEINBERG

*University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*

Charles L. Griswold. *Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Smith: A Philosophical Encounter*. New York: Routledge, 2018. Pp. xxi + 275. Cloth, \$78.36.

In this intricate, careful, and compelling book, Griswold stages an extended encounter between two towering figures of Enlightenment thought: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Smith. While Rousseau and Smith were known to each other, they had nothing like the “encounter” that Rousseau and David Hume had, for example. Smith commented on Rousseau’s views, particularly those found in the *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*, in his 1756 “Letter to the Authors of the *Edinburgh Review*” as well as in his *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, and Rousseau shows up in Smith’s correspondence with Hume, but beyond that there was little actual interaction between the two philosophers. However, Griswold’s work is not to focus on the history of a relationship but to show what can be learned about the respective views of Rousseau and Smith by bringing those views into sustained dialogue.

More specifically, the main purpose of staging an encounter between Rousseau and Smith is to illuminate their respective views on what Griswold broadly calls “the question of the self.” As Griswold elaborates, this question is itself a “complex web” composed of interlacing strands of thought on several topics: “what we are by nature (in particular whether sociability is natural or acquired), who we have become, whether we can know ourselves or each other, how best to articulate the human condition, what it would mean to be free, and whether there is anything that can be done to remedy our deeply imperfect, if not degraded condition” (xvii). Many of these questions are obvious ones to ask of Rousseau’s writings, but one of the achievements of Griswold’s book is to show just how aptly they are asked of Smith’s writings as well. Building on his own excellent work on Smith in *Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment*, as well as the scholarship that book has helped to foster, Griswold shows that Smith was just as keenly interested as Rousseau in questions of the self,

self-knowledge, intersubjectivity, sociability, illusion, self-deception, and hypocrisy—despite taking often strikingly different positions on these questions and topics.

This review cannot do justice to the intricate conversation Griswold stages between these two figures on these topics. In each of the five chapters, Griswold focuses on a strand in the complex of questions about the self, moving between the writings of Rousseau and Smith, and then concluding the chapter with a dialectical exchange that often moves beyond the published writings. The goal is not to answer a question or resolve a dispute, and there is no declared winner in the exchange. The goal is rather to deepen, explore, and complicate the question at hand. This lack of resolution may be unsatisfying to some readers, but it is both truer to the questions Griswold is examining, and more germane to a broader goal of the book.

This broader goal, which begins to appear as the dialectic advances into further complexity, seems to be to provide a case study in how and why conflict and disagreement occur and continue. As Griswold reveals, Rousseau and Smith are not just in disagreement about substantive philosophical questions; they also disagree in large-scale metaphilosophical ways. Rousseau tends to think in “starkly binary terms”—seeing any opacity as utter impenetrability, and any artifice as total fabrication (254), whereas Smith tends to think in terms of spectra and degrees—looking for practical, commonsense, “good enough” solutions to real problems. But it is not clear how much more can be said to sharpen these metaphilosophical differences. Indeed, if Hume were asked to comment on these differences, he might say that Griswold has uncovered a temperamental and sentimental difference in the philosophies of Rousseau and Smith, where the differences in their respective views on “human life and . . . happiness” are best explained by the different sentiments of the sect to which each belongs (Hume, “The Epicurean,” n. 1). What we might say, following Griswold’s own comments in the final paragraph of this book, is that this staged encounter between Rousseau and Smith reminds us that disagreement and conflict occur not only because people have different beliefs and values, and potentially incommensurate lists of priorities, but also because they have different worldviews and different temperaments. Recognizing this may not help to resolve our differences, but it will help us to understand them.

Like Griswold’s other work, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Smith* will be a valuable resource for scholars of Rousseau, Smith, and Enlightenment philosophy more generally. Griswold deepens and extends the already extensive scholarship on Rousseau on the “question of the self,” and, for scholars of Smith, he opens up promising new lines of research and inquiry on these topics.

LAUREN KOPAJTIC

*Fordham University*

Elizabeth S. Radcliffe. *Hume, Passion, and Action*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. xi + 230. Cloth, \$60.00.

Elizabeth Radcliffe’s book is an important and original contribution to scholarship on Hume’s ethics and moral psychology. Throughout, she deftly combines important discussions of Hume’s predecessors and contemporaries that serve to contextualize his views with in-depth analysis of Hume’s texts. At the same time, she shows an impressive familiarity with more recent scholarship on Hume’s and Humean ethics, and deploys much of this recent scholarship to frame her own interpretation of Hume’s ethics and moral psychology. That sophisticated and nuanced interpretation focuses particularly on the relations between and the respective roles played by belief, the passions, and moral sentiments in motivation and agency.

The book has seven chapters and an appendix; this latter is devoted to a more detailed examination of philosophical accounts of the passions, reason, and action in the seventeenth