

**Humanities \ Philosophy**

Williams, David Lay. **Rousseau's Platonic Enlightenment**. Pennsylvania State, 2007. 306p bibl index afp; ISBN 9780271029979, \$55.00. Reviewed in 2008jul CHOICE.

In this sterling, deeply researched study, Williams (Univ. of Wisconsin, Stevens Point) explores how thinkers ranging from Hobbes to d'Holbach highlight various sets of ideas that Rousseau combated in developing his philosophical teaching. The account of Rousseau's predecessors who might be called Platonists is especially interesting, as is the account of those who qualify as materialists. Moreover, Williams provides a good overview of Rousseau's teaching, demonstrates a commendable grasp of the relevant secondary literature, and argues ably for the superiority of his own interpretations. Two concluding chapters on how Rousseau's ideas have been distorted since his death are compelling. Yet neither Rousseau's refusal to identify an end or purpose for human existence, nor his embrace of the sweet sentiment of existence as the highest human happiness, sways Williams from his contention that Rousseau is a devout Christian with strong Platonist leanings; in his account of Platonism, he also tends unduly to ascribe to Plato arguments uttered by characters in the dialogues. Clearly written and superbly organized, this book contributes much to Rousseau studies. An indispensable book for Rousseau scholars, this volume also will appeal to general readers and students at all levels. **Summing Up:** Highly recommended. Lower-level undergraduates through faculty/researchers; general readers. -- *C. E. Butterworth, University of Maryland College Park*