

A Hermeneutics of the Self

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Moses Mendelssohn's late German writings confront the question of the place of Scripture and religious tradition within the individual's task of self-formation. Pollok will argue that he offers an essential hermeneutical conception of the self that critically draws on a tradition of exegesis in the manner of Spinoza. Being forced to either prove Judaism as superior, or to convert, Mendelssohn conveys a hermeneutics that focuses on the dynamic dialectical move between an irreducible self to be formed from within itself – and the normative constraints it faces by religious as well as societal laws.

Pollok will also show that Mendelssohn's theory can be read more convincingly if seen under the scope of Ernst Cassirer's project of a Philosophy of Symbolic Forms. In its reformulation as a function of world-understanding and world-construction, personal faith as well as the ceremonial laws and traditions within Judaism gain a new role. Mendelssohn's task could then be reformulated as a search for a method to strengthen the act of signification within one decisive sphere of human (self-)understanding.



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