"The Myth of Tragedy: Fictions of Dialogue in Mendelssohn's *Letters on the Sentiments* and Shaftesbury's *The Moralists,*"


This essay claims that the fictional form of Mendelssohn's *Briefe über die Empfindungen* (Letters on the Sentiments, 1755) has great bearing on its philosophical content. A comparison of the dynamics of its three characters with those of Shaftesbury's *The Moralists* (1709) reveals that Mendelssohn's letters engage in their own triadic intertextual dialogue with the Englishman and with Plato. Mendelssohn's recasting of Shaftesbury's characters, generic playfulness, and formal ambiguities all work to challenge some of the most important doctrines purported by figures hitherto assumed to speak for the author. In fact, the role of fiction in Mendelssohn's epistolary text serves to undermine the notion of writerly authority and to question the possibility of escaping the Christianization of philosophy in the modern age.

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