

Steven D. Martinson

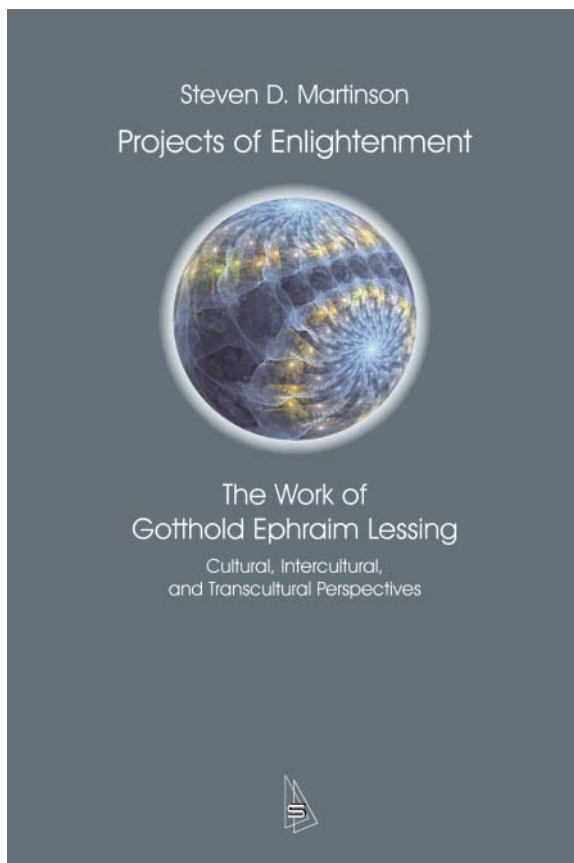
Projects of Enlightenment: The Work of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing

Cultural, Intercultural, and Transcultural Perspectives

HERMEIA, vol. 11 • 2013, 286 pp., paperback • € 34,80 [D] • ISBN 978-3-939381-39-6

Projects of Enlightenment focuses on the work of the foremost representative of the German Enlightenment, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781). The name, Lessing, has come to signify the advancement of free inquiry and tolerance as well as the improvement of the individual human being, society, and humankind. To speak of the unity of Lessing's thought, however, is to ignore the inconsistencies, contradictions, and challenges the writer could not always overcome. The man's preoccupation with gambling presupposes a worldview that is different from the one that has often been attributed to him. Rather than reflect the harmony of the universe, Lessing's writings address and trace the effects of circumstance, arbitrary rule, and anxiety. But Lessing's gambling habit was also a source of creativity that drives the emergence of order out of chaos, the production of meaning out of uncertainty, and the building of character in and through the perpetual search for truth. Martinson's readings of the cultural-historical contexts in which Lessing lived his life, the intercultural-religious dialogues that shaped his relationships and informed his writings, and the transcultural mentalities that his work cultivates reshape contemporary views of the writer's projects of enlightenment.

Steven D. Martinson is Professor of German Studies at the University of Arizona in Tucson. He is a past president of the Lessing Society and Research Fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.



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