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PROMOTIONSPROGRAMM BUDDHISMUS-STUDIEN



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Lecture by Rafal Stepien, Ph.D.

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Date: Thursday, July 20th, 2017

Time: 18:00 o'clock (c.t.)

Location: Geschwister-Scholl Platz 1, Room A 015

On Emptying Self of View: A Buddhist Critique of First Philosophy

Nāgārjuna (c. 150-250) is the founder of the Madhyamaka school of Indian Buddhist philosophy, and generally taken to be second in importance only to the Buddha himself for the development of Buddhist thought. Nāgārjuna's masterwork, the *Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way* or *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā*, opens and closes with salutations to the Buddha as one who taught the 'cessation of conceptualization' (*prapañcopaśamaṃ*) and the 'abandonment of all views' (*sarvadr̥ṣṭiprahāṇāya*) respectively. Furthermore, the text contains numerous calls for the complete abandonment of views, and repeatedly uses the tetralemma (*catuṣkoṭi*) to survey and reject all four of the logical positions open to classical Indian philosophers. In this paper, I argue that Nāgārjuna's insistence on the abandonment of *all* views – including ultimately his own – constitutes his distinctive means to the metaphysical 'exhaustion' characteristic of *nirvāṇa*, wherein all views, theses, propositions (*dr̥ṣṭi*, *pakṣa*, *pratijñā*) are abandoned as so many subtle affirmations of an only ever empty self.

About the Speaker:

Rafal K Stepien is currently the inaugural Berggruen Research Fellow in Indian Philosophy at the University of Oxford and Assistant Professor of Asian Religions at Hampshire College (USA). Previously, he has been the Cihui Foundation Faculty Fellow in Chinese Buddhism at Columbia and the Soudavar Memorial Research Scholar in Persian Studies at Cambridge.