

Zukunftsphilologie: Revisiting the Canons of Textual Practice

Lecture

Tuesday, May 24, 2011, 16.00 – 18.00

Freie Universität Berlin, Raum JK 24/122d, Habelschwerdter Allee 45

Andrew J. Nicholson

(Stony Brook University, USA)

What is a Gītā?

Textuality and Authority in Indian Philosophy

Chair: Travis Smith (University of Florida, Zukunftsphilologie Fellow 2010/11)

What *is called* a Gītā? In other words, what type of text has traditionally been labeled as a “Gītā,” or “song,” in Sanskrit? And what *calls for* a Gītā? What historical conditions led authors in India to present their ideas in the form of a philosophical dialogue known as a Gītā, rather than in some other way? In this talk I will present an overview of some of the many Gītās written in Sanskrit in pre-modern India. The Bhagavad Gītā, the warrior Arjuna’s dialogue with the god Kṛṣṇa, is the only one that most modern Hindus know. Yet there are dozens of other Gītās, many quite influential in pre-modern India. Indologists have sometimes derided other Gītās as inferior imitations of a uniquely inspired classic text. What is it about modern attitudes to textual authority and authenticity that made it so hard for us to appreciate the virtues of these other texts? Certainly, many of the Gītās were self-consciously patterned after the Bhagavad Gītā. But why did their authors do this? Was it a lack of originality or imagination? I will argue that, to the contrary, it was the novelty of the philosophical and theological doctrines taught in these other texts that often made authors want to present their own works as Gītās composed by the mythological sage Vyāsa. I will pay special attention to the Īśvara Gītā, an important medieval work that presents the yogic path of supernatural power, not devotion to God, as the highest means to liberation.

Andrew J. Nicholson is Assistant Professor of Hinduism and Indian Intellectual History at Stony Brook University, New York. He holds degrees in Religious Studies (M.A., University of Chicago), Philosophy (M.A., DePaul University), and South Asian Languages and Civilizations (Ph.D., University of Chicago). He has been the recipient of Fulbright-Hays, Robert Bosch Stiftung, and University of Chicago Committee on Southern Asia Studies fellowships. Professor Nicholson is currently co-director of the American Academy of Religion's Yoga in Theory and Practice Consultation, an associate of the Columbia University Seminar on South Asia, and a trustee of the American Institute of Indian Studies. His first book, *Unifying Hinduism: Philosophy and Identity in Indian Intellectual History*, was published in 2010 by Columbia University Press. His second, *Īśvara Gītā: The Secret Yoga of Lord Śiva*, is scheduled for publication in 2012.

Zukunftsphilologie: Revisiting the Canons of Textual Scholarship

The project Zukunftsphilologie endeavours to promote and emphasize primary textual scholarship beyond the classical humanistic canon. In an age of advanced communication, intellectual specialization, and unprecedented migration of knowledge and people, the discipline of philology assumes new relevance. Zukunftsphilologie aspires to support research in neglected varieties of philology with the explicit aim to integrate texts and scholarly traditions from Asia, Africa, the Middle East as well as from Europe itself.

Zukunftsphilologie refers to the polemic between the classicist Ulrich von Wilamowitz and Friedrich Nietzsche around the method and meaning of classical studies. As a project it sees itself as part of a growing trend towards a more global intellectual history. It is inspired in particular by the work of Edward Said and Sheldon Pollock.

In order to promote historically-conscious philology, Zukunftsphilologie will foster research in the following areas: genealogies and transformations of philological practice, philology's place in the system of knowledge (e.g. its relation to science, theology and jurisprudence), and philology and the university. Furthermore, Zukunftsphilologie aims to support critical reviews of historical and philological practice. In revisiting important „philological wars“, the goal is not to merely evaluate the argumentative worth of these debates, but to reflect on the wider cultural and political context in which these „philological wars“ emerged and how they have shaped our knowledge of the past.

The project Zukunftsphilologie is co-directed by Angelika Neuwirth, Manan Ahmed and Islam Dayeh (all Freie Universität Berlin) and is associated with and located at the Friedrich Schlegel Graduate School for Literary Studies at Freie Universität Berlin. Zukunftsphilologie is a project at the Forum Transregionale Studien.

Forum Transregionale Studien

The Forum Transregionale Studien is a new research platform of the Land of Berlin designed to promote research that connects systematic and region-specific questions in a perspective that addresses entanglements and interactions beyond national, cultural or regional frames. The Forum works in tandem with already existing institutions and networks engaged in transregional studies and is supported by an association of the directors and heads of universities, research institutes and networks mainly based in Berlin. It started its activities in 2010 by identifying and supporting three transregional research projects based in Berlin research institutions in the different fields of Law, Philology, and Urban Sociology. The Forum Transregionale Studien is funded by the Senate of Berlin.

Contact: zukunftsphilologie@trafo-berlin.de

For more information please see:

www.forum-transregionale-studien.de

<http://www.geisteswissenschaften.fu-berlin.de/friedrichschlegel/promotionsprogramm/kooperationen/Zukunftsphilologie/index.html>