

Einladung

zu einem Gastvortrag

von

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über das Thema

„Philosophy and the Varieties of Conversation: A Commentary on the Opening Conversations in the *Questions of Menander*“

Nigel Warburton once said that philosophy without conversation can at times involve the reduction of thought to dogma. He made this point mindful of the place of philosophical conversations in the history and the historiography of philosophy in Europe. A similar point may be made for the seemingly ubiquitous place of philosophical conversations in literature in Sanskrit, be it in the theological conversations of a husband and wife, the conversations between teachers and students, secret conversations between friends, the conversations between God and man, or even, in time, of the presentation of philosophy as conversations between a philosopher and his mind. It may also be seen in the emphasis placed on debate in the history and historiography of philosophy in India. But what is the place of conversation in philosophy? How is it different, if at all, from debate? Is a particular emphasis on conversation as a vehicle for philosophy a function of certain conceptions of philosophy? In this talk, I invite these questions by offering a commentary on the opening conversations in the Pāli text of the dialogue of King Menander and the monk Nāgasena. I suggest that the text is highly self-conscious of its narrative vehicle, a dialogue, and if read with care, offers us conversations not only as a vehicle, but also a theme to think about.

I will focus on three conversations in the text that need to be distinguished from each other. I think the text frames, and introduces, its own preferred mode of conversation, by framing itself, as a step in a series of kinds of conversations. I will call the first variety of conversation, one modeled on debate, as philosophy as a public trial; the second variety, which is presented as spontaneous conversation, will be discussed as the resolution of private doubts; and lastly, there is a variety of conversation to which we are introduced on which philosophical conversation is the private pursuit of peculiarly personal concerns. It is the last variety of conversation, I believe, that the text steers us towards. But both, conversation as the resolution of spontaneous doubts, and

conversation as the pursuit of private concerns, are forms of conversation enabled by the work performed philosophy as a public trial. Debate, pursued without acrimony or insistence on dogma, results in philosophical conversation.

am
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um
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