



Seminar

**JAN R. STENGER**

Fellow, SCAS.

MacDowell Professor of Greek, University of Glasgow

*Erziehung or Bildung?*  
*Ideas about Self-formation in Late Antiquity*

Tuesday, 5 December, 11:15 a.m.

In the Thunberg Lecture Hall  
SCAS, Linneanum, Thunbergsvägen 2, Uppsala  
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## ABOUT JAN R. STENGER

After graduating from the Universität Tübingen, Jan R. Stenger received his doctorate in Classics from the Universität zu Kiel in 2003 as well as his habilitation in 2008. He has taught Greek and Roman literature at the universities of Kiel, Berlin (Freie Universität), and Glasgow, where he was appointed Professor of Greek in 2012. Stenger has held visiting posts at the universities of Munich and Cologne and in 2015-16 he was a EURIAS Senior Fellow at the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies. Since 2008, he has been Principal Investigator at the Cluster of Excellence Topoi, Berlin. Stenger's main fields of research are Greek lyric poetry, ancient epistolography, and literature and culture of Late Antiquity; he is particularly interested in the relationship between ancient Christianity and classical culture, with a focus on educational thinking from the fourth to sixth centuries CE.

Stenger's publications include the monographs *Poetische Argumentation: Die Funktion der Gnomik in den Epinikien des Bakchylides* (2004) and *Hellenische Identität in der Spätantike: Pagane Autoren und ihr Unbehagen an der eigenen Zeit* (2009), as well as edited volumes on the literary modelling of cityscapes and the concept of literature in late antiquity. His most recent publications are 'Where to Find Christian Philosophy? Spatiality in John Chrysostom's Counter to Greek *Paideia*' (*Journal of Early Christian Studies* 24, 2016) and 'What Does It Mean to Call the Monasteries of Gaza a "School"?' (*Vigiliae Christianae* 71, 2017). He is also Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Philologus*.

During his stay at SCAS, Stenger will continue working on a monograph on educational thinking in the late Roman Empire from c.300 to 600 CE (funded by the Leverhulme Trust).

## ABSTRACT

This paper aims to shed light on a significant contribution made by thinkers of late antiquity (c. 300 to 600 CE) to classical educational philosophy. Education in the late Roman Empire was dominated by theories and practices that had been established centuries earlier for instruction in rhetoric and philosophy. Scholars have therefore often emphasised the inherently conservative nature of schooling in that period and noted that not even the spread of Christianity caused any significant changes in the schools' curriculum and effects on society. However, the widespread and sometimes vehement debate on education and learning, both in the Greek East and the Latin West, is evidence that pagan and Christian authors were considering ideas of a formation that, rather than imparting knowledge and skills, focused on individuals as a human beings and improvement of the self. In my talk I will propose that modern notions of *Bildung* (self-cultivation) informed by German idealism can help us to understand how late antique theorisation conceptualised the process of formation as a self-reflexive encounter between an interpreting subject and the objective world. Analysing texts that put the process of self-formation centre stage (Themistius, Gregory of Nyssa, Macrobius and Boethius) I will show that major authors were exploring ways in which the individual could fruitfully engage with the world in its diversity for the benefit of the soul and fulfilment in life. Their theories show an awareness that, in order to realise the full sense of humanity, the subject is in need of an object that is neither so different as to preclude comprehension nor too similar to make formation impossible. I will argue that these discussions envisage the formative interaction with the other, which operates as a barrier or challenge, as a constructive and productive process: far from being a passive reception of something given, formation results in giving shape to the self and simultaneously to the world.