

**Philosophy 292**  
**The Sacred and The Secular: Seminar**  
**Fall 2010**

**Thursday 2-4; Emerson 310**

**Draft of 9/1/10**

Prof. Sean D. Kelly  
[sdkelly@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:sdkelly@fas.harvard.edu)  
Office Hours: TBD

302 Emerson Hall  
5-3915

**Course Description**

This seminar will develop a Gen Ed course in Culture and Belief. The Gen Ed course is devoted to the following question: What is the meaningfulness and direction of our lives grounded in, now that we live in a secular age? The course proceeds by considering different conceptions of gods and the sacred in the classic literature of the West, asking whether any of these conceptions remains relevant after the death of God. Readings for the course are chosen from among Homer, the Bible, Aeschylus, Virgil, Augustine, Dante, Luther, Shakespeare, Milton, Pascal, Nietzsche, Melville, and others. The seminar will put these readings in context by considering them in the light of Hegel and Heidegger's philosophy of history.

**Prerequisites**

Some background in late Heidegger's philosophy will be helpful but not required. Familiarity with the central literary texts will be assumed.

**Course Requirements**

The course will be reading intensive, since we will be covering about half a dozen major literary texts plus the philosophical background that sheds light upon them. A book manuscript co-authored by the professor will be available as well, and will set the stage for the discussions.

Students taking the course for credit will be required to write either a research paper or a detailed course proposal. In either case, the finished document should be 15-20 pages. Some student presentations may be appropriate.

**Required Texts**

Homer (Fitzgerald, tr.), The Odyssey, (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux)  
Aeschylus (Latimore, tr.), Oresteia, (University of Chicago Press)  
Virgil (Mandelbaum, tr.), Aeneid, (Bantam)  
Dante (Ciardi, tr.), Inferno, (Signet)  
Dante (Ciardi, tr.), Purgatorio, (Signet)  
Melville, Moby Dick, (Norton)

Heidegger (Hofstadter, tr.), Poetry, Language, Thought (Harper & Row)

### **Recommended Texts**

Hegel, Lectures on the History of Philosophy

Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit

Heidegger, Basic Questions of Philosophy

Heidegger, Parmenides

Dreyfus and Kelly, All Things Shining: Reading the Western Classics to Find Meaning in a Secular Age (manuscript available on the course website)

### **Other Course Resources**

All Things Shining blog: <http://allthingsshiningbook.wordpress.com/>

Being in the World – A Celebration of Being Human in a Technological Age:  
<http://www.beingintheworldmovie.com/index.html>

Dreyfus podcast: [http://webcast.berkeley.edu/course\\_details\\_new.php?seriesid=2010-D-67124&semesterid=2010-D](http://webcast.berkeley.edu/course_details_new.php?seriesid=2010-D-67124&semesterid=2010-D)

### **Tentative Schedule**

#### **Sept 2**

Introduction

#### **Sept 9**

The Contemporary Scene

Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*

Dreyfus and Kelly, ATS “Introduction”

Dreyfus and Kelly, ATS chapter 1: “Our Contemporary Nihilism”

Dreyfus and Kelly, ATS, chapter 2. “David Foster Wallace’s Nihilism”.

#### **Sept 16**

Hegel and Heidegger on History

Hegel, *Philosophy of History* (introduction)

Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy* (excerpts) or “Metaphysics as History of Being”

#### **Sept 23**

*The Odyssey*, Books 1-11

Heidegger, *Parmenides Lectures*

Dreyfus and Kelly, ATS, Chapter 3: “Homer’s Polytheism”

Dreyfus and Kelly, “Notes on Embodiment in Homer”

#### **Sept 30**

*The Odyssey*, Books 12-24

Heidegger, *Parmenides Lectures*

Dreyfus and Kelly, ATS, Chapter 3: "Homer's Polytheism"

Dreyfus and Kelly, "Notes on Embodiment in Homer"

**Oct 7**

*The Oresteia*, Agamemnon

Dreyfus and Kelly, ATS, Chapter 4: "From Aeschylus to Augustine: Monotheism on the Rise"

Possibly: Hegel vs. Heidegger on Sophocles?

**Oct 14**

*The Oresteia*, Agamemnon

Dreyfus and Kelly, ATS, Chapter 4: "From Aeschylus to Augustine: Monotheism on the Rise"

Possibly: Hegel vs. Heidegger on Sophocles?

**Oct 21**

*Gospel of John*

Heidegger, *Origin of the Work of Art*

**Oct 28**

*The Divine Comedy*, Inferno

Dreyfus and Kelly, ATS, Chapter 5: "From Dante to Kant: The Attractions and Dangers of Autonomy"

**Nov 4**

*The Divine Comedy*, Purgatory and Paradiso (excerpts)

Dreyfus and Kelly, ATS, Chapter 5: "From Dante to Kant: The Attractions and Dangers of Autonomy"

Luther (excerpts)?

Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Freedom"?

Kant, "What is Enlightenment?"?

**Nov 11**

*Moby Dick*

Dreyfus and Kelly, ATS, Chapter 6: "Fanaticism, Polytheism, and Melville's 'Evil Art'"

**Nov 18**

*Moby Dick*

Dreyfus and Kelly, ATS, Chapter 6: "Fanaticism, Polytheism, and Melville's 'Evil Art'"

**Nov 25**

## THANKSGIVING RECESS

### **Dec 2**

#### Conclusion

Dreyfus and Kelly, ATS, Chapter 7: “Conclusion: Lives Worth Living in a Secular Age”