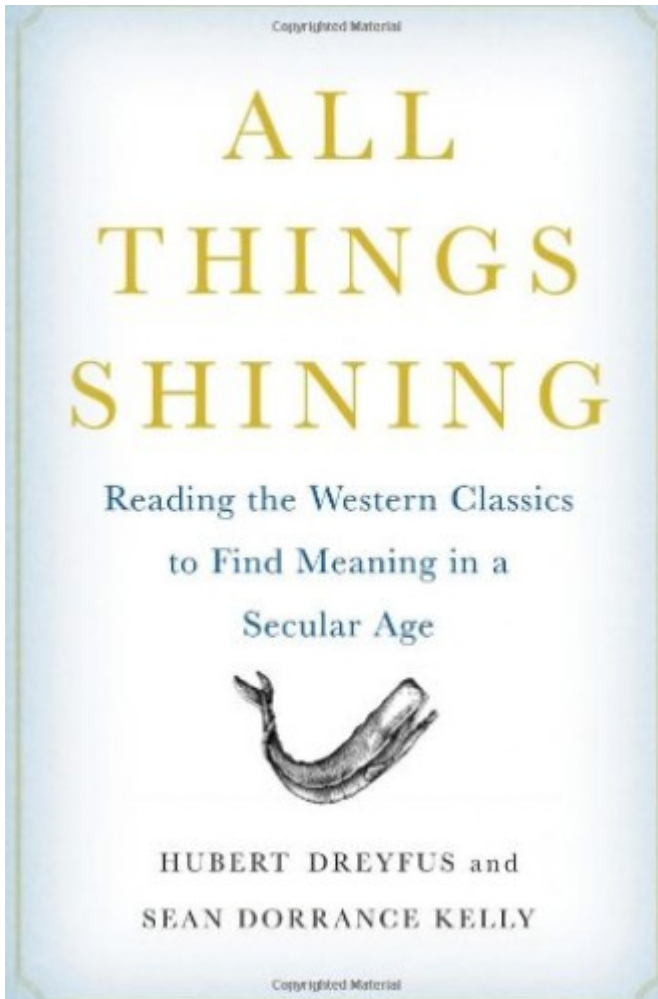


Still whooshing

By [Martin E. Marty](#)

January 20, 2011

In Review



All Things Shining

by Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Dorrance Kelly
Free Press

"[Whooshing up](#)" once, "[whooshing up](#)" twice: find two "whooshings up" in major newspapers on the same day and you may well pay attention. Get ready to be swept away by this new coinage, which is featured in *All Things Shining* by philosophers Herbert Dreyfus and Sean Dorrance Kelly. *Wall Street Journal* reviewer Eric Ormsby summarizes:

Whooshing up is the sensation we enjoy at a sporting event when the crowd rises to its feet as one to register a communal sense of awe and admiration before some astonishing athletic feat. Whooshing up is communal, it is public, and it is shared.

It also replicates what the ancient Greeks did in response to highlights in athletic events. Dreyfus and Kelly advocate whooshing up as a partial cure for the nihilism that afflicts our culture now that God is gone. God may be gone, they suggest, but the gods are not--and the public has to believe in *something*.

Their point is a perfect illustration of the most quoted line attributed to but not written by G. K. Chesterton: "When a man stops believing in God he doesn't then believe in nothing, he believes in anything" (or "everything" in some readings.) The old word for this was polytheism, and Dreyfus and Kelly call for it to come back in revised versions.

Back? It never left. God #1 remains Mars, much beloved even in churches. Have you ever pondered the words of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," sung even in the sanctuaries of the Prince of Peace? God #2 is still Venus, who rules in pop culture and needs no revering in sanctuaries. God #3 is always Mammon, who determines the life of the secular culture and even the prosperity gospel and its analogues in the churches.

The god most noticed by Dreyfus and Kelly is #4, Hermes. They know that the books of philosophy and hymns of the church can't compare to athletic events for prompting whooshing up. These are merely four examples of the belief-in-everything that fosters most whooshing up.

Liturgies are available. [Here](#) is Orphic Hymn 28 to Hermes from long ago:

To Hermes, Fumigation from
Frankincense, Hermes, draw near, and to my prayer incline, messenger of Zeus,
and Maia's son divine; prefect of contest, ruler of mankind, with heart
almighty.

The NFL and the NBA and Littler League could find ways to
package that.

Some would say that the churches stand no chance unless they
can out-whoosh-up popular culture and its celebrations. Not a chance; they will
compete and fail and themselves fall into nihilism. They have different
"fumigations from frankincense" to offer.

At its best, however, worship--whether around a campfire at
a youth retreat, during the burning of the candle and the offering of a cup
where two or three are gathered as one is dying, after a mission completed by a
volunteer group, or during the singing of the *Mass in B Minor*--inspires its own kind of
whooshing. Worship
planners and leaders can open the way for the winds of the Spirit to turn
worship from drab routine to some sort of whooshing-up in an awe-full event.

Or they can stand by and whine or sulk or be envious as the
old gods keep the field to themselves.