

# DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY COLLOQUIUM SERIES

DENNIS J. SCHMIDT

*THANK GOODNESS FOR THE ATMOSPHERE:  
THE STARRY SKY AND THE MORAL LAW*

## ABSTRACT

The beginnings of philosophy were intimately connected with an interest in the stars. From Thales and Pythagoras, through Plato and Aristotle, the stars were sources of fascination and inspiration, both idea and image. Eventually, it is a star that becomes the very image of the good for Plato. One of the highpoints of this fascination with the stars comes in Kant's celebrated remark that "two things fill the mind with wonder: the starry sky above and the moral law within." In that remark, Kant echoes in his own way a sort of kinship of the image of the starry sky and the moral law.

This philosophical affectation for the stars seems to have disappeared today. Curiously, this happens precisely at a moment in history when our capacity to see the starry sky has extended beyond anything even imagined before. The purpose of this paper is to look briefly at the import of the early concern with the stars in philosophy and then to ask what it might mean if we were to once again take thinking about the stars seriously today.

## BIOGRAPHY

Dennis Schmidt is Research Professor of Philosophy and Head of the philosophy department at Western Sydney University. He specializes in post-Kantian European philosophy and Ancient Philosophy, and is a leading scholar in the areas of Hermeneutics, Aesthetics, and Literary Criticism. He is the author of several books, including *Between Word and Image: Heidegger, Gadamer, and Klee* (Indiana University Press, 2013), *Idiome der Wahrheit* (Klostermann Verlag, 2012), *Lyrical and Ethical Subjects* (SUNY Press, 2005), and *On Germans and Other Greeks* (Indiana University Press, 2001).

Tuesday, May 1st • 3:45 PM • YMCA 401

Immediately following the Colloquium, undergraduates interested in pursuing a Master's in Philosophy at Western Sydney University are invited to meet Prof. Schmidt and learn about the program.



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