

McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts
Duquesne University

HERACLITUS, MARCUS, NIETZSCHE

Eternal Return of the Self, or, Epics of the Soul, or, Becoming Oneself

PHIL 603-01, M 12:15–2:55

College Hall 324

Spring 2010

Teacher	Texts
Dr. Miller.....College Hall 332	<i>The Art and Thought of Heraclitus</i> , C. H. Kahn
Office Hours.....TTH 2:30–3:30	<i>Meditations of Marcus Aurelius</i> , tr. Grube
Office Phone.....412-396-1291	<i>The Inner Citadel</i> , P. Hadot
Email Address..... millerp2212@duq.edu	<i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i> , tr. A. Del Caro
Website..... www.unc.edu/~plmiller	<i>Nietzsche's Epic of The Soul</i> , T. K. Seung
Evaluation	Important Dates
Greek Alphabet Quiz.....5%	Greek Alphabet Quiz.....01.25
Midterm Exam.....15%	Midterm Exam.....02.22
Paper.....45%	Final Exam.....04.26
Final Exam.....35%	Term Paper.....05.03

Course Description

“The world forever needs the truth, hence the world forever needs Heraclitus.” Thus spoke Nietzsche in one of his first books. One of his last books shows his admiration undiminished: “I set apart with high reverence the name of Heraclitus...Heraclitus will always be right.” What was the perennial truth that this iconoclastic German found in the aphorisms of this obscure Greek? To discover it for ourselves, we shall become students of Zarathustra, who preaches several Heraclitean doctrines: that everything flows in time, that no self is ever itself, and thus that each self must become itself. “Become who you are!” is his paradoxical lesson; his tale is accordingly an epic of the soul. Aiming our course toward understanding this recent interpretation of Zarathustra (Seung’s), we shall begin with a study of Heraclitus himself.

Zarathustra also preached the eternal return, which Nietzsche later said “could possibly have been taught by Heraclitus.” Whether or not it was—an exegetical question we shall consider alongside many others, helped by Kahn’s masterpiece of philosophical scholarship—many other Greeks thought his aphorisms preached a cosmic cycle. Of the Stoics, who revered Heraclitus as a founder, and adopted the eternal return as their creed, none was more devoted than Marcus Aurelius. He likewise thought himself immersed in a flowing world, struggling to love his fate rather than change it, believing in a god whose only salvation would be the rough justice of time itself, namely death. This melancholic Roman wrote an intimate meditation, never intended for publication, which his best interpreter (Hadot) has shown to be a compendium of spiritual exercises. Marcus thus anticipates the discipline of Zarathustra, which has the same goal: to return to the *logos* of Heraclitus, the eternal striving of self-becoming.

But who returned more faithfully, Nietzsche or Marcus? If equally so, was Nietzsche thus a Stoic, despite the scorn he elsewhere pours on that ancient school? These questions are more than historical curiosities. On the contrary, they are of the utmost importance for contemporary continental philosophy. Nietzsche was not alone in his reverence for Heraclitus; in this matter, if in none other, he followed Hegel; in this matter, as in others, he was followed by Heidegger. All three wrote reverential studies of the Obscure, which makes his present neglect seem all the more peculiar. Has Heraclitus been surpassed by his German disciples, obviating all future returns to his aphorisms? Or should we return to them afresh in order to perpetuate his eternal revolution in logic, ontology, epistemology, psychology, theology, ethics, and aesthetics? Only so, he would argue, can you become yourself. Only so, we shall add, can he become himself.

Course Requirements

More will be said about the paper as its due date approaches, but from the first day of class you should be hunting for a good topic, speaking with me about any that become contenders for your inquiry. For now, there are a few books about writing, style, and argumentation that you may wish to consult. All writers of English profit from dipping occasionally into *The Elements of Style* (Strunk & White). If you are new to philosophical writing, or wish to improve its basics, *The Rulebook for Arguments* (Weston) is very helpful. *Thinking from A to Z* (Warburton) explains the basics terms of reasoning, and there are few in the field of philosophy who would not benefit from internalizing much of it. For your term papers you should consult a recent edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Conformity to its guidelines will be expected of all excellent work.

In contrast to the specific discussions expected in your papers, the exam aims to motivate you to achieve a synoptic view of the authors we have read. At the end of each week I shall write two questions or so that capture some of our discussion thus far, posting these on *Blackboard*, and later editing them into an exam study guide, perhaps adding a few questions that synthesize several of these questions. The best way to prepare for the exams, then, is to ensure after each week that you have understood the questions that I write in order to capture our discussion. If you do not, you should review the readings and your notes for that week, discuss them with your classmates, and consult me by email or in office hours. Easiest of all your evaluations this semester should be the Greek Alphabet Quiz, for which a few hours of memorization will secure a lifetime of comfort with those strange characters that appear in Kahn's edition.

Grading Policies

As befits graduate and professional education, attendance is expected at each meeting, especially because we meet only once a week. In light of this expectation, necessary absences should be explained, preferably with documentation. Absence will likely jeopardize performance. *Blackboard* will be an important resource for this course, so please familiarize yourself with it and consult it a couple of times per week. There you will find some important announcements and all important course documents. These documents will range from this syllabus, to assignment prompts, to study guides for the exams.

Work will be graded with numerical scores, a system which aspires to make grading maximally transparent. The meanings of these numerical scores are the official prescriptions of the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts:

93–100.....	A.....	superior
90–92.....	A-.....	excellent
88–89.....	B+.....	very good
83–87.....	B.....	good
80–82.....	B-.....	above average
78–79.....	C+.....	satisfactory
70–77.....	C.....	average
60–69.....	D.....	poor
0–59.....	F.....	failure

Graduate students are seeking professional training. Our particular profession is extremely competitive. Success in it requires excellent or superior work. It is not expected that more than a few students will be working at this level yet, but everyone should nonetheless be striving for it over the long term. It is expected that graduate students in philosophy do good work in all their courses, with excellent work in some, and a trend toward superior work in the program overall. Although *C* and *C+* have been designated ‘average’ and ‘satisfactory’ by McAnulty, consistent work at this level (or lower, needless to say) should give pause, provoking reconsideration of goals and discussion with a faculty advisor. Papers will be docked three points for each day they are late.

There is no way to apply universal standards to different sorts of assignments, least of all for graduate work, but because papers are paramount at this level, let us say a few words about their standards in particular, with the proviso that more will be said as their due date approaches. Work in the *A* range could, with minor revision, receive consideration—though not necessarily be published—by a peer-reviewed journal such as the *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. *B*-range work is competent for a graduate seminar but of insufficient quality to be considered for review by such a journal, for any number of reasons. *C*-range work, finally, is incompetent for a graduate seminar, even if it might be satisfactory for an upper-level undergraduate course. While I am eager to promote students who earn *A*'s in my courses, I cannot write a letter of recommendation otherwise.

Administrative Requirements

Like all forms of lying, plagiarism and cheating are grave offences. This is especially true in a university whose mission involves the pursuit of truth. Since these offences threaten the very foundation of intellectual life, they will be prosecuted to the full extent afforded by this university's policies. The maximum penalty is expulsion. Any doubts about the natures of these offences or the punishments they will incur can be dispelled by consulting the following website:

<http://www.studentlife.duq.edu/handbooksec5.html>

Students with documented disabilities are entitled to reasonable accommodations, if needed. If you need accommodations, please contact the Office of Freshman Development and Special Student Services in 309 Duquesne Union (412-396-6657) as soon as possible. Accommodations will not be granted retrospectively.

“Learning Outcomes”

There is a movement afoot in universities, as in primary and secondary schools, to categorize “learning outcomes,” quantify pedagogical results, and thus make education amenable to bureaucratic control. However applicable this model may be to lower levels, or even to other subjects at the college level, its application to the philosophical classroom is at best absurd, and at worst pernicious. One desirable outcome of all my courses, therefore, is that students come to see “learning outcomes” in this light. In a delicious irony, the philosophers we shall read in this course will also equip you to diagnose the deeper motives of this prevalent desire for rigid categories, incontrovertible results, and comfortable mastery. More precisely, if we were to use some of the terms recommended by the currently fashionable system, “Bloom’s Taxonomy of Learning Outcomes,” we would say that this course will have succeeded if you leave it better able to:

(Level 4) *uncover* the nihilistic longing for certainty and comfort at large in our degenerate culture;

(Level 5) *generate* from the ashes of this culture a few ideas capable of rising with renewed life; and then...

(Level 6) *decide* to commit your whole life to these ideas—a joyful life, strong and open despite the discomforts and uncertainties of the world.

Syllabus

<p>01.11.10</p> <p>First Week: Introduction</p> <p>Grasping Heraclitean Fire Immanence vs. Transcendence Immanent Spirituality</p> <p>Read: “Heraclitean Aphorisms” (PDF) or Kahn 1–85 “Grasping Heraclitean Fire” (PDF) “Immanent Spirituality” (PDF)</p>	<p>01.18.10</p> <p>MLK Holiday</p> <p>Read: Kahn 1–26 Hadot 35–53 Seung ix–xxvii</p> <p>Study: Greek Alphabet</p>
<p>01.25.10</p> <p>Second Week: Heraclitus</p> <p>Read: Kahn 87–138</p> <p>Greek Alphabet Quiz</p>	<p>02.01.10</p> <p>Third Week: Heraclitus</p> <p>Read: Kahn 138–93</p>
<p>02.08.10</p> <p>Fourth Week: Heraclitus</p> <p>Read: Kahn 193–241</p>	<p>02.15.10</p> <p>Fifth Week: Heraclitus</p> <p>Read: Kahn 241–87</p>
<p>02.22.10</p> <p>Sixth Week: Heraclitus</p> <p>Read: “Heraclitus” (PDF)</p> <p>Midterm Exam</p>	<p>03.01.10</p> <p>SPRING BREAK</p> <p>Read ahead in Hadot & Seung</p>

<p>03.08.10</p> <p>Seventh Week: Marcus</p> <p>Read: Marcus, Books 1–4 Hadot 1–127</p>	<p>03.15.10</p> <p>Eighth Week: Marcus</p> <p>Read: Marcus, Books 5–8 Hadot 128–231</p>
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<p>03.22.10</p> <p>Ninth Week: Marcus</p> <p>Read: Marcus, Books 9–12 Hadot 232–313</p>	<p>03.29.10</p> <p>Tenth Week: Nietzsche</p> <p>Read: <i>Zarathustra</i>, Book 1 Seung 1–53</p>
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<p>04.06.10 (Tuesday; Monday schedule)</p> <p>Eleventh Week: Nietzsche</p> <p>Read: <i>Zarathustra</i>, Book 2 Seung 54–117</p>	<p>04.12.10</p> <p>Twelfth Week: Nietzsche</p> <p>Read: <i>Zarathustra</i>, Book 3 Seung 118–240</p>
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<p>04.19.10</p> <p>Thirteenth Week: Nietzsche</p> <p>Read: <i>Zarathustra</i>, Book 4 Seung 241–359</p>	<p>04.26.09</p> <p>Fourteenth Week</p> <p>Final Exam</p>
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Term Paper Due: Monday 05.03.10, noon.