

Great Ideas IV - Beauty and Ethics (2015-2016)

How this course works / General Guidelines

- The **weekly schedule** in this file tells what book(s) you should be reading and what assignments you should be working on during any given week. (Print this file.) Make every effort possible to **stay on schedule with reading and assignments**. This is especially important for scheduled class discussions.
- The **lessons on the Class Site** offer some guidance in the content (ideas) of the course, as well as expectations for completing assignments. Some lessons contain audio clips or videos.
- The book readings usually come before the assignments on the schedule by one week. Give yourself **plenty of time to comfortably read the books** so that you are prepared for the given assignment. It is suggested that you read the novels during recreational, "non-school time" during your day. Start longer books sooner in the schedule if you are a slower reader.
- The **tutor** marks your assignments, gives regular feedback, moderates discussions, and answers any questions you might have. If you fall behind in the schedule, or have any problems, please ask for help.
- Written assignments and essays contribute to a large portion of the final course mark. See the **Tree of Life Student Handbook** for instructions, tips, and requirements for formal essays.
- **Discussions** will often happen before a formal essay. Use this opportunity to gather ideas, exchange comments, questions, etc. in preparation for your essay.
- Discussions are **marked** according to your participation and quality of responses. Aim for four total responses including at least 1 quotation from the book, and 1 question for your classmates.
- Since the online discussions are an integral part of the course, it is important that online communication with fellow students be **respectful, constructive, and done in love**. Keep these things in mind:
 - Remember that we are all learning at different levels and so we must respect each other and our varying abilities.
 - It is okay to correct someone on a fact or statement. Use kind words.
 - There will be times when disagreement arises on certain ideas; some students will have different perspectives that are not always apparent. It is useful to talk about

these things and ask questions to better understand what someone means. It is okay to say that you disagree but first make sure you understand what the other person is saying. Whenever you disagree, you should explain why. Be open to changing your thoughts on some things.

- Finally, consult Proverbs 15-18 for some basic principles in good communication. Especially consider the following Proverbs:

Whoever restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding. (Proverbs 17:27)

A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion. (Proverbs 18:2)

Before destruction a man's heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor. If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame. (Proverbs 18:12-13)

The Study of the Great Ideas in the Great Books

Introduction

A good education should include an opportunity for students to wrestle with some of the weighty questions that come with living. Who am I? Why am I here? Is there a God? Who is He? What does He require of me? What is valuable or worthwhile? What are the principles of right and wrong? For centuries great thinkers have proposed answers to these and other questions. The implications of their answers are all around us. We call it culture and Western Civilisation as it exists is a veritable cornucopia of competing worldviews – all of them out to get control of our minds and to move us to live as becomes a disciple of their way.

Surely, ideas have consequences. They do not exist in a vacuum. As one thinks, so he is. There can be little disagreement that the study of ideas is important. However, there are probably more than 400 basic ideas to explore and discuss. To look at them all would be to take the proverbial route that is a mile wide and an inch deep. Therefore, we have sought to help students understand what might be considered the most foundational of all these ideas: God and Man; Truth and Lies; Goodness and Evil; Beauty and Ethics. The order of the studies is significant as it follows, more or less, the progression of the Trivium; that is, grammar level understanding (God and Man) to rhetorical application in a look at what constitutes beauty and ethical living. Upon completion our hope is that students will be able to articulate that an understanding of truth, for example, significantly impacts the idea of what is good or even what is beautiful. Further an understanding of what is good will affect the view of what is right and wrong; what is just; what is freedom; what is equality. The connectedness goes on and on, becoming for the student his or her worldview; that is, how they will live in this present age.

In 2003 we launched our first level of *Tree of Life's Study of the Great Ideas Through the Great Books*. *The Study of the Ideas of God and Man* has proved to be challenging and stimulating for many students. In 2004 we introduced our second level: *The Study of the Ideas of Truth and Lies*, exploring some core questions that arise when young people begin to read critically. 2005 saw the addition of *The Study of the Ideas of Good and Evil*. Our four year study of the Great Ideas was rounded out with the completion of *The Study of the Ideas of Beauty and Ethics*. However, as students who have gone through every level have discovered, their wrestling with the Great Ideas has only begun. Enjoy the journey!

The Study of the Ideas of Beauty and Ethics

“All good things must come to an end.” ...or so the saying goes. In the sense that we have arrived at the fourth and final level of our study of the Great Ideas through the Great Books, and, assuming that you can truly call the last three years good, the old saying has some merit. But, as you probably suspect, this is not the end. Deep down you know it is only the beginning. You have only scratched the surface of the Great Conversation. For, as you have read syntopically on the ideas of God and Man, Truth and Lies, Good and Evil, you have no doubt come to a better understanding of what you believe and how these beliefs affect the way you ought to live. Yet, you also have probably thought that the more you consider these ideas, the more you realize how much you don't know! Regardless it is now time to push on - to consider more seriously the idea of Beauty and, as a conclusion of sorts, how you ought to decide how to live – what we will call a study of Ethics.

It is probably clear to you by now that the ideas you have been studying are intricately intertwined; that is, that your view of one will necessarily influence your view of another. This will also be apparent to you as you consider the ideas of Beauty and Ethics. In a sense both can quite rightly be seen as the fruit or flower of your previous studies, yet both ideas do not lend themselves to the neat comparison/contrast relationship that characterized the ideas in the previous levels. Therefore, you will deal with them separately – roughly a half of the year devoted to each.

Enjoy the literature chosen for this year's study, but more than enjoy, determine to act on what you have learned. Determine to make these four years not an end, but a true beginning. Determine to seek the jewel of wisdom in all its facets, and determine to pursue it in faith, without doubting, so that you will not be like the double-minded man, unstable in all he does. Thank you for being part in the Great Conversation.

Beauty

“Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” It would seem that a nodding agreement to this old maxim would bring an end to our study post haste. Why? Well, inherent in this statement is the assumption that little or no criteria beyond personal taste can be advanced in determining what is or is not beautiful. If it is true that what is beautiful for you may not be beautiful for me, it would seem that the postmodernists may have won the day after all. If we are free to create our own meaning of beauty, independent of all else, than maybe we can indeed do the same for truth, goodness, or any of the Great Ideas.

Yet, can this really be? Is Beauty merely subjective? Can there not be objective standards for judging what is beautiful and what is not? Many have tried to capture some sort of objective standard in the past. Most notably, Thomas Aquinas, the great 13th century Roman Catholic theologian, set forth essential standards for Beauty, saying that for something to be beautiful it must have integrity, proportion, harmony, and clarity. He equated Beauty closely with must have integrity, proportion, harmony, and clarity. He equated Beauty closely with Goodness. For him goodness calms our desires while beauty calms it by being seen or known. Hence, Aquinas would listen to the music of someone like John cage with a rather pinched expression. He would see no clarity, no harmony, no integrity, therefore, no Beauty. While you probably would agree with Aquinas concerning the lack of Beauty in Cage's music, what about judging the degree of beauty in a particular landscape, a person, a painting, a building, or a culture? Things start to get a little fuzzy.

Like most ideas, we can probably find a sort of middle ground in our discussion. Surely there must be some kind of objective standard for Beauty through which room is left for individual taste. Mortimer

Adler supports the importance of coming to an understanding of objective standards for Beauty by noting that in cultures where acceptance of subjectivism and relativism in the sphere of Beauty are accepted, this then spreads to judgements of good and evil, and then to statements about truth. What he is saying is that if beauty is in the eye of the beholder, then surely the line between good and evil and truth and lies will soon be blurred. It would also seem that his observations work the other way as well. As we become more given to relativism in terms of truth and goodness, our idea of beauty follows suit. Can we not see this played out in our culture today? Sadly, even among Christians, we can see that the war rages over what is beautiful and what is not.

The Christian camp can essentially be divided into three groups in its view of the beautiful. In the area of art, for example, fundamentalists tend to look with suspicion and isolate themselves from all contemporary attempts at artistic expression. Transformational Christians campaign for believers to engage and renew the arts. Finally, synthesists tend to justify most forms of art and use them as a means of something good in and of itself. And, if you step out of Christian circles, you'll be faced with a multitude of opinions of what constitutes Beauty. If you don't believe this, take a walk through your local mall this Friday night!

It should be apparent by now that the idea of Beauty is a complex one. Socrates put it simply and... well, beautifully. "Beautiful things are difficult," he said. Indeed they are. However, we must not avoid them because they are difficult. The Bible urges us to pursue an understanding of Beauty - the beauty of nature, beauty in the arts and architecture, beauty of people and nations, and, of course, the definition of Beauty itself, the Shekinah glory of God. It is hoped that this year's study will open your eyes and sharpen your senses, but it is also hoped that it will continue to engage your intellect.

A right understanding of Beauty must necessarily go hand in hand with a right understanding of Truth and Goodness. You cannot have one without the others, or, at least, you cannot possess it wholly. These three (Truth, Goodness, Beauty) have been described as both the fundamental and transcendent values of culture, values by which all other values are judged. We see this idea clarified quite wonderfully in Tolkien's tale, *The Lord of the Rings*. For those of you who have read this work you will recall the state of the Shire prior to Frodo's quest to destroy the ring. The Hobbits existed in a sort of idealized agrarian paradise. For the most part integrity, harmony, clarity reigned and it was beautiful. Now, recall the state of the Shire toward the end of the book when the four hobbits return. The evil wizard, Saruman, had taken up residence at Bag End where he and his group of ruffians had begun to transform the Shire into a wasteland. No integrity, no harmony, no clarity...no Truth, no Goodness, and certainly, no Beauty. It is not until Frodo and his friends rally the other hobbits to stand for what is True that their Goodness can be seen in action. And only when the Shire is scourged of all Lies and Evil does Sam have a chance to begin to return his land to its former state of Beauty. Oh read the *Lord of the Rings* with fresh eyes! Tolkien captures the relationship between Truth, Goodness, and Beauty as only he could.

Ultimately what you believe concerning Truth, Goodness, and Beauty will depend on how you answer this question: Is God or man the measure of all things? In the end this will determine how you will live in this present age. And that leads us to our final topic...

Ethics

Simply stated ethics is the study of right and wrong. In any study of ethics you will learn to make judgements concerning the way you will choose to live. It is also here that you will determine what

motivates you to live as you do. To illustrate this, let us consider a small child. Early on this child may learn whether stealing is either right or wrong. Usually he will accept this teaching without question. However, the day soon arrives when that child will need to choose how he will live. Using our example, he must ask himself, “Will I steal or not?” Not only that but he also must consider his reason for the decision he makes.

Now, as an astute reader, you will have noted that we have strayed a bit beyond the realm of pure ethics (judgement) and have moved into the area of morality (action). That is because it would not be wholly beneficial or practical to simply naval gaze for half a year around moral dilemmas. So, you will at times use the two terms (ethics and morality) interchangeably. In this way it is hoped you will avoid being like the man who knows what is right, but never gets around to doing it. In other words you will have really wrestled with real issues.

You can imagine that judgements about what is right and wrong hit at all points of the compass when you begin to consider the opinions of people who hold one of many worldviews that are manifest about us. But, what is pretty clear to all but the most extreme is that everyone is wired with a desire to know what is the right thing to do. Not only that, but people act on this concept everyday as they make decisions. Should I go over the speed limit even though I’m late for that appointment? Should I skip church today because I’m tired from a late night? Should I ask permission to hunt on Mr. Brown’s land? Should I try to find the owner of the \$10 bill that I found in the mall just now?

Since the Fall man has struggled with the idea of ethical behaviour. Libraries could be filled with the books written on the topic. Wars have been fought over it. Nations have divided. Relationships have been broken. Churches have split. It’s kind of fun to debate a friend over some abstract ethical exception but a serious grappling with one’s own ideas of ethical behaviour is where the rubber hits the road. It’s easy to see that for Plato, Augustine, Calvin, Dewey, and even your local abortionist that decisions about ethics matters, but it should matter for you, too! As one scholar declared, “Ideas have consequences.”

We need to act on what we know and behave in a way that is consistent with what we believe. To try to leave this part of our Great Ideas study in abstraction would be to make one out to be an egghead. No one wants to be labeled as one of those, now, do they?

In the end the decisions that you make concerning your own personal ethic will be based in part on what you have learned in your study of the ideas of God, Man, Truth, Goodness and Beauty. It has certainly been a long-range goal of this course that you will draw on that knowledge as you read the material associated with this last leg of your work, the selection of which is tiny indeed when compared to the epicloth of choice available. However, when considered as a whole, you ought to be well equipped to make the kind of ethical decisions with which you will be faced in the years ahead.

Eric Gill once said, “Take care of the truth and goodness, and beauty will look after itself.” By extension it is safe to add, “...and with these a right relationship with both God and man becomes what our Creator has always intended it to be – a way of life.” Amen! May it be so!

Course Calendar - Great Ideas IV - 2015/2016

Week #	Start Date	Work / Assignment	Current Reading
1	Sept. 8	How To Read a Book study guide (due Sept. 12)	<i>How to Read a Book</i>
2	Sept. 14	Bible study guide (due Sept. 19)	<i>Bible</i> <i>The Republic</i>
3	Sept. 21	Poetry study guide (due Sept. 26)	<i>The Republic</i>
4	Sept. 28	The Republic study guide	<i>The Republic</i>
5	Oct. 5	<u>The Republic Discussion #1</u>	<i>The Republic</i>
6	Oct. 12	The Republic Essay (due Oct. 17)	<i>Song of Roland</i>
7	Oct. 19	<u>Song of Roland Discussion #2</u>	<i>Till We Have Faces</i>
8	Oct. 26	Till We Have Faces Assignment (due Nov. 7)	<i>Till We Have Faces</i>
9	Nov. 2	How Should We Then Live study guide	<i>How Should We Then Live</i>
10	Nov. 9	How Should We Then Live study guide	<i>How Should We Then Live</i>
11	Nov. 16	How Should We Then Live study guide (due Nov. 21)	<i>How Should We Then Live</i>
12	Nov. 23	<u>How Should We Then Live Discussion #3</u>	Short Stories
13	Nov. 30	Short Stories (Beauty) Assignment (due Dec. 12)	Short Stories
14	Dec. 7	Nicomachean Ethics study guide	<i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>
15	Dec. 14	Nicomachean Ethics study guide (due Dec. 19)	<i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>
16	Dec. 21	Smith of Wooton Major Essay (due Jan. 9)	<i>Smith of Wooton Major</i>
		During Christmas Break and first week of January.....	<i>Smith of Wooton Major</i>

17	Jan. 4	The Odyssey study guide	<i>Odyssey</i>
18	Jan. 11	The Odyssey study guide	<i>Odyssey</i>
19	Jan. 18	<u>The Odyssey Discussion #4</u>	<i>Odyssey</i>
20	Jan. 25	The Merchant of Venice reading	<i>The Merchant of Venice</i>
21	Feb. 1	<u>The Merchant of Venice Discussion #5</u>	<i>The Merchant of Venice</i>
22	Feb. 8	Institutes study guide	<i>Institutes</i>
23	Feb. 15	Institutes study guide (due Feb. 20)	<i>Institutes</i>
24	Feb. 22	Institutes Essay (due Mar. 5)	<i>Institutes</i>
25	Mar. 29	The Prince reading	<i>The Prince</i>
26	Mar. 7	<u>The Prince Discussion #6</u>	<i>The Prince</i> Short stories
27	Mar. 14	March Break (can be taken during March - but don't miss a discussion)	
28	Mar. 21	Short Stories (Ethics) assignment (due Apr. 2)	<i>Farmer Giles of Ham</i> Short Stories
29	Mar. 28	<u>Farmer Giles of Ham Discussion #7</u>	<i>Reformed Documents</i> <i>Scarlet Letter</i>
30	Apr. 4	Reformed Documents study guide	<i>Reformed Documents</i> <i>Scarlet Letter</i>
31	Apr. 11	Reformed Documents study guide (due Apr. 16)	<i>Unaborted Socrates</i>
32	Apr. 18	Scarlet Letter Essay (due Apr. 23)	<i>Unaborted Socrates</i>
33	Apr. 25	<u>Unaborted Socrates Discussion #8</u>	<i>Brave New World</i>
34	May 2	reading/catch-up week	<i>Brave New World</i>
35	May 9	Brave New World Essay (due May 21)	
	May 16	Final Essay (due June 4)	

DAILY SCHEDULE

WEEK 1

Day 1-2 - Read the introductory material on the Class Page so you know how the course works and where to find things. Also today, read the instructions and follow the Study Guide for *How to Read a Book*. You will be reading from the last chapters of the book and completing the last two assignments this week. See the Class Site to download/print the study guide and for extra ideas.

Day 3-4 - Follow Lesson Fourteen of the study guide. When complete, submit this assignment for evaluation.

WEEK 2

Day 5 - Complete Lesson 1 in the study guide for *The Bible*. You can find a fillable pdf form for this study guide on the Class Site.

Day 6 - Complete Lesson 2 and 4.

Day 7 - Complete Lesson 3.

Day 8 - Complete Lesson 5. Submit for evaluation.

WEEK 3

Day 9 - This week you will start the third short assignment - Poetry - before we begin some heavier books. Read "She Walks in Beauty" and complete the first poetry question. You will find the Study Guide and additional ideas/resources on the Class Site.

Day 10 - Read "On Growing Old" and complete the second poetry question.

Day 11 - Read "Seeking Beauty" and complete the third poetry question.

Day 12 - Read "Visitors" and "Pied Beauty" and complete the last two poetry questions. Submit this assignment for evaluation.

WEEK 4

Day 13-16 - Begin reading *The Republic* by following the study guide provided. This study guide is not evaluated but is meant to direct your reading in preparation for the first discussion. If you are using a different translation/edition of *The Republic*, you may not have the same editor's introduction for Lesson 1; in that case, use whatever reference or background material on *the Republic* you might have on hand. Lesson 2 begins at Book III until the topic of gymnastics comes up. Lesson 3 covers Book VII. Lesson 4 covers Book X

until the discussion over the danger of poetry. Feel free to read other passages of this long dialogue as time affords, but the ideas covered go beyond the scope of this course. See the Class Site for sample study guide answers.

WEEK 5

Day 17-20 - See the discussion questions below on *The Republic*. Spend this week responding to the ideas in the discussion. Be prepared to look back at *The Republic* throughout.

- *According to Plato's Cave Allegory (Book VII), what is real? Therefore, what is truly beautiful? Are human productions of art beautiful?*
- *Can you summarize what Plato says of art and poetry, especially into book X. Where does it come from? What part of man does it most interact with? Is it good for society? Why or why not?*
- *What do you think of Plato's ideas for the ideal society, especially regarding education?*
- *Any other questions you are interested in, or things you had trouble with?*

WEEK 6

Day 21-24 - Take a week to research and write an essay on **one** of the following topics. See the Tree of Life Student Handbook for essay expectations and formatting. Additional ideas and help are found on the Class Site.

*The Apostle Paul, in the writing to the church in Philippi, shows that he, like all participants in the Great Conversation, was concerned for that which was truthful, good, and beautiful. He exhorts them by saying, "...whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue, and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things." (Philippians 4:8) Why? Because it is all part of the preparation for active obedience to God. (vs. 9) It would seem that Paul is calling us to do the same thing that Plato calls us to – embrace what is true, good, and beautiful. Or is he? Write an essay outlining the similarities and differences in the messages of Paul and Plato, especially as it relates to the idea of what is truly beautiful. Include material from *The Republic*, *The Bible*, and other source (if necessary) to support your ideas.*

or

It may have occurred to you that Plato's Parable of the Cave sound a lot like C.S. Lewis's The Great Divorce. The reason is that Lewis borrowed heavily from Plato's ideas of forms, shadows, reason, and imagination. However, Lewis was no pagan and we read in The Great Divorce a redeemed version of Plato's ideas on the "Cave". Write an essay outlining the similarity of structure between the Parable of the Cave and The Great