

The Great Ideas of Good and Evil



Online Discussion Class



Tree of Life School

2023-2024

Introduction, Schedule, and Exercises

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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*. Later in 2012, we introduced an online, discussion-based version of the course allowing students to interact together. This popular option has been improved each year over the last few years. However, as students who have gone through every level have discovered, their wrestling with the Great Ideas has only begun. Enjoy the journey!

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The Study of the Ideas of Good and Evil

“I am the Alpha and Omega, The Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.”
Rev. 22:13

“Man is the measure of all things.”
Protagorus

“I am the way, the truth, and the life.”
John 14:6a

“You will not surely die.”
Satan (Gen. 3:4)

...so sums up our study over the last two years of the ideas of God, Man, Truth, and Lies. But, what about the ideas of Good and Evil? We run into these words almost every day and across many disciplines. One can hardly consider studies in theology, ethics, psychology, politics, or art (just to name a few), without wrestling with questions about the existence and manifestation of Good and Evil. To be sure, what we come to believe about Good and Evil will have a bearing on how we relate to truth and falsity; beauty and ugliness.

Mortimer Adler sates, “The true is the good of our thinking and the beautiful is a quality that certain things have when they are good as objects of contemplation, love, or as production.” While we might quibble with Adler’s ideas of truth, goodness, and beauty, we should agree that we can better understand goodness and beauty in terms of truth, and truth and goodness in terms of beauty. While they can be considered separately, they are best understood in relation to one another. You will recall that one of the primary aims of the study of the Great Ideas through the Great Books is to contemplate what is True, what is Good, and what is Beautiful.

As you have probably predicted, our view of Good and Evil will be rooted in our concept of God and Man. The psalmist writes, “Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good!” (Psalm 136:1) This goodness of God expressed in this psalm is reiterated throughout Scripture. It is multi-faceted and speaks of God’s sovereign redemptive love; His kindness and generosity to all His creatures; His pity to those in distress; His patience.

On the other hand if, like Protagorus, a person sees “man as the measure of all things”, Good and Evil are not rooted in the character of a Supreme Being who has created man in His own image. These ideas then become, in the words of Montaigne, “in large part the opinion we have of them”. Like Shakespeare’s Hamlet we are free then to determine for ourselves what, if anything, is evil.

So the stage has been set and through the ages thinkers of all stripes have debated the existence, source, and effect of Good and Evil on our world. Some have sought the right application of Good for their own benefit; others for the Common Good of society; and the rest, the Greatest Good for the greatest number. Few have actually sought what *they considered* to be Evil. However, all, in one form or

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another, have had to decide on answer to key questions: Is there a God? If so, who is He? What is He like? What does He require of me? Does Truth exist? If so, how do I apply it to all areas of my life? They also probably wrestled with the same questions that you will tackle this year: Does Good and Evil exist? If so, what are their attributes? How do they affect my perception of the world? My actions? How am I to seek Good? What conflicts arise as I seek to do this?

“Hey, wait a minute!” you might be saying. “Haven’t I already dealt with many of these questions in the books, poems, and stories that I’ve read over the last two years?”

Congratulations! You’re quite astute if this has occurred to you at any time while you’ve been reading this introduction. (That’s the good news.) The better news is that you will, no doubt, re-visit many of the questions and ideas already studied and begin to explore their interconnectedness with this years’ ideas of Good and Evil. Welcome to the Great Conversation! Uncle Screwtape will not be happy.

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How This Course Works

The format of this course brings together the homeschooling character of independent study with the benefits of student/teacher interaction in an online class. As a two-credit course, the Great Ideas of Truth and Lies will demand much of students. There are a number of components to this course, some independent work and others interactive. At any given time, students will be reading from two or maybe three books, as well as working on several exercises. The weekly schedule provided in this guide is essential in following the course. It is the students' responsibility to stay on track with readings and exercises in order to get the most out of our study.

This course includes the following elements:

Regular reading forms the raw material for this course. Students will follow a reading schedule guiding them slowly through some of the longer, more classical books in this course as well as shorter pieces. This is a significant change from previous versions of the course, where long classical works would be read all at once over two or three weeks. Instead, students will now read one or two chapters of these books in instalments, once per week over the course of six to ten weeks. This is intended to allow for students to slowly digest the material as well as appreciate the ideas they are reading. Note that the total volume of reading in the course remains unchanged from before. Other books, including novels, stories, and poetry, will be read at a quicker pace. The reading becomes the subject of discussion classes and writing assignments.

Discussion classes will meet every 2 weeks on Tuesdays (dates and times announced online) and will cover both the ideas in the literature as well as instruction on writing assignments. The discussions will follow a Socratic method (question and answer) and give the opportunity for students to think carefully and inquisitively. The classes are live webinars with audio and video from the teacher, and allowing for audio and text communication from students. Classes are recorded and available for viewing through the week for those missing a scheduled session for whatever reason. Students are required to attend (ideally) or view all discussions. However, students are not marked on their verbal participation in the discussion class; this is intended to foster natural, comfortable interaction rather than force the discussion.

Online quizzes: Before the discussion class, students complete a short quiz based on their reading and the content in the class. Following the class, they complete a quick confirmation of having participated in the discussion class.

Forum questions are given during the weeks without discussion classes, allowing for additional student interaction and as a built-in progress check. Students are required to post a single answer with a specified length that addresses the question. They are marked according to whether the answer addresses the question and provides reasonable support. Students are required to reply to one other post.

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Reading/Study guides and writing exercises are used to help students narrate the content of their readings, process the ideas in the course, and to prepare for discussions and writing assignments. These are checked for completion at the end of the course, along with a rating based on completion of the readings.

Formal writing assignments are given throughout the course to develop students' thinking and practise writing skills. The writing assignments are both descriptive, analytical, and creative. Students will receive written or audio feedback on their writing with suggestions for improvement. The final extended essay of the course will be one that is assembled, edited, and improved in steps, and will represent their thinking on basic ideas of the course.

Home discussion questions are given for parents and students to talk at home about some of the ideas and applications coming from the course readings and to connect them to biblical teaching. **These are optional but recommended.** These questions give more opportunity to cover certain ideas, issues, and opinions than would be suitable for class discussion and in which there may be difference among Christians. Moreover, these questions are intended to maintain the homeschooling character in this online class. See page 105.

A personal **Great Ideas Notebook** will be kept by each student for recording ideas, quotations, questions, examples, impressions, facts, and dates from their study. This is an open-ended and private exercise that will span the entire Great Ideas course to help students develop the habit of thoughtful note-taking, and to gather material for their writing. This will be **optional but recommended** as a helpful exercise. At the end of the course, opportunity will be given to provide evidence of a Great Ideas Notebook for bonus points. See suggestions on page 104.

Evaluation Scheme

Submitted Writing Assignments / Essays	50%
Forum Discussions	20%
Class Participation / Followup	20%
Quizzes (optional)	0%
Completion of Reading and Notes (end of year mark)	10%
Great Ideas Notebook (optional - extra credit)	+5% max

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Two Week Cycle of the Course

Week	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday/Thursday/Friday
1	Great Book reading	Online Discussion Class + quiz	Writing exercises, other reading
2	Great Book reading	respond to Forum Question	Assignment due on Saturday

Condensed Weekly Schedule

Week	Date	Monday - Great Book Reading	Tuesday - Online Class / Forum Question	Submitted Assignments	Other reading this week
1	Sept 5*	Iliad 1-2	<u>Class 1: Introduction / Iliad background and themes</u>	HTRAB study guide	HTRAB / begin Ivanhoe
2	11	Iliad 3, (4), 5	Forum Question	HTRAB Study Guide due Sept. 16	HTRAB / Ivanhoe
3	18	Iliad 6, (7-8), 9	<u>Class 2: Achilles as a tragic hero</u>		Ivanhoe
4	25	Iliad (10-15) 16	Forum Question	Ivanhoe Essay due Sep.30	Ivanhoe
5	Oct. 2	Iliad 17-18	<u>Class 3: The Turn of the Tide</u>	Short Story reading / questions	Short Stories
6	10	Iliad 19, (20), 21	Forum Question	Short Stories Assignment due Oct. 14	Short Stories
7	16	Iliad 22-23	<u>Class 4: The Showdown</u>	Check Iliad Study Guide questions	
8	23	Iliad 24	Forum Question	Iliad Essay outline due Oct. 28	Read Beowulf completely
9	30	Beowulf l.1-1250	<u>Class 5: Beowulf introduction, Fate revisited</u>	Beowulf SG questions	
10	Nov. 6	Beowulf l. 1251-2200	Forum Question	Iliad Essay due Nov. 11 Beowulf SG questions	Beowulf
11	13	Beowulf l. 2200-3182	<u>Class 6: Beowulf conclusion - Any Christianity?</u>	Beowulf Study Guide questions	finish Beowulf; read Gawain completely
12	20	Gawain laisses 1-2	Forum Question	Beowulf Study Guide due Nov. 25	Gawain
13	27	Gawain laisses 3-4	<u>Class 7: Courtly Virtues</u>	work on Gawain essay material	finish Gawain Pre-read Hamlet
14	Dec. 4	Hamlet Acts 1-2	Forum Question	Gawain Essay due Dec. 9	Hamlet
15	11	Hamlet Acts 3-4	<u>Class 8: The Heart of Hamlet</u>	Hamlet assignment questions	Hamlet

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16	Jan 2	Hamlet Act 5	Forum Question	Hamlet Assignment due Jan. 6	Read the Ideal Husband
17	8	Ideal Husband	<u>Class 9: The Ideal Husband</u>	Job Study Guide Lessons 1-2	Begin Job
18	15	Macbeth Acts 1-2	Forum Question	Ideal Husband Assignment due Jan. 20 Job SG Lessons 3-5	Job
19	22	Macbeth Acts 3-4	<u>Class 10: Macbeth</u>	Job SG Lessons 6-8	Job
20	29	Macbeth Act 5	Forum Question	Job SG due Feb. 3 Check Macbeth SG	Begin Wuthering Heights
21	Feb. 5	Screwtape Letters	<u>Class 11: Macbeth/CS Lewis</u>	Screwtape Letters Study Guide	Wuthering Heights
22	12	Screwtape Letters	Forum Question	Job Essay due Feb. 17 Screwtape Letters SG	Wuthering Heights
23	19	Screwtape Letters	<u>Class 12: Spiritual Warfare in Screwtape Letters</u>	Check Screwtape Letters SG	Wuthering Heights
24	26	Great Divorce	Forum Question	Wuthering Heights Assignment due Mar. 3	Great Divorce
25	Mar. 4	Great Divorce	<u>Class 13: The Great Divorce of what?</u>		Finish readings
	11	-----Break Week-----			
26	18	Institutes ch. 1	Forum Question	Essay on Good and Evil due Mar. 23	Start reading Poetry
27	25	Institutes ch. 2-5	<u>Class 14: John Calvin and his Institutes</u>	Poetry questions	Poetry
28	Apr. 1	Institutes ch. 6-10	Forum Question	Poetry Assignment due Apr. 6	Poetry
29	8	Institutes ch. 11-18	<u>Class 15: Universe Next Door</u>	Universe Next Door readings/SG	Start reading Lord of the Flies
30	15	Institutes ch. 19	Forum Question	Universe Next Door readings/SG	Lord of the Flies
31	22	Institutes ch. 20	<u>Class 16: Lord of the Flies</u>	Universe Next Door readings/SG	Start reading Moby Dick
32	29	Institutes ch. 21-24	Forum Question	Universe Next Door Study Guide due May 4	Moby Dick
33	May 6	Institutes ch. 25	<u>Class 17: Moby Dick</u>		Moby Dick
34	13	finish readings	Forum Question	Institutes Study Guide due May 18	Moby Dick
35	21	finish readings	<u>Class 18: Moby Dick</u>	Final Essay due June 29	finish readings

* indicates the scheduled work starts on a Tuesday due to a holiday on Monday.

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Week 1

Monday	Read <i>Iliad</i> 1-2 (follow study guide instructions)	<input type="radio"/>
Tuesday	<i>Complete online Quiz</i>	<input type="radio"/>
	Class 1 @ _____ "Introduction to the Course, and <i>Iliad</i> Background / Themes"	<input type="radio"/>
	Complete Discussion Followup	<input type="radio"/>
Exercises	Begin the Study Guide for How to Read a Book	<input type="radio"/>
	Complete Lessons 1-2 in the <i>Iliad</i> study guide (unmarked)	<input type="radio"/>
Other reading	Begin reading <i>Ivanhoe</i>	<input type="radio"/>

Study Guide for The Iliad

Background: In Year One of this Great Ideas course, you read the story of the Trojan War in Edith Hamilton's Mythology. This year, you have the opportunity to obtain more of an appreciation for the magnificent epic, The Iliad by reading the real thing (in translation of course). The Iliad was written or at least composed by the great Greek poet, Homer, who probably lived sometime during the 8th Century BC. For more than 27 centuries this poem has been an important part of Western oral and written tradition.

The Iliad is prized by scholars for its beauty, literary excellence, imaginative power, and drama. But it is much more than this. As you read and study the poem this year, you will find yourself saying, "Hey! I've read something like this before." Indeed, you probably have, as many great writers throughout the ages have modelled their work after the Homeric epic.

However, there is even much more than this. The Iliad expresses themes and deals with issues that strike a chord with every person. This is because all great poetry has a universality about it that lifts the mind and soul of its reader above the particulars of the poem. In The Iliad, Homer confronts us with the Greek concept of honour, courage, wrath, love, friendship, grief, vengeance, forgiveness, fidelity, and endurance. (*Invitation to the Classics*, pg. 30) He also portrays for us classic characters:

Helen, the beauty whose kidnapping set two great armies at odds with one another.

Achilles, half man/half god, who seems an uncomfortable hero for many.

Hector, the great Trojan who defends home and family even though the reason is distasteful to him.

Paris, the sniveling coward who steals another man's wife and expects others to defend his unjust actions.

And a cast of thousands, each bigger than life. This would seem to be the stuff of a giant Hollywood blockbuster. Alas, Homer beat them to the punch by centuries.

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Heroism was important to the Greeks and The Iliad is full of heroes. Do you recall the story of Odysseus slaying all the suitors for his wife after his long absence from Ithaca? When he is done, there are two suitors left – a poet and a priest. He kills the priest and leaves the poet. The reason? To the Greeks poets were a gift from the gods. They were to be honoured and respected. Of course, who else would be left to tell of the heroic deeds of Odysseus? The bard of course. So, you see that self-glorification defines the Greek hero and no two heroes in The Iliad better depict this essential Greek virtue than Hector and Achilles. Both men are driven by different motives, but both are clearly heroes in the Greek sense of the word. This you will see in abundance throughout the poem. Watch for it.

Another obvious aspect of The Iliad is that it is a war story. War is necessary if the hero is to be – well – a hero. What is ironic, however, is that for the most part, the Greeks despised war. Unlike the Romans who loved a good war story, the Greeks saw the destruction and desolation that war brought. We see this clearly with the ruin of Troy. The victorious Greeks, after ten years of hard combat and tedious siege, willingly participate in the sack of the great city, but the thrill of victory is masked by the despair of destruction. Lovers of peace who glorified the hero. It is a complex combination and one that Homer tackles throughout the poem. Watch also for this.

In a day when our culture generally sees heroism as good and war as evil, we will struggle with the way that Homer portrays his heroes and the “matter of factness” of the battle scenes. You will see good and evil in a volatile cocktail. You will come to understand the Greek mind more and more and hopefully to see some of what is good and evil in our own culture. It almost goes without saying that you will also revisit ideas that have been covered in the first two levels of the Great Ideas for Homer also reveals much of the Greek ideas about God, man, truth, and lies. Then again, how could it not be so? Homer has long been a participant in the Great Conversation.

Lesson One

Read Book One

1. Achilles is one of the heroes of The Iliad. What do we know about the prophecy of his future that is significant to the story?

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2. Why is Achilles angry in Book One?

3. Based on what you have read thus far, what kind of leader is Agamemnon? Explain.

Lesson Two

Read Book Two

1. What role does Agememnon’s dream play in Book Two?

2. Identify some of the main characters in The Iliad by placing the appropriate name in its corresponding blank.

_____	central character of The Iliad
_____	King of Troy, father of Hector and Paris
_____	King of Ithaca, loved by Athena

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- _____ Achilles best friend
- _____ King of the gods
- _____ leader if the Greek forces
- _____ kidnapper of Helen
- _____ husband of Helen
- _____ greatest of the Trojans
- _____ defender of the Greeks, god who hates Troy
- _____ reason for the war
- _____ oldest counselor of Greek leader
- _____ god who loves Paris and Helen
- _____ leader of the Dardanians, hero of The Aenied
- _____ mother of Achilles

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Week 2

Monday	Read Iliad 3, (4), 5 (follow study guide instructions)	<input type="radio"/>
Tuesday	<i>Forum Question:</i> Give one or two take-home tips for smart reading from this section of HTRAB.	<input type="radio"/>
Exercises	Complete the Study Guide for How to Read a Book (due Sept. 16) Complete Lessons 3-4 for the Iliad Begin collecting ideas for the Ivanhoe Essay (see Week 4)	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>
Other reading	Continue reading <i>Ivanhoe</i>	<input type="radio"/>

Forum Question (Draft/Notes)

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.