

The Great Ideas of Truth and Lies



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 Truth and Lies

Picture the scene. Freshman university students are sitting packed into a room that is obviously too small to hold the entire class. The eminent Dr. Phil O'Sophy enters and sizes up the audience. "Some of them will have to go," he muses. Without a word of introduction he turns to the blackboard and scrawls, *CAN ANYTHING BE KNOWN?*. He announces to the class, "I want 500 words in answer to this question by Wednesday." He walks out of the room. The students look at one another in stunned silence. Professor O'Sophy will get his wish. Half the class fails to show on Wednesday.

This fictionalized account is repeated in classroom after classroom in many of our major universities every fall. But it's not the old ploy of knocking down class size with which we are concerned here; it's the question.

Can anything be known?

Is there such a thing as truth?

If so, what is it?

How do I get it?

What do I do with it if it is obtained?

The pursuit of truth is as old as man himself. Before God even creates Adam, we read, "In the beginning God". GOD, the first person spoken of in the Bible. The very word denotes majesty; that basis for all that there is; the sustainer of all creation; or, as we read in John 14:6, the very essence of all sound knowledge. In other words God is Truth and because he is Truth, in Him can be found no Lie. Hence the inspiration for the second year of the study of the Great Ideas through the Great Books.

Because God (Truth) created man, we are stamped with His image. It comes as no surprise then that man has always sought after the Truth. What makes the pursuit of Truth so difficult is that the Fall of man, precipitated in part by the Father of Lies, Satan, has resulted in our loss of perfection. We are now a deeply flawed creation - totally depraved in fact; that is, every inclination is toward sin. This has made man's pursuit of Truth perilous and, as is his nature, has devised a veritable obstacle course on which to run this race.

For many, to speak the truth is to merely say what we think or believe. Conversely, to lie is to say the opposite of what we think or believe. As commendable as it may be to "tell the truth" in this sense, this definition does not satisfy at least one aspect of the Ideas of Truth and Lies. For example, someone may say what they think or believe and be entirely in error because their beliefs are based on falsehoods. Therefore, a study of Truth and Lies must be more than learning to tell the truth as we know it. It must get to the heart of the age old questions:

What ultimately is true? and How do we know Truth?

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In the Western world this all began with Thales who sought to determine what lay beyond the diverse physical realm that was all around him; to seek what holds it all together. In other words, what is it that unites all things? This seeking after The Ultimate Reality (Truth) has been the guiding passion of philosophers down through the ages. For the Greeks this ultimate reality was a very abstract idea. They knew it was infinite and they knew that it was eternal but they did not see it for what it was. That view was left to the Hebrews who, long before the Greeks, understood that the One who held everything together was a personal Being. It is in Him that we live and move and have our being. This was a very radical thought and one that served to divide seekers of Truth to the present day.

Until the 13th century the Greek and, later, the Judeo-Christian worldviews dominated the West. Then along came Thomas Aquinas whose signature work, Summa Theologica, was an attempt at using Aristotelian thought in addition to Revelation, rendering what has come to be known as The Great Synthesis. Its impact on the Church was staggering and, three hundred years later, at the Council of Trent, his works were placed at the altar alongside the Scriptures.

Since then philosophy has become a veritable smorgasbord of "isms". From Descartes to Locke; Hume to Kant; Kierkegaard to Nietzsche, we are left swimming in a pool of competing worldviews. All of this makes understanding the ideas of Truth and Lies quite difficult to unpack for today's student. In fact, we live in an age where there is an attempt to force Truth to the sidelines by a culture that demands tolerance of all beliefs and relativism to reign supreme. Truth is in the eye of the beholder for many today. It is as if Truth exists on shifting sand and, by extension, a Lie cannot exist at all.

However, even young children can see through this awkward scepticism. Mark Twain, in The Prince and the Pauper, effectively illustrates this in a scene where young Edward, clothed in rags, hungry, beaten, sleeping in a cattle stall, is discovered by two peasant girls, Margery and Prissy. When asked who he is, Edward replies that he is the King of England. Prissy responds,

"Didst hear him Margery? He saith he is the king. Can that be true?"

"How can it be else but true, Prissy? Would he say a lie? For look you, Prissy, an it were not true, it would be a lie. It surely would be. Now think on't it. For all things that be not true, be lies - thou canst make naught else out of it."

It was a good tight argument, without a leak in it anywhere, and it left Prissy's half doubts not a leg to stand on. She considered a moment, then put the king upon his honor with the simple remark, "If thou art truly the king, then I believe thee."

Quite simply, Truth and Lies exist, and it is necessary for all who declare intellectual honesty to determine what is True and to act what is discovered. To not do so is to live a Lie and Margery does not allow for that.

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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 3 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.

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 136.

A personal **Great Ideas Notebook** may 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.

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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Three 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	Writing exercises, other reading
3	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 (due on Saturday)	Other reading this week
1	Sept 5*	How to Read a Book	Forum Question		Out of the Silent Planet
2	11	How to Read a Book	Class 1 - Introduction to Course		Out of the Silent Planet
3	18	How to Read a Book	Forum Question		Out of the Silent Planet
4	25	Oedipus Rex	Forum Question	Out of the Silent Planet - Outline/Essay due Sep 30	Short Stories
5	Oct. 2	Oedipus Rex	Class 2 - The Oedipus Trilogy, Greek Fate		Short Stories
6	10	Oedipus at Colonnus	Forum Question		Short Stories
7	16	Oedipus at Colonnus	Forum Question	Short Story Assignment due Oct. 21	Philippians
8	23	Antigone	Class 3 - The Lie of Oedipus		Philippians
9	30	Antigone	Forum Question		Philippians
10	Nov. 6	The Importance of Being Earnest	Forum Question	Bible Study Guide due Nov. 13	The Importance of Being Earnest
11	13	Tartuffe	Class 4 - Satire (Two Comedies)		Tartuffe
12	20	Gulliver's Travels I	Forum Question		(Tartuffe/Earnest plays)
13	27	Gulliver's Travels II	Forum Question	Comparative Essay due Dec. 2	(Tartuffe/Earnest plays)
14	Dec. 4	Gulliver's Travels III	Class 5 - More Satire in Gulliver's Travels		Silas Marner
15	11	Gulliver's Travels IV	Forum Question		Silas Marner

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16	Jan 2	Institutes I	Forum Question	Gulliver's Travels Essay due Jan. 6	Silas Marner
17	8	Institutes II	Class 6 - Silas Marner and Redemption?		Poetry
18	15	Institutes III/IV	Forum Question		Poetry
19	22	Institutes VI/VII	Forum Question	Poetry Assignment due Jan. 27	Poetry
20	29	Institutes VIII	Class 7 - Institutes of the Christian Religion		Much Ado About Nothing
21	Feb. 5	Institutes IX/X/XI	Forum Question		Much Ado About Nothing
22	12	Institutes XII/XIV	Forum Question	Much Ado About Nothing Assignment Feb. 17	Much Ado About Nothing
23	19	Much Ado About Nothing	Class 8 - Much Ado about Nothing, Games of Love		Institutes XV
24	26	Institutes XVI	Forum Question		To Kill a Mockingbird
25	Mar. 4	Institutes XVII	Forum Question	Institutes Study Guide due Mar. 16	To Kill a Mockingbird
	11	-----Break Week-----			
26	18	Rasselas	Class 9 - To Kill a Mockingbird, Injustice		Rasselas: the Prince of Abyssinia
27	25	Rasselas	Forum Question		Rasselas: the Prince of Abyssinia
28	Apr. 1	Postmodern Times 1	Forum Question	Rasselas Essay due Apr.6	Ecclesiastes / Rasselas
29	8	Postmodern Times 2-3	Class 10 - Rasselas and the Search for Contentment		Ecclesiastes / Rasselas
30	15	Postmodern Times 4	Forum Question		Catchup
31	22	Postmodern Times 5-7	Forum Question	Final Rasselas Essay Revision due Apr. 27	Catchup
32	29	Postmodern Times 8-10	Class 11 - Postmodernism, Lies in Western Culture		Great Expectations
33	May 6	Postmodern Times 11	Forum Question		Great Expectations
34	13	Postmodern Times 12	Forum Question		Great Expectations
35	20	Postmodern Times 13	Class 12 - Final Class	Postmodern Times Study Guide due May 25 Great Expectations Essay due June 29	Great Expectations

* indicates the scheduled work starts on a Tuesday because of a holiday in Monday

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Week 1

Monday	Read <i>How to Read a Book</i> ch. 6-7	<input type="radio"/>
Tuesday	Respond to the Forum Question on the class site: <i>Based on your reading so far, give one key step or instruction about analytical reading. Include a quotation and explain why it is important to truly understand a book.</i>	<input type="radio"/>
Exercises	Complete the Reading Guide for <i>How to Read a Book</i> , ch. 6-7 Post under the "Introduce yourself"	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>
Other reading	Begin <i>Out of the Silent Planet</i> (essay in Week 4)	<input type="radio"/>

Forum Question (Draft/Notes)

[illegible]

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How to Read a Book Reading Guide for ch. 6-7

Background: It is fashionable these days to speak of reading the *Great Books*. You know the Great Books don't you? They're the "every thinking person wants to read; knows they should read; doesn't really know how to go about reading; can't understand them once they start, so they give up" kinds of books. These are the books with authors' names like Homer, Herodotus, Euclid, Virgil, St. Augustine, Luther, Shakespeare, Pascal, Rousseau, Melville, Tolstoy, and Solzhenitsyn. They are not all books with which we might agree. Quite frankly we would find ourselves disagreeing with much that they say. However, they are the books that have shaped Western culture. *The Republic*, *The City of God*, *The Prince*, *Don Quixote*, *Paradise Lost*, *Candide*, *Faust*, and, of course, *The Holy Bible*. We recognise the titles. We may even have lingered for varying periods of time within their pages. However, very few of us have read these books. I mean *really read* them.

Why? These books are not easy reading. They push us and tax our faculties. They do not let us take the easy way out. We would just as soon catch the movie or read the Readers' Digest version. But, we must not. We must learn how to read so that we can find out for ourselves what they say; what the authors of these classics are saying to us.

The authors of the text for this course are not so concerned about reading a lot of books. In fact, they agree with Thomas Hobbes when he said, "If I read as many books as most men do, I would be as dullwitted as they are." Mr. Hobbes, humility aside, touches on a key point to being a good reader. We too often equate good reading with the volume of books read or the speed with which they are read. No, good reading is more than that. **Good reading is when the author and reader meet and the reader understands what the author is teaching.** It seems like a simple task when put in simple words. But is it so easy?

What is good reading? What kinds of skills are needed to read the Great Books? Is it possible for someone like yourself to acquire these skills? What benefit can you hope to gain from your efforts? What kind of books should you be reading? Are there books that should be avoided? These and other questions are answered in *How to Read a Book*.

On April 8, 1933, William Lyon Phelps, American educator and author, delivered the following radio broadcast. In it he discusses the value of owning books. As you read it, I hope you catch a vision for reading - not just a score of novels or newspapers, or magazines, or other "earthly" compositions; for while these are suitable to inform and/or entertain us, they cannot often be classified as great books. No, it is hoped that you begin the lifelong process of reading books that teach you about the world and, more importantly, something about yourself. Read well - not in quantity, but in quality.

Owning Books by William Lyon Phelps

(Taken from *The World's Greatest Speeches*, Copeland and Lamm editors) Dover Publications 1973

The habit of reading is one of the greatest resources of mankind; and we enjoy reading good books that belong to us much more than if they are borrowed. A borrowed book is like a guest in the house; it must be treated with punctiliousness, with a certain considerate formality. You must see that it sustains no damage; it must not suffer while under your roof. You cannot leave it carelessly, you cannot mark in it,

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you cannot turn down the pages, you cannot use it familiarly. And then, some day, although this is seldom done, you really ought to return it.

But your own books belong to you; you treat them with that affectionate intimacy that annihilates formality. Books are for use, not for show; you should own no book that you are afraid to mark up, or afraid to place on a table, wide open and face down. A good reason for marking favourite passages in books is that this practice enables you to remember more easily the significant sayings, to refer to them quickly, and then in later years, it is like visiting a forest where you once blazed a trail. You have a pleasure of going over the old ground, and recalling both the intellectual scenery and your own earlier self.

Everyone should begin collecting a private library in youth; the instinct of private property, which is fundamental in human beings, can here be cultivated with every advantage and no evils. One should have one's own bookshelves, which should not have doors, glass windows or keys; they should be free and accessible to the hand as well as the eye. The best of mural decorations is books; they are more varied in colour and appearance than any wallpaper; they are more attractive in design, and they have the prime advantage of being separate personalities, so that if you sit alone in a room in the firelight, you are surrounded with intimate friends. The knowledge that they are there in plain view is both stimulating and refreshing. You do not have to read them all. Most of my indoor life is spent in a room containing six thousand books; and I have a stock answer to the invariable question that comes from strangers. "Have you read all of these books?" "Some of them twice." This reply is both true and unexpected.

There are of course no friends like living, breathing, corporeal men and women; my devotion to reading has never made me a recluse. How could it? Books are of the people, by the people, for the people. Literature is the immortal part of history; it is the best and most enduring part of personality. But book-friends have this advantage over living friends; you can enjoy the most truly aristocratic society in the world whenever you want it. The great dead are beyond our physical reach, and the great living are usually almost as inaccessible; as for our personal friends and acquaintances, we cannot always see them. Perchance they are asleep, or away on a journey. But in a private library, you can at any moment converse with Socrates or Shakespeare or Carlyle or Dumas or Dickens or Shaw or Barrie or Galsworthy. And there is no doubt that in these books you see these men at their best. They wrote for you. They "laid themselves out," they did their ultimate best to entertain you, to make a favourable impression. You are necessary to them as an audience is to an actor; only instead of seeing them masked, you look into their inmost heart of heart.

For the following questions, perform an inspectional reading of chapters 6-11

The Third Level of Reading: Analytical Reading.

I The First Stage of Analytical Reading: Rules for Finding What a Book is About

1. _____ the book according to kind and subject matter.
2. State what the _____ book is about with the utmost brevity.
3. Enumerate its major parts in their order and relation, and _____ these parts as

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you have outlined the whole.

4. _____ the problem or problems the author is trying to solve.

II The Second Stage of Analytical Reading:

Rules for Interpreting a Book's Content

5. Come to terms with the author by interpreting his _____ words.

6. Grasp the author's leading propositions by dealing with his most _____ sentences.

7. Know the author's arguments, by finding them in, or constructing them out of, _____ of sentences.

8. Determine which of his _____ the author has solved, and which he has not; and of the latter, decide which the author knew he had failed to solve.

III The Third Stage of Analytical Reading: Rules for Criticizing a Book as a Communication of Knowledge

A. General maxims of Intellectual Etiquette

9. Do not begin criticism until you have completed your outline and your _____ of the book.

10. Do not disagree disputatiously or contentiously.

11. Demonstrate that you recognise the difference between _____ and mere personal _____ by presenting good reasons for any critical judgement you make.

B. Special Criteria for Points of Criticism

12. Show wherein the author is _____.

13. Show wherein the author is _____.

14. Show wherein the author is _____.

15. Show wherein the author's analysis or account is _____.