

# A Study of the Great Ideas (Truth and Lies)



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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*. 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 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?*

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 13<sup>th</sup> 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.

### Outline

The following schedule is given in the hopes that it will help you work your way through the course requirements with greater ease than if left to set up your own schedule. You will of course understand that you might spend an entire year studying only one the required books - indeed with some you could spend a lifetime. However, it is not within the scope of this Great Ideas course to fully mine all that there is to learn from the books that you will read. It is hoped that you will certainly get something from them and, at the very least, that you will be less intimidated by the thought of tackling more of the great literature of Western civilization by the time you finish this year than you were before you started.

The following schedule is just a guideline and the amount of time to be spent on each work is only a suggestion. You may find that you need an extra week to work through one book while not as much time as is suggested to study another. So be it! However, try to keep the big picture in sight at all times. The course is designed to be completed in one “academic” year (about 32 weeks). You should make every effort to do so. For the average student this may mean committing three hours or more each day to reading, answering questions, and preparing essays. You may even find that extra time will need to be spent completing the reading selections. That said, try to work on the material when you are freshest. The material demands your best and you will benefit most if you put an honest effort into the course work. It is expected that you will complete the requirements in the order they are presented. All the best!



### Suggested Schedule for Study of the Great Ideas

#### Truth and Lies

How to Read a Book (2 weeks)

Out of the Silent Planet (1 week)

Oedipus, Oedipus at Collonus, Antigone (3 weeks)

The Importance of Being Ernest and Tartuffe (2 weeks)

The Consolation of Philosophy (2 weeks)

Essay on The Consolation of Philosophy (1 week)

Short Story Unit (2 weeks)

The Bible (2 weeks)

Silas Marner (1 week)

Calvin's Institutes - Book Two (3 weeks)

Much Ado About Nothing (1 week)

Rasselas (2 weeks)

Essay on Rasselas (1 week)

Poetry Unit (1 week)

To Kill a Mockingbird (1 week)

Post-Modern Times (3 weeks)

Essay on Post-modern Times (1 week)

Great Expectations (2 weeks)

Total - 31 weeks

\* Part of the requirements for this course is to work through the material in the text, Streams of Civilization Vol. 2. You will note that time has not been scheduled for this. There is, however, a study guide in your binder and you should set aside time each day for working at these requirements. A steady pace will have you complete the work by the end of the 32 weeks.





## Study Guide for *Oedipus Rex*

### Background to the play

The playwright Sophocles lived in Greece from 496 to 406 B.C. during the “Golden Age” of Greek art and drama.

His play *Oedipus Rex* starts in the middle of the story. Yet the Greek audience would be familiar with the beginning. In fact, they would already know the whole story, and, just as we would today, they attended the theatre to see how Sophocles would present the drama. In order that you too can have the insight the Greeks had as they watched the drama unfold, here is the background information you need to know.

It is a dreadful and pitiful story. Laios and Jocasta, the king and queen of Thebes, were told by the god Apollo that their future son would kill his father and marry his mother. When a son is born to them, they try to ensure that the prophecy will not come true. They drive a metal pin through the infant’s ankles to disable him, and give him to a shepherd, with instructions to abandon him to die of exposure on the nearby mountain, Kithairon. The shepherd takes the child up the mountain, but in pity gives him to a fellow shepherd he meets there, who comes from Corinth, on the other side of the mountain range. This shepherd gives the baby to the childless king and queen of Corinth, Polybus and Merope. They bring the child up as their own, and name him Oedipus [Ee'-di-pus], which in Greek means “swollen foot”, his feet having been injured by the metal pin. So Oedipus grows up in Corinth as the king’s son, with no idea of his real parentage, and Laios and Jocasta believe that their child is dead and the prophecy of Apollo false.

After Oedipus becomes a young adult, a man who had drunk too much wine at a banquet tells him that he is not the real son of Polybus. Now in doubt, Oedipus goes to Delphi, to the oracle of Apollo, to ask the god who his parents are. All he is told is that he is destined kill his father and marry his mother. Oedipus resolves therefore never to return to Corinth, and sets out to make a new life for himself elsewhere.

On his journey he comes to a place where three roads meet, and in the narrow place is ordered off the road by the driver of a chariot carrying an old man. In the ensuing fight, Oedipus in self-defense kills the old man and all his attendants, except one, who escapes and takes the news to Thebes. The old man in the chariot was Laios, king of Thebes. Oedipus unknowingly has killed his father, and thus the first part of Apollo’s prophecy is fulfilled.

Oedipus continues on his way and eventually arrives in Thebes. He finds the city in distress. The Sphinx monster--part bird, part lion, part woman--is killing the young men of Thebes and refuses to leave until someone solves her riddle. All who had tried had failed, and met their death. The Thebans offer the kingship of the city and the hand in marriage of Jocasta, the widowed queen, as a reward to anyone who can answer the riddle. Oedipus volunteers to

answer it: “What walks on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon, and three legs in the evening?” Oedipus answers correctly. It is Man, who goes on all fours as a child, on two feet as an adult, and on three as an old man, when he has a cane to help him along.

Oedipus marries Jocasta and becomes king of Thebes. Now the second part of the prophecy is fulfilled, but he does not know it. For many years he rules the city with honour. He has two daughters and two sons. Then a plague breaks out in Thebes. The people of the city are dying, the cattle are dying, the crops are dying. The Thebans pray at the temples, and a delegation of priests comes to the palace to beg Oedipus to save them. Neither they nor Oedipus have any idea that it is the presence of Oedipus that has brought a curse on Thebes. The play begins here.

### **Things to know about a Greek Play:**

**Characters:** Usually only three at a time on the stage. They wear large masks with exaggerated facial expressions, and high platform shoes, so they can be seen by the sizable audience.

**Audience:** In ancient Greece, everyone in town attended the theatre, since the performances were annual religious exercises accompanied by sacrifice and ritual dancing and singing.

**Theatre:** Consisted of three areas: a raised stage for the actors, a flat circular area (called the orchestra) for the chorus, and the seats rising up the side of a steep hill for the audience. The background scenery (*skene*) for the stage was usually the doors of a palace. All the action took place in front of this building. Violence was never portrayed on stage; violent events are reported by a messenger.

**Prologue:** The opening scene. Explains the situation at the beginning of the play.

**Parados:** The entrance of the chorus.

**Chorus:** A group of twelve to fifteen men speaking in unison. They respond to and comment on the action.

**Choragos:** Leader of the chorus with an individual speaking part.

**Choral Ode:** song sung by the chorus, divided into portions called strophe and antistrophe. A choral ode separates each scene from the next.

**Exodos:** The final scene. The chorus or choragos speaks the concluding words.

## Dramatic Irony

We use irony in our speech daily. It is when we deliberately, but not deceptively, say the opposite of what we mean. For example, I might sadly look out the window on a dreary rainy day and say, "Well, it sure is a nice day for our picnic." Those who hear me know I really mean just the opposite: it's a bad day for a picnic.

Dramatic irony is a little different from regular irony. Dramatic irony occurs when a character says something that he believes to be a true and simple statement, but to the audience it means much more because they have more information than the character. It may be that the character says something about himself, his intentions, his understanding of the situation, or another character, and the audience knows that there is very much more to what he is saying than the character realizes. An example from the Bible can be found in John 11:47-50.

Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. "What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish."

What Caiaphas meant by "one man die for the people" was perfectly true, but not in the way that he meant it. He thought that by getting rid of Jesus, the Jews would avoid Roman punitive action for their habitual rebellion. In truth, Jesus did die for his people, but it was death of redemption, not of politics, and it atoned for many both Jew and Gentile. And the further irony is that the Jews did receive punitive action anyway in the year 70 when the Roman armies destroyed Jerusalem.

Another Biblical example is found in Matthew 27:24,25:

When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!" All the people answered, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!"

It is the crowd that is speaking dramatic irony. They do not realize that the blood of Christ would truly be on their heads, and that very generation would suffer God's punishment about forty years later. They say they will take the punishment, thinking there won't be any, but we the readers know what is to happen to them in the near future.

So the difference between irony and dramatic irony is that irony deliberately says the opposite of what is meant, while dramatic irony unwittingly says more than what is meant. *Oedipus* has heaps of dramatic irony. It could hardly be avoided, since the point of the play is Oedipus finding out something about himself that the audience already knows.

## TRUTH AND LIES

### Prologue

1. On page 5, Oedipus speaks of the people's sickness. What is the dramatic irony in this speech? Mention what Oedipus means to say, as well as the additional meaning that he doesn't realize. [Do this for each question you are asked about dramatic irony.]

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2. When Creon tells Oedipus of the circumstances surrounding Laios' death (page 9), he says that the messenger reported that it was a band of men that killed him. We know that it was Oedipus alone that killed him. Why do you think the messenger would bring this false story?

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3. What is the irony near the bottom of page 9?

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### Scene I and Ode I

1. What is the irony at the bottom of page 13? At the top of page 14?

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## TRUTH AND LIES

		<b>Tree of Life School</b>	
		Truth and Lies	
Assignment	Essay	Description	Mark
1		How to Read a Book Study Guide	
2		Out of the Silent Planet Novel Study	
3		Sophocles Study Guide	
4		The Plays of Wilde and Moliere	
5		The Consolation of Philosophy Study Guide	
	1	Consolation of Philosophy Essay	
6		Short Stories Study Guide	
7		Bible Study Guide	
8		Silas Marner Novel Study	
9		Calvin's Institutes Book 2 Study Guide	
10		Much Ado About Nothing Play Study	
11		Rasellas Study Guide	
	2	Rasselas Essay	
12		Poetry Unit Study Guide	
13		To Kill A Mockingbird Novel Study	
14		Postmodern Times Study Guide	
	3	Postmodern Times Essay	
15		Great Expectations Novel Study	
		<b>Total for God and Man Assignments (75%)</b>	
		<b>Total for World History One (25%)</b>	
		<b>Final Mark</b>	