

# Copyright Tree of Life School - Sample Only

The Great Ideas of Beauty and Ethics



Online Discussion Class

Tree of Life School

2021-2022

Introduction, Schedule, and Exercises

Copyright © 2020 by Tree Of Life School

# Copyright Tree of Life School - Sample Only

## Table of Contents

Introduction to The Great Ideas in the Great Books	2
Introduction to the theme of Beauty and Ethics	3
How This Course Works	8
Evaluation Scheme	9
2-week Course Cycle	10
Condensed Weekly Schedule	11
Weekly Schedule and Exercises	13
Great Ideas Notebook - Ideas	85
Home Discussion Questions	86
Assignment Sheet	89

# Copyright Tree of Life School - Sample Only

## 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!

# Copyright Tree of Life School - Sample Only

## 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 of the Great Conversation.

# Copyright Tree of Life School - Sample Only

## 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, then 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 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 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 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

# Copyright Tree of Life School - Sample Only

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 other, or, at least, you cannot possess it wholly. These three (Truth, Goodness, Beauty) have been described as both the fundamental and transcendent 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.

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...

# Copyright Tree of Life School - Sample Only

## 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 navel 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 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 matter. 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?

# Copyright Tree of Life School - Sample Only

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 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!



# Copyright Tree of Life School - Sample Only

## 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 three-credit course, the Great Ideas of Beauty and Ethics 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 Wednesday (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** based on the reading material will be given after each discussion class as a check on reading progress and understanding of content.

**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

# Copyright Tree of Life School - Sample Only

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.

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. Students will need to give evidence of their keeping such a notebook for completion of the course.

**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 different opinions among Christians. Moreover, these questions are intended to maintain the homeschooling character in this online class. See page 86.

## Evaluation Scheme

Submitted Writing Assignments / Essays	50%
Online Quizzes	7.5%
Participation (viewing) of Discussion Classes	7.5%
Forum Question Responses	15%
Completion of Reading Guides and Exercises (parent marked)	10%
Great Ideas Notebook	10%

# Copyright Tree of Life School - Sample Only

## Two Week Cycle of the Course

Week	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday/Friday
1	Great Book reading	Quiz	<b>Online Discussion Class</b>	Writing exercises, other reading
2	Great Book reading	Respond to Forum Question	<b>Assignment</b> due before class	<b>Assignment</b> due before class

# Copyright Tree of Life School - Sample Only

## Condensed Weekly Schedule

Week	Date	Monday - Great Book Reading	Tuesday/Wednesday - Forum Question/Online Class	Submitted Assignments	Other Reading this Week
1	Sept. 13	Republic	<u>Class 1: Introduction/ Republic Themes</u>	HTRAB study guide	HTRAB
2	Sept. 20	Republic	Forum Question	<b>HTRAB study guide due Sept. 27</b>	Song of Roland
3	Sept. 27	Republic	<u>Class 2: The Simile of the Cave</u>	Bible study guide	Bible/ finish Song of Roland
4	Oct. 4	Republic	Forum Question	<b>Bible study guide due Oct. 11/ Republic essay outline</b>	
5	Oct. 11	How Should We Then Live	<u>Class 3: How Should We Then Live: Introduction</u>	Republic essay	Till We Have Faces
6	Oct. 18	How Should We Then Live	Forum Question	Republic essay	finish Till We Have Faces
7	Oct. 25	How Should We Then Live	<u>Class 4: Till We Have Faces: Orual's Complaint</u>	<b>Republic essay due Nov. 1</b>	
8	Nov. 1	How Should We Then Live	Forum Question	Poetry unit	Poetry
9	Nov. 8	How Should We Then Live	<u>Class 5: How Should We Then Live: Conclusion</u>	<b>Poetry unit due Nov. 15/ How Should We Then Live SG due Nov. 15</b>	Ethics
10	Nov. 15	Nicomachean Ethics	Forum Question		Ethics
11	Nov. 22	Nicomachean Ethics	<u>Class 6: Ethics: Introduction</u>		Short Stories
12	Nov. 29	Ethics	Forum Question	Short Story unit	Short Stories
13	Dec. 6	Ethics	<u>Class 7: Ethics: Friendship</u>	<b>Short Story unit due Dec. 13</b>	
14	Dec. 13	Ethics	Forum Question	<b>Ethics SG due Dec. 20</b>	finish readings

# Copyright Tree of Life School - Sample Only

Week	Date	Monday - Great Book Reading	Tuesday/Wednesday - Forum Question/Online Class	Submitted Assignments	Other Reading this Week
15	Jan. 3	Odyssey	<u>Class 8: The Odyssey: Introduction</u>		Smith of Wootton Major
16	Jan. 10	Odyssey	Forum Question	Short Story unit	finish Smith of Wootton Major
17	Jan. 17	Odyssey	<u>Class 9: Smith of Wootton Major</u>	<b>Short Story unit due Jan. 24</b>	Merchant of Venice
18	Jan. 24	Odyssey	Forum Question		finish Merchant of Venice
19	Jan. 31	Odyssey	<u>Class 10: Merchant of Venice: Problem Play?</u>	Reformed Documents SG	
20	Feb. 7	Odyssey	Forum Question	Reformed Documents	The Prince
21	Feb. 14	Odyssey	<u>Class 11: The Odyssey: Virtues</u>	Reformed Documents	The Prince
22	Feb. 21	Calvin's Institutes Of Christian Religion	Forum Question	<b>Reformed Documents due Feb. 28</b>	finish The Prince
23	Feb. 28	Institutes	<u>Class 12: The Prince: Ethics in Politics</u>		The Scarlet Letter
24	Mar. 7	Institutes	Forum Question		finish The Scarlet Letter
	Mar. 14	-----	Break Week	-----	-----
25	Mar. 21	Institutes	<u>Class 13: The Scarlet Letter</u>	Scarlet Letter essay	
26	Mar. 28	Institutes	Forum question	Scarlet Letter essay	
27	Apr. 4	<b>Institutes</b>	<u>Class 14: Institutes</u>	<b>Scarlet Letter essay due April 11</b>	Farmer Giles of Ham

# Copyright Tree of Life School - Sample Only

Week	Date	Monday-Great Book Reading	Tuesday/Wednesday - Forum Question/Online Class	Submitted Assignments	Other Reading This Week
28	Apr. 11	Institutes	Forum question		finish Farmer Giles of Ham
29	Apr. 18	Institutes	<u>Class 15: Farmer Giles of Ham</u>		Unaborted Socrates
30	Apr. 25	Institutes	Forum question	Institutes essay outline/ <b>Institutes study guide SG due May 2</b>	Unaborted Socrates
31	May 2	Unaborted Socrates	<u>Class 16: Unaborted Socrates</u>	Institutes essay	Brave New World
32	May 9	Brave New World	Forum Question	<b>Institutes essay due (May 16)</b>	Brave New World
33	May 16	Brave New World	<u>Class 17: Brave New World</u>	Brave New World essay	
34	May 23	finish readings	Forum Question	<b>Brave New World essay due May 30</b>	finish readings
35	May 30	finish readings	<u>Class 19: Essay Prep Discussion</u>	<b>final essay due June 20</b>	finish readings

# Copyright Tree of Life School - Sample Only

## Week 1

Monday	Read <i>The Republic</i> introduction by Desmond Lee
Tuesday	Complete online Quiz
Wednesday	Class 1 @ _____ "Introduction/Republic Themes" Complete post discussion survey
Exercises	Begin the Study Guide for <i>How to Read a Book</i> Complete Lesson 1 in <i>The Republic</i> study guide (unmarked)
Other reading	

### Lesson One

Read the Translator's Introduction.

This lesson will give you background information on Plato, the culture in which he lived, and some of the main ideas discussed in *The Republic*. Since we are not studying the entire book this year, this lesson will help you receive a general understanding of the work's contents.

1. More than any other, who most influenced Plato's thinking?

---

2. Is it fair to say that Plato believed that a philosopher's acquisition of learning or wisdom carried with it moral obligations? In other words, do ideas have consequences?

---

3. What happened to seal Plato's disillusionment with contemporary politics?

---

4. What school did Plato found with the hope of training philosophers that one day might implement the ideas expressed in *The Republic*?

---