

Theory of Knowledge

Summer Reading Assignment – 2006/07

First, you need to read *Sophie's World* by Jostein Gaarder. The book is widely available in paperback or at local libraries. It will be the basis of our first essay in the fall.

Second, you need to choose a book from the list below. None of these works is required, but each of them can add to your enjoyment of the class and change your outlook on the world. Read one, then be prepared to do a short presentation on the book next September.

Books

Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, Robert Pirsig. A dark tale of travelling across the nation on a motorcycle, discussing the history of philosophy as they go.

Lila, Robert Pirsig. The sequel to *Zen*, somewhat less depressing but heavier.

Unpopular Essays, Bertrand Russell. A collection of lesser known essays by Russell, hard to find these days. Most of these essays can be found in *The Basic Writings* of BR.

The Way of Life According to Lao Tzu. The basic writings of Taoism, short, enlightening.

The Tao of Pooh, Benjamin Hoff. If you like Pooh and seek the enlightenment of Taoism, then this book is for you.

The Te of Piglet, Benjamin Hoff. Sequel to the Tao of Pooh, more advanced concepts based on another A.A. Milne character.

The Tao of Physics, Fritjof Capra. A mid-70s attempt to reconcile rational and Western science and Eastern mystical thought.

The Lessons of History, Will and Ariel Durant. This short volume gives insights into history as a process - a must read for future history majors or historians.

Siddhartha, Herman Hesse. Hesse's treatment of the story of Buddha - short and easy to read, gives a sense of an entirely different religious knowledge.

The Mask of Apollo, Mary Renault. If you like historical fiction, this is the best book on the list. It examines the roles of philosophy and drama in ancient Greece.

Mastery, George Leonard. This small book about martial arts is really about learning and knowledge of almost any kind.

The Virtue of Selfishness, Ayn Rand. A compact package of Ayn Rand's philosophy, which people generally love or hate with a passion.

On the Road, Jack Kerouac. What can I say? Questions the assumptions of consumerist, post WWII America in an iconoclastic way.

Congo, *Jurassic Park* both by Michael Crichton. These books have a lot of different theories of knowledge in them.

Mind Tools, Rudy Rucker. This is the best small book on mathematics I've ever found.

Ishmael, Daniel Quinn. A view of human history as told by a gorilla, great stuff for the environmentalists among us.

Genie, Russ Rhymer. A story of horrendous child abuse, followed by linguistic research. A dark, troubling story - not to be read lightly.

Circles, James Burke. Burke is the producer of an old BBC series called "Connections". In this book he presents 50 essays about his own somewhat idiosyncratic view of the history of science.

Five Equations That Changed the World, Michael Guillen. Narrative histories of mathematicians and their work, quite readable for non-math types.

Flatland, Edwin Abbot. Examines the mathematical implications of different geometries.

Surely You Must be Joking, Mr. Feynman, Richard Feynman. Stories about Feynman's science, politics and personal history. Surprisingly funny and accessible. He actually has a couple of more books out there, any of which would be fine.

The History of Knowledge, Charles Van Doren. A brief textbook of knowledge in the Western tradition from the pre-socratics to the Enlightenment.

Misreadings, Umberto Eco. A collection of essays from a leading semiotics scholar, humorous and erudite.

Conversations About the End of Time, Umberto Eco & Stephen J. Gould. An examination of the role of time in various cultures.

Bully for Brontosaurus, Stephen J. Gould. Evolution and dinosaurs by the leading popularizer of biology.

The Art of War, by Sun Tzu. A classical Chinese text.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time, Mark Haddon. A mystery featuring an autistic detective.

Euclid's Window, Leonard Mlodinow. A surprisingly engaging history of geometry.

Mountains Beyond Mountains, Tracy Kidder. The story of Dr. Paul Farmer and his creation of Partners in Health.

The Professor and the Madman, Simon Winchester. A sad but compelling story of the great Oxford English Dictionary – NOT a feel good book.

This list is incomplete and you may find something else to read which makes a statement about knowledge. Be prepared to present your book in the fall.