



12 IB TOK Summer Homework

Dear Rising 12 IB Students,

Congratulations! Your final year of secondary learning is at hand! As you approach this momentous threshold, please be aware that you have a lot of work to do. But relish this work and let it bolster your enthusiasm for your final year of studies!

Here's an assignment that you could so relish:

For your TOK summer homework assignment, please read a short book of philosophy or a chapter from a larger book. Afterwards, write a one-page composition that states the author's thesis in that book or chapter and summarize (or, alternatively, draw outlines of) the main argument(s) that the author concocted to arrive at this conclusion. Here is a list of potential texts:

- Plato's *Meno* (In this dialogue, Plato tries to convince Meno to address his fundamental beliefs before moving onto further questions, but with limited success. Can a young slave boy help?)
- Plato's *Ion* (Perhaps his shortest dialogue.)
- A chapter from Plato's *Republic* (Book [or chapter] 7 describes the cave analogy we studied this year)
- Berkeley's *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (We'll look at some of this next year to explore how Berkeley constructs counterclaims against Descartes' rationalism.)
- One Tractate from Plotinus' *Enneads* (Unusual for Classical Greek philosophers, Plotinus is more "Eastern" in that he considers the oneness of everything.)
- A chapter from Aristotle's *Physics* (or *Metaphysics*, the "sequel") (Aristotle is an especially good model for how deductive logic may be used to form arguments, even when he is completely, completely, completely wrong.)
- Descartes "Discourse on the Method" (We studied some of his ideas in this essay earlier in the year when we studied reason as a way of knowing.)

There are a couple of novels you could read as well:

- Jostein Gaarder's *Sophie's World* (An easy-to-read summary of Western philosophy, though the "argument" made is not really logically presented.)
- Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (Another good novel that introduces philosophy and in which the author arrives at an interesting conclusion, though the argument is interspaced with narrative and may be hard to follow.)

For those more interested in Eastern Philosophy, let me suggest:

- A chapter from Kong Tzu (Confucius') *Analects* (Kong Tzu maintained the idea that human nature is essentially good.)
- A chapter from the collected works of Han Fei Tzu (He maintained that human nature was essentially bad.)
- A chapter from the collected works of Chuang Tzu (He was more of a Daoist but presented his ideas in the tradition of Chinese classical philosophy.)



Note: Chinese philosophers tend to rely on example and analogy rather than deductive logic to arrive at their conclusions, so outlining their arguments will have to show this approach.

Of course, any work will do, so do some research and find a text that discusses a topic that is of interest to you, that is not too long, and that is not too dense (I would avoid Kant if I were you!). The purpose of this is for you to practice outlining how others develop complex logical arguments, as that is what you will have to do on your TOK essay next year.

Please let me know if you have any questions, and relish!

– Mr. Lamphear