

THE FOUNDATIONS OF
WISDOM

VOLUME 3

PHILOSOPHY OF MAN
STUDY GUIDE

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STUDY GUIDE

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Introduction

THIS IS A STUDY GUIDE to accompany volume 3, Philosophy of Man, of *The Foundations of Wisdom: An Introduction to the Perennial Philosophy*. In this study guide I will explain the overall structure of volume 3 and how best to read the text of volume 3. I will also include essential, chapter-by-chapter questions you should be asking and answering as you read through the text. The answers to these questions are not all found verbatim in the text itself (though some are). The purpose of these questions is not only to help the student read the text carefully, but also to think about things implied by or related to the teaching in the text. For some of the questions in which the answer is not found explicitly in the text, you may be able to provide only a provisional or probable answer. That is OK. The purpose of those questions is to get the student to think more deeply about the realities indicated in the text.

Logic and Natural Philosophy as Prerequisites to the Study of the Soul

Whenever we try to investigate some subject, we ask a series of questions about it. Some questions cannot be answered unless we know the answers to prior questions. For example, the question “Can virtue be taught?” cannot be answered well without answering the questions “What is virtue?” and “What is teaching?” So it is with the study of the soul. Certain questions about the soul, such as, “What is a soul?” and “Is it certain that the human soul can exist after death?” cannot be answered well without having answered prior questions, such as “How is a good definition constructed?” and “How can we determine if the conclusion to an argument is necessarily true?” Therefore, before embarking upon the study of the soul, it is necessary for the student to acquire the prior sciences of logic (volume 1) and natural philosophy (volume 2). Logic is necessary as a prerequisite for all the speculative sciences, since all of these use definitions, statements and demonstrations. Natural philosophy is a prerequisite to the study of the soul because life is found first in natural things, like trees and dogs and men. Unless we know something about natural things generally, we will not be able to understand particular kinds of natural things well, including those with souls. So if you have not yet studied logic and natural philosophy, you should lay this book aside and study those subjects well before taking up this book again. One way to do this is to start at the beginning of this series, since the previous two volumes in this series consider logic and natural philosophy.

The Need for a Teacher

In the study guides for logic and natural philosophy, I touched upon the need for a teacher in philosophy, or in any difficult matter. The study of the soul is no exception. As Aristotle once wrote about the soul, “To determine anything reliable about it is among the things which are most difficult.”¹ Since the study of the soul is among things difficult to learn, requiring much experience, it cannot be learned well simply

¹ Aristotle, *De Anima*, Book I, 402a10.

from a book. There are so many questions which the study of the soul raises that no book could adequately consider all of them without becoming too large. No book can answer questions the way a teacher can, and so, no book, by itself, is sufficient as a guide for the life of the mind. Therefore, once again, I strongly recommend that, in addition to reading this book on the study of the soul (together with this study guide), try to find someone who already knows this subject matter well who can fulfill the role of a teacher.

The Overall Plan of the Study of the Soul

This book is divided into three parts. In the first part (Introduction and chapter 1) I cover some preliminaries to the study of the soul. In the second part (chapters 2–11), I consider the soul itself. In the third part (chapter 12), I consider and refute subjectivism, which is an erroneous account of knowledge.

In the consideration of the soul itself, I first consider the definition of soul (chapter 2), then I consider the specific kinds of soul (for example, the vegetative soul, the sentient soul, and the rational soul) and the properties which belong to each of them (chapters 3–11).

Using Supplementary Texts

Some chapters refer the student to supplementary texts in the footnotes. These texts are, for the most part, original texts of great thinkers. Depending upon the abilities of the teacher and students, as well as upon the time you have to complete the course, these supplementary texts can be very helpful to examine a subject in greater detail. If the teacher is knowledgeable and familiar with these supplementary texts, and the students are more advanced, these texts will be very helpful for increasing the student's knowledge of the study of the soul. However, the course can be completed without reading the supplementary texts. They are options for those who desire to use them.

How Much Reading and Study Time Should Be Devoted to Each Part?

The time needed to cover the materials in this book is the sum of the time it takes to read the book and cover the material in class. The amount of time it should take a student to read the book carefully is approximately 20 hours. The amount of class time to cover the contents of this book should total to somewhere between 45 and 65 hours. So a student should expect that the total amount of time necessary to cover the entire contents of the study of the soul book with this accompanying study guide will be between 65 and 85 hours.

As a ballpark figure, chapters 1–4 should take approximately 15–20 hours to read and discuss; chapters 5–11 should take approximately 40–50 hours to read and discuss; and chapter 12 should take approximately, 10–15 hours to read and discuss.

These are simply estimates based upon my experience teaching this material. There may be reasons or circumstances why a particular student might use significantly more time than what is recommended here, but it would be unusual that a student would need significantly less time than the 65 hours recommended here.

List of Definitions for the Study of the Soul

- Soul (nominal) (ch. 1):** The first principle of life in a living thing; or Whatever is ultimately responsible for the difference between living and non-living things.
- Soul (essential) (ch. 2):** The substantial form of a natural, living body.
- Nutrition (ch. 5):** The assimilation of food into the substance of a living body.
- Growth (ch. 5):** The assimilation of food into the quantity of a living body.
- Reproduction (ch. 5):** The assimilation of food into the seed of a living body; or Bringing into existence, from seed, another living substance of the same kind.
- Vegetative power (ch. 5):** A power of the soul by which a living being produces another living being of the same kind as itself.
- Sensation (nominal) (ch. 6):** Whatever seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and feeling all have in common.
- Sensation (essential) (ch. 6):** The reception of the forms of the affective qualities of another thing, as other; or The reception of the forms of the affective qualities of another thing in an immaterial way.
- Sense Power(ch. 6):** The ability to receive the forms of affective qualities of another thing, as other.
- Knowledge (ch. 12):** The possession of the form of another thing, as other.
- Understanding (ch. 6):** The ability to possess the “what it is” of things sensed or imagined, as other.
- Intellectual Power (ch. 9):** The ability to know order, as such.
- Rational Power (ch. 9)** The ability to come to know one truth from another truth.

Introduction and Chapter 1

What to Look for in the Introduction and Chapter 1

Look for the reasons why you should be very motivated to study the soul. Also, try to understand why we should begin the study of the soul with a definition of soul based upon our experience of our own living activities. Finally, try to see how the study of the soul is related to other kinds of knowledge.

Summary and Explanation of the Introduction and Chapter 1

The introduction gives reasons why the student should diligently study the soul, namely, because of the certitude of knowledge we can have (since we are certain of our own living activities); because of the nobility of the soul as a subject of knowledge; and because of the utility of knowledge about the soul.

Chapter 1 explains where we should begin the study of the soul. We should not begin with customary ideas about the soul, not only because many of them are unfounded, but also because many customary ideas about the soul are mutually exclusive. So, the best place to begin is to recognize the connection between life and the soul, and with this in mind to formulate a nominal definition of the soul. After responding to the possible misunderstandings that such a definition may cause, the chapter goes on to identify the place of the study of the soul within the whole body of knowledge.

Questions about the Introduction and Chapter 1

How can it be true that knowledge of the soul is certain when there is so much disagreement about the soul, even about whether souls exist?

Why is the soul noble?

Granted that certain knowledge is good and that knowledge about noble things is good, what makes a knowledge better: the certitude of the knowledge, or the nobility of the thing known?

What is knowledge of the soul useful for?

How does a nominal definition differ from a definition by properties or an essential definition?

Is the nominal definition proposed in the text a good definition, especially since it would mean that all living things, even plants, have a soul?

Why is the study of the soul included as a part of natural philosophy? What does this imply about the order in which we should study these two sciences?
