THE FOUNDATIONS OF WISDOM

VOLUME 3

PHILOSOPHY OF MAN

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FR. SEBASTIAN WALSHE, O. PRAEM.

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GENERAL PREFACE

Hunting for Happiness

The discovery and development of philosophy is part of man's larger search for happiness. As man was hunting for happiness, he found philosophy. Most of human ingenuity and energy were originally directed toward removing the obstacles to happiness: for example, the arts of hunting and agriculture were developed to alleviate hunger; the art of housebuilding was developed to alleviate the suffering associated with excessive heat and cold; various martial arts and weapons were developed to protect against violence from animals and other men; medicine was developed to cure illness. But once these arts had been developed and man had time for leisure, it became apparent that there exists in man a more fundamental desire than that which is satisfied by food, clothing, and bodily health. It is a desire not merely to avoid evils, but a desire for some positive good, and it is a desire for a positive good which is not merely instrumental to something else (such as practical knowledge), but a good desired for its own sake. Aristotle expressed this desire simply in the statement, "All men by nature desire to know."

It may seem strange that happiness should have much to do with knowledge. After all, very few men dedicate real effort and time to searching for knowledge. And what knowledge they do search for tends to be practical in nature: that is, it is for the

sake of making or doing things. Yet, it is an indisputable fact of history that once the chief practical arts had been established, and the needs of the body provided for, men naturally turned to philosophy in their leisure time. Aristotle recounts that "After all such [practical] arts had been developed, those sciences were pursued which are sought neither for the sake of pleasure nor necessity. This happened in places where men had leisure. Hence the mathematical arts originated in Egypt where the priestly class was permitted leisure."[1] And again: "When nearly all the things necessary for life, leisure and learning were acquired, this kind of prudence began to be sought."[2] But if this is so, how do we account for the fact that so few people consider knowledge to be essential for happiness?

This question is like the question of why so few children prefer a high paying job or an excellent education to ice cream. First of all, since the goods of the body are better known than the goods of the soul, it is natural that men should seek to provide for the goods of the body first. Secondly, happiness is not found in the possession and exercise of just any knowledge, but in the best knowledge. And finding and using this type of knowledge is very difficult to achieve. Just as it would be impossible for a child to perform well at a high paying job or to receive an excellent education all at once, so it would be impossible for someone to acquire and use the knowledge needed for happiness without first passing through years of experience and study. Finally, notice that Aristotle did not say all men naturally desire to *come to* know, but rather that all men naturally desire to know. Samuel Johnson, encountering a famous landmark in Ireland, once quipped that

[1] Metaphysics 981b22-24. Genesis 47:22 provides independent confirmation of the leisure afforded the priestly class in Egypt.

[2] Metaphysics 982b22-23.

it was "worth seeing . . . but not worth going to see." There is a similar relationship between knowing and coming to know. Coming to know can be arduous and even painful. But if you asked any man on the street whether he would like to know some important truth if it took no effort, I would bet he would say yes. But because many obstacles stand in the way of possessing knowledge, there are few who seek it.

Philosophy is near the end of man's search for happiness. However, even within philosophy itself there is an order of discovery arising naturally from the search for happiness. For we want to know the supreme good of man—that is, what man has been made for—but to know *that* we need to know *what* man is, and since man is a natural being, we need to know what nature is. So philosophers began to examine nature. But once these things had been worked out in outline, it became clear that the nature of man is difficult to know, that it is even difficult to know about the existence and nature of the soul, and that the highest perfection of the human soul, wisdom, is even more difficult to know. Therefore, it was necessary to develop one final art: logic, which assists us in coming to know difficult truths. Plato's Socrates seems to have been the first to acknowledge a need for an "art about arguments" in the Phaedo, precisely as he is searching to discover the existence and nature of the human soul.

The order of discovery in philosophy is almost opposite to the order in which philosophy should be learned. For students should first study logic, which is the art that treats of acquiring the good of speculative reason: truth. Since every science searches for truth, logic teaches how to proceed correctly in every science. Second, they should study mathematics, which among the sciences is the easiest in which to find certitude (hence there is much agreement in this part of philosophy). Third, they should study natural

things (or natural philosophy).[3] Fourth, among natural things, they should focus their study upon living things, especially man (the study of the soul). Fifth, once they know accurately the nature of man, and the various powers and perfections of the soul, they should study the good for man (ethics). And since man's supreme good consists in knowing things better than himself, the philosopher should study the first causes of all being (wisdom or metaphysics) last.[4] For the very exercise of knowing these things higher than man is the happiness which man desires. That is, natural happiness consists in contemplating the truths which are the conclusions of metaphysics.

Because this is only an introduction to philosophy, this text will not consider the last part of philosophy—that is, metaphysics). Such a consideration belongs not to the beginning student, but to an advanced student. Moreover, because the science of mathematics is widely taught, and much easier than the other parts of philosophy, this text will not consider that part of philosophy either. Perhaps the best elementary treatment of mathematics can be found in Euclid's Elements.

Finally, this text will not proceed in a primarily historical method, as is typical in most introductions to philosophy. The timeline of the history of philosophy is not necessarily a progression from ignorance to knowledge or error to truth. It is quite possible for an earlier philosopher to know more than a later one, and vice versa. Nor is the order of history necessarily the best order for the beginning student to follow if he is in search of truth.

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[3] The area of study that used to be called natural philosophy was concerned with areas of knowledge we tend, confusingly enough, to lump under the label of "science" today.

[4] This order of study is laid out by Saint Thomas Aquinas at the beginning of his Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics and at the beginning of his Commentary on the Book of Causes.

This text does not seek to inform the student about the positions taken by various philosophers, but rather to lay out the method best suited to human nature of coming to understand the order among the ultimate causes of reality. We study the Pythagorean Theorem not to know that Pythagoras thought, but because it is true and worth knowing. And it would be worthwhile to study the same theorem even if it was discovered by Frankie Watkins. In philosophy, we are not so much concerned with who discovered some truth as with the truth itself and the reasons why it can be known. So while much of what is found in this text will be truths discovered by Aristotle and Saint Thomas Aquinas, they stand on their own and do not rely upon the authority of those who first discovered and presented them.

INTRODUCTION

Why Study the Soul?

Knowledge about the soul is one of the best kinds of knowledge a man can have. Some kinds of knowledge are good to have because of their certitude (like mathematics, which is so certain that agreement is common among mathematicians). Other kinds of knowledge are good to have because of their intrinsic nobility (like knowledge about God, which is knowledge about the best thing there is). The knowledge of the soul is both: certain and noble.

Knowledge of the soul is certain because each person has immediate, first-hand, and undeniable experience of his inner life and activities. We are certain that we feel, that we think, that we love. Even if everyone around us told us: "No, you don't feel sad," or "No, you don't like chocolate ice cream," we would remain completely certain that we do feel a certain way, we do think such and such, we do love this thing. The arguments of others would crumble before our first-hand experience of our own inner life. In fact, our certitude of our inner life and activities is so great that some philosophers, like Descartes, were deceived into thinking that we are more certain that we think than we are certain that we exist! He said, "I think, *therefore* I am."[5] While that is a bad

[5] Of course, it is fair to ask the question: What does "I" mean in the first premise "I think" if it does not refer to an existing thing? Descartes, it seems, is guilty here of assuming what he is trying to prove.

argument, it is nevertheless a good testimony to how certain we are about the inner workings of our life, the activities of our souls.

The soul is also a very noble subject of study. As Jesus once pointed out, "For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life?" (Mt 16:26). We value our souls above all physical goods: it seems to be what is most God-like in us, for by it we know and love. Therefore, to come to know something about the soul would be something very worthwhile.

Finally, the study of the soul is something very useful in our pursuit of wisdom because knowledge of the soul assists us in every branch of knowledge, for it is by means of the soul that we know. We sense and understand by means of our soul. Therefore, knowing more about the soul can help us to understand each of the things we know better.

CHAPTER 1

Where to Begin

How to Begin a Study of the Soul

One of the first difficulties modern students typically have when beginning a study of the soul is that the word "soul" has so many ideas associated with it in the modern mind. To most people, the word "soul" conjures up ideas of ghosts, religion, the afterlife, or even reincarnation. Movies, preachers, and new age books all have something to say about the soul: the soul is what Jesus saves, the life force that continues after death, the divine in us, etc. It can all get very confusing very quickly.

We do not want to dismiss off-hand the various things that people say about the soul, but it is not very helpful to begin with them. One thing is clear: none of these assertions is self-evident to a beginning student. Besides this, many of the things modern people say about the soul are contradictory and mutually exclusive—in other words, only some of these ideas can be true, and it is not immediately clear which are. So we cannot take these ideas and assertions about the soul as our starting point, though perhaps some of them will eventually prove true. And while for those who accept Christian revelation, their faith provides them with a sure guide to truth about the soul, nevertheless, we are approaching the soul here as philosophers, trying to discover what is true about the soul from common experiences that everyone has, regardless of their faith.

So where should we begin? We know from logic that if we are to gain scientific knowledge about the soul, we will have to construct some demonstrations about it, and to do that, we will need a definition of the soul. So we know that much: we need to find a definition of the soul, and preferably an essential definition if such a definition is possible. That narrows down our job: the first thing we are looking for is a definition of "soul."

But even this seems daunting. How can we find a definition of something so elusive as the soul, something so likely to produce contradictory opinions? One thing I like to point out to students when they are struggling to understand and define a term is that they already have a pretty good idea about what any given word, like the word "soul," means. If I were to ask each student here to give me a meaningful sentence using the word "soul," they would probably find it a fairly easy task. Sentences like "I took my soul out for a walk and then gave it a bath" or "my brother is more soul than I am" or "that rock weighs four soul" are easy to identify as incorrect usages of the word "soul." Therefore, each of you really does have a pretty good idea of what "soul" means and what it doesn't mean. It's just a matter of putting your idea into words.

The Nominal Definition of Soul

Typically, the best place to start with a difficult definition is with some kind of nominal definition. From there we can seek an essential definition, or at least a definition by properties. Often, looking at a word's etymology can help us get a nominal definition.[6] Greek and Latin are some ancient languages where we first find the word soul used. The Greek word for soul is

[6] The etymology of a word is the history of its usage from the first times and languages in which it was used. (This should not be confused with entomology, the study of insects).

"psyche" (pronounced: SUU-kay), which just meant "breath," while the Latin word for soul is "anima," which means life (we get the English word "animated" from the Latin word "anima"). According to the original usage of the word "soul," ensouled things are living, breathing things. Now that's not too hard for us to grasp. Those are things very close to our everyday experience.

Let's propose our first, nominal definition of soul: soul is whatever makes living things different from non-living things. Now, right away someone will say: but there are lots of differences between living and non-living things, which one should we call the soul? Some living things see, some grow, some think. All of those differences—seeing, growing, thinking, etc.—are different ways of living, but we are not looking for some particular difference. Rather, we are looking for whatever it is that is ultimately responsible for life as such, not just some specific manifestation of life: that's what we mean by the soul. True, we will eventually want to investigate these different manifestations of life and study whether they are the result of different kinds of souls. But for now, we just want to come to a general concept of soul which includes any form of life. The soul is the very first cause upon which *living* depends. So, to be clearer, let's state our nominal definition this way: soul is whatever is ultimately responsible for the difference between living and non-living things. Or we could put this even more simply by saying: *the soul is the first principle of life in a living thing.*

According to this first, nominal definition of soul, whatever is alive can be seen to have a soul: men, birds, carrots. Yes, you read that correctly: carrots. Usually, at this point in the class, my students and I engage in a dialogue that goes something like this:

Joe Student: Carrots?! You mean to tell me that carrots have a soul? That's crazy talk. Do you expect me to believe that there's an afterlife for carrots?

Fr. Sebastian: No, I don't expect you to believe anything of the sort. Remember, I told you before, throw out all those ideas that come with the modern mindset about the soul. When I say something has a soul, I am making a very limited claim: that it's alive. I am not making any claims about its condition after death, and we are in no position to assert that a soul can exist apart from the body.

Joe Student: But if carrots have souls, doesn't that make them just like men?

Fr. Sebastian: No, not just like men. There may be different kinds of souls. Human souls would presumably be different from carrot souls. But it is true that if carrots have souls and men also have souls, they have to be like men in *some* way. First of all, both have to be alive. And in fact they do share some kinds of living activities, like growth and receiving nourishment.

Joe Student: But why should I believe that things like growth and taking in nutrition are caused by something immaterial like the soul. Couldn't those things be explained without bringing in the immaterial?

Fr. Sebastian: Don't worry. I'm not saying at this point that the soul is even something immaterial. If this turns out to be the case, we will have to prove it. As far as we're concerned, whatever makes a carrot alive may well be just some material or mechanistic

> cause. I'm not asking you to assent to anything other than the fact that carrots are alive: that they grow, take in nourishment and reproduce, and therefore, they must have some principle within them that makes them different from things that are not alive.
> **Joe Student**: Oh, OK.

Now that we've cleared that up, one thing that emerges is that the soul is something very natural, very commonplace, not some strange transcendent being that belongs to the world of ghosts and the supernatural and the paranormal. The soul is as natural as life itself.

The Place of the Study of the Soul in the Whole Body of Knowledge

Now is a good time to determine where the study of the soul fits in with other things that we can know. Let's look back at our "road-map of all things knowable."[7] Recall that everything that can be known has an order, and order is related to our reason in three ways: there is the order discovered in things by our reason; the order put into things by our reason; and the order revealed to reason by God. Now, certainly there are things revealed by God about the human soul, but that is the province of theology, and we are doing philosophy here. Thus, we are not talking about an order revealed to reason. Neither is the study of the soul found in the order put into things by reason. The soul is what makes living things to be alive, and it is clear that living things are not the product of human reason: living things come about by nature, not by human art. In fact, most living things existed long before men existed. That means the study of the

[7] As first found in *Volume I: Logic*, chapter 3.

soul falls under the order discovered by reason in things—that is, the study of the soul falls under one of the speculative sciences. Recall again that this order discovered by reason can be about things which exist in matter and are defined with matter (natural philosophy); things which exist in matter but are defined without matter (mathematics); and things that do not exist in matter and are not defined with matter (metaphysics). Into which branch does the study of the soul fall? Well, we seem to be pretty sure that the soul is not studied in mathematics: mathematical things like lines and numbers do not make something alive. We are also sure that the living things with which we are most familiar are material things, like men and dogs and trees. So the soul seems to be something which exists in matter rather than something that exists without matter. As such, the soul should be studied as a part of natural philosophy.[8] We can make another argument that comes to the same conclusion: it belongs to the same science to study its subject and the principles of its subject. For example, it belongs to the same science to study numbers and the principle of numbers (i.e., the unit); and it belongs to the same science to study lines and points (since a point is a principle of a line). But the soul is a principle of a living thing, and living things are clearly natural

[8] Someone could object right now and say: but the soul is immaterial, it doesn't exist in matter, so it should be studied in metaphysics, not natural philosophy. That is a serious objection which we will have to answer more fully later, but what is clear enough now is that even if it turns out that some kinds of souls, like the human soul, can exist apart from matter, they never come into existence without matter. Not only that, but it is not even obvious at first if the human soul or any other kind of soul can exist without matter. Yet it is obvious that human beings and other living things are material. That is enough evidence to start off with the assumption that the soul ought to be studied in natural philosophy. Nevertheless, we will have to return to this problem later once we have examined the nature of the soul in greater depth.

things. So the soul should be studied in natural philosophy. Is the study of the soul the same as natural philosophy? That can't be since living things are not the only natural things: rocks are natural, as are the elements and various compounds. So the study of the soul will only be a part of natural philosophy. But which part? How should we divide up natural philosophy to identify which part the study of the soul belongs to? Since natural philosophy has mobile being as its proper subject, then the *per se* divisions of natural philosophy will follow the *per se* divisions of motion. Recall that there are three kinds, or species, of motion: local motion (change of where), alteration (change of quality), and growth (change of quantity). Which motion is most characteristic of all living things? Growth. All living things grow, usually becoming thousands or millions of times bigger than they start out. In fact, in the natural world, it is hard to find things which grow that aren't living. Therefore, the soul is studied in the part of natural philosophy which is about growth. If we look at the modern sciences, we see that biology (in which we study living things and the principle of living things, the soul) corresponds to natural things which have an intrinsic principle of growth, while physics is the study of natural bodies insofar as they move by local motion, and chemistry is the study of natural bodies insofar as they undergo alteration. The *Figure 1* on the next page will aid us in remembering the divisions we have covered:

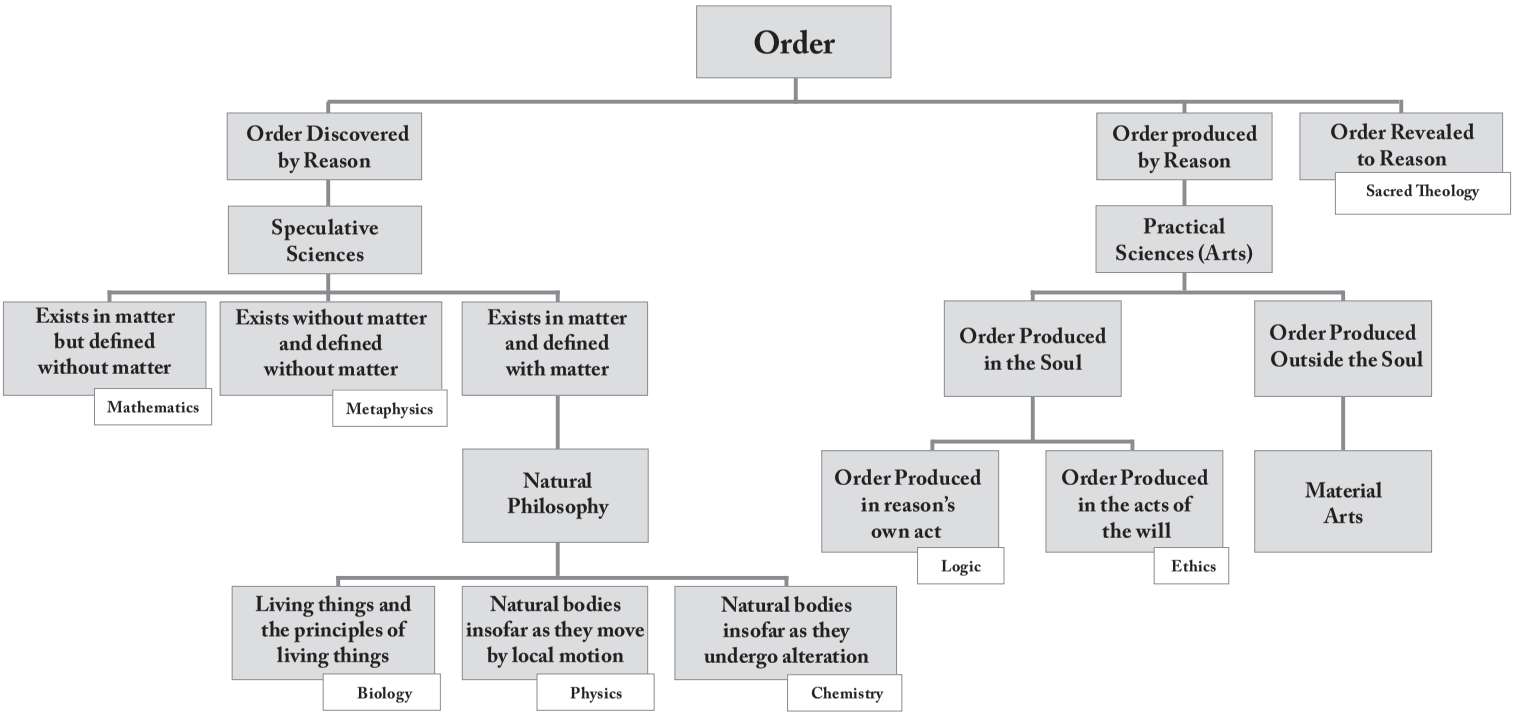
Order
Order Discovered by Reason
Speculative Sciences
Exists in matter but defined without matter
Mathematics
Exists without matter and defined without matter
Metaphysics
Exists in matter and defined with matter
Natural Philosophy
Living things and the principles of living things
Biology
Natural bodies insofar as they move by local motion
Physics
Natural bodies insofar as they undergo alteration
Chemistry
Order produced by Reason
Practical Sciences (Arts)
Order Produced in the Soul
Order Produced in reason's own act
Logic
Order Produced in the acts of the will
Ethics
Order Produced Outside the Soul
Material Arts
Order Revealed to Reason
Sacred Theology

Figure 1

Summary

- Generally understood, the soul is *the first principle of life in a living thing*.
- Studying the soul falls under the domain of natural philosophy.
- Within natural philosophy, studying the soul falls under the type of motion associated with change in quantity: growth.
- The study of motion as growth corresponds to biology, the study of living things and the principle of living things.

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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?