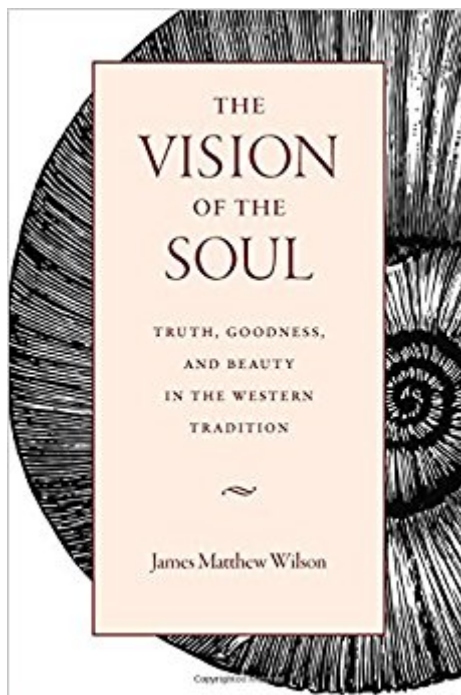




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The Vision Of The Soul: Truth, Goodness, And Beauty In The Western Tradition



Synopsis

Ours is an age full of desires but impoverished in its understanding of where those desires lead— an age that claims mastery over the world but also claims to find the world as a whole absurd or unintelligible. In *The Vision of the Soul*, James Matthew Wilson seeks to conserve the great insights of the western tradition by giving us a new account of them responsive to modern discontents. The western or Christian Platonist tradition, he argues, tells us that man is an intellectual animal, born to pursue the good, to know the true, and to contemplate all things in beauty. Wilson begins by reconceiving the intellectual conservatism born of Edmund Burke's jeremiad against the French Revolution as an effort to preserve the West's vision of man and the cosmos as ordered by and to beauty. After defining the achievement of that vision and its tradition, Wilson offers an extended study of the nature of beauty and the role of the fine arts in shaping a culture but above all in opening the human intellect to the perception of the form of reality. Through close studies of Theodor W. Adorno and Jacques Maritain, he recovers the classical vision of beauty as a revelation of truth and being. Finally, he revisits the ancient distinction between reason and story-telling, between mythos and logos, in order to rejoin the two. Story-telling is foundational to the forms of the fine arts, but it is no less foundational to human reason. Human life in turn constitutes a specific kind of form— a story form. The ancient conception of human life as a pilgrimage to beauty itself is one that we can fully embrace only if we see the essential correlation between reason and story and the essential convertibility of truth, goodness and beauty in beauty. By turns a study in fundamental ontology, aesthetics, and political philosophy, Wilson's book invites its readers to a renewal of the West's intellectual tradition.

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Customer Reviews

"James Matthew Wilson is truly alive with the wonder of Creation and with the Logos that gives it meaning. He is also truly a master of words, weaving them so that they are carriers of the goodness, truth, and beauty of which he writes. In the words of Hopkins, Wilson's words are "dovewinged" and "carrier-witted". They lift us into the presence of the very essence of reality, its being, so that our minds and hearts might be opened, dilated, to the goodness, truth, and beauty which is the triune splendor of love." -Joseph Pearce, author of *Beauteous Truth: Faith, Reason, Literature and Culture* "Brilliant, a very important contribution to conservative political and theological discourse, and genuinely original (and persuasive) in its insistence that even the political must be ordered to beauty. Wilson argues at a high metaphysical level, as does his obvious predecessor Hans Urs von Balthasar, but without leaving the world of hearthside and farm and chapel and local school: Von Balthasar meets Wendell Berry." -Anthony Esolen, Providence College

James Matthew Wilson is associate professor of religion and literature at Villanova University

Mortimer J. Adler spoke of different levels of reading. One of those levels leads to increased understanding. I am paraphrasing here, but Mr. Adler said that reading at this level basically requires the mind to stretch beyond its current limits, to have the brightness of the rising sun fall upon waking eyes - in a word, to grow as a human being. This is what happens in James Matthew Wilson's latest book *The Vision of the Soul*. The author asks his reader to come on a journey with him. Not a voyage into unexplored territory, but a digging into the roots of conservative thought and how a proper understanding of its history brings us to a firm appreciation of the beautiful, the true and the Good. I, too, am in the process of reading the entire text from start to finish. Although I have some pages to go, this brief review with a five-star rating can be trusted. Mr. Wilson's prose is lucid and a work of art in itself. The book is not meant for academics. It was written to reach the minds of people like you and me, people who hope to know more of that Light that lights every living soul. Read slowly, and read it again. All great books require this approach. More specific comments to come soon, hopefully.

I've never reviewed a book I haven't yet finished, but I make an exception because I would hate for the one-star review here to put anyone off of what I have found, about half the way in, to be a rich,

engaging and enlightening book. I'm no scholar -- I have a terrible grounding in classical education -- so it's a challenging read. But so are most books worth reading. I came to admire Wilson first as a poet, and would urge anyone with regard for that craft to read him, especially those who admire form. The reverence for goodness, truth and beauty in "Vision" finds marvelous expression in the poems.

This book is unreadable. I read a positive review of it in the American Conservative, but it was very disappointing. I consider myself pretty well versed in classical literature and philosophy, but it is unbelievably esoteric. This is not a book for public consumption and I question whether it is even too esoteric to use in academia.

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