



The Vision of the Soul

Truth, Goodness, and Beauty in the Western Tradition

James Matthew Wilson

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.

JAMES MATTHEW WILSON is associate professor of religion and literature at Villanova University.

May • 376 pages • 6 x 9

Paper \$29.95 • 978-0-8132-2928-7

ebook \$29.95 • 978-0-8132-2929-4

A well-written look at the conservative tradition in Western civilization

"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