

## Study guide

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Schumacher, E F. *A Guide for the Perplexed*. Harper Perennial, 1977, pp. 15-25. In Chapter 2, "Levels of Being", Schumacher describes the classical distinction between mineral, vegetable, animal, and man, and why this is important.

1. What, according to Schumacher, is the "chain of being" that was understood by our ancestors? How, if at all, does this scheme of things differ from the modern view based on the doctrine of evolution?
2. How are the different levels of being distinct from one another? In particular, what powers are successively added as the chain of being is ascended?
3. Do you agree with Schumacher that "evolution as a process of spontaneous, accidental emergence of the powers of life, consciousness and self-awareness, out of inanimate matter, is totally incomprehensible"?
4. How do the domains of physics, chemistry, and the life sciences differ from the humanities? Do you agree that each of these deal with a different level of being?
5. Are the four levels of being separated by "ontological discontinuities" or merely "differences in degree"? That is: are there *essential* differences between these levels? How is Schumacher's view hostile to evolutionary doctrine? In particular, are there—can there be—*transitional forms* that *link* these levels?
6. How does recognizing distinct levels of being affect our understanding (and treatment) of man?
7. Schumacher says that life is like Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Why does he employ this analogy? He also says that matter is like a geometrical point, that plants are "one-dimensional" and that man is "three dimensional". What existential truth does this analogy suggest?
8. Are there any levels of being above the four that Schumacher enumerates in this chapter? What has been the traditional answer to this question?