Questions for Discussion

Koran
1. What does the Koran teach about Jews and Christians (Sura 2)?
2. What does it teach about fighting (Sura 2)?
3. How should men treat women (Sura 4)?

Alfarabi, *The Enumeration of the Sciences*
1. What are the different purposes of political science, jurisprudence, and dialectical theology?

Alfarabi, *The Book of Religion*
1. What is the relation between philosophy (theoretical and practical) and the virtuous religion? What are the implications of this relation?
2. What is the relation between the virtuous religion and political science?

Alfarabi, *The Political Regime*
1. What is the relation between the first (human) ruler and the active intellect?
2. What is the difference between human intellect and human imagination? What is the political significance of that difference?
3. What are the mistaken views of happiness that characterize the ignorant cities? Which are the most promising of the ignorant cities?

Alfarabi, *The Attainment of Happiness*
1. What are the political and legal conditions necessary for the attainment of happiness? At what points do you agree or disagree with his teaching?
2. How does he contradict himself on the question whether the true philosopher is a political ruler?

Alfarabi, *Plato’s Laws*
1. According to Alfarabi, how freely did Plato communicate his thoughts?
Avicenna, *On the Divisions of the Rational Sciences*

1. Into what parts and subparts does he divide the sciences?

Avicenna, *Healing: Metaphysics 10*

1. What religious doctrine should the law include?
2. What is the relation between the content of revelation and philosophic investigation (p. 82)?
3. What is the relation between practical judgment and knowledge (p. 86)?
4. Who is the man who is “almost a human god” (p. 88)?

Alghazali, *The Deliverer from Error*

1. In what ways does he respect the philosophers’ sciences? In what ways does he reject them?

Ibn Bajja, *The Governance of the Solitary*

1. Can the virtuous city exist?
2. Does the philosopher need to be a political ruler?

Ibn Tufayl, *Hayy the Son of Yaqzan*

1. What does it matter which of the two accounts of Hayy’s birth is accurate?
2. Hayy’s attempt to teach on Asal’s island fails. What does that failure indicate about the relation among religion, politics, and reason?

Averroes, *The Decisive Treatise*

1. What is the difference between dialectical theology and demonstration (i.e., philosophy)?
2. What is interpretation of the Law? What forms does it take?
3. When is interpretation of the Law appropriate? When is it inappropriate?
Hebrew Scriptures

1. What sort of dominion does God give to man (Genesis 1:26)?

2. Why does God not want Adam and Eve to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:17)?

3. What does God promise Abram (Genesis 12:1-3)?

4. What happens when Abraham questions God’s justice (Genesis 18:16-33)?

5. What moral priorities are found in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17)?

6. Does the law of retaliation allow unrestrained vengeance (Exodus 21:22-25)?

7. Whom does God specially protect (Exodus 22:21-27)?

8. What is the message of the book of Ecclesiastes?

9. What is the consequence of pride (Isaiah 2:12-17)?

10. How is justice understood here (Isaiah 5:1-7)?

11. What is Isaiah’s indictment of Judah’s leaders (Isaiah 29:15-16)?

12. What answer is given to Habbakuk’s question of why God is silent in the face of evil (Habbakuk 2:4)?

Saadya Gaon, *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*

1. Note the distinction between Laws of reason and Laws of revelation. In what way is revealed Law also rational?

Judah Halevi, *The Book of Refutation and Proof on Behalf of the Despised Religion, or, the Kuzari*

1. How do the sage’s views differ from those of the king of the Khazars?

2. How does the sage distinguish between intellectual Law and divine Law?

3. Why does the sage deny that the distinguishing mark of the worshiper is detachment from the world?

4. According to the sage, do philosophers care about practical affairs?
5. Why does the sage decide to go to Jerusalem?

Maimonides, *Logic*

1. How does he distinguish between political science (and what it includes) and divine commands?

Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*

1. How does he describe prophecy? What are the roles of the rational faculty and the imagination in prophecy?
2. How does he describe the prophet?
3. What is the prophet’s legislative function?
4. What is the hierarchy of aims of the Law?

Maimonides, *Eight Chapters*

1. What distinction does he make between two kinds of law?

Maimonides, *Letter on Astrology*

1. What is the significance of astrology in Jewish life?

Isaac Polgar, *The Support of Religion*

1. What is his view of human perfection?
2. How does he characterize the philosopher-king as prophet?

Abravanel, *Commentary on the Bible*

1. On what basis does he distinguish between spiritual rule and temporal rule?
2. What arguments does he give against kingship?
New Testament

1. Is it possible to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44-48)?

2. Can we take literally Jesus’s command not to worry (Matthew 6:25-34)?

3. In what way does Jesus want us to avoid judging (Matthew 7:1-5)?

4. What does Jesus mean by “free” (John 8:32-36)?

5. How is everyone, not only Jews, expected to be aware of God (Romans 1:19-21)?

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*

1. What are the four kinds of law and the differences among them (pp. 83-93)?

2. What is the relation between customs and law (pp. 153-55)?

3. What does he teach about the form of government (pp. 53-56)?

4. How is right defined (pp. 158-67)?

5. How is justice defined (pp. 168-92)?

Thomas Aquinas, *De regimine principum*

1. What does he indicate as his intention in writing this work (preface)?

2. What arguments does he give for his conclusion that humans are naturally political animals (bk. 1, chap. 1)?

3. What factors distinguish good governments from bad (bk. 1, chap. 2)?

4. In this work he defends monarchy (bk. 1, chap. 3), while in *Summa theologiae* he defends a mixed form of government (pp. 53-54). Do those two passages contradict each other? Consider also bk. 1, chaps. 4-6, before reaching a decision.

5. What are the best ways to prevent a king from becoming a tyrant (bk. 1, chap. 7)? Do you agree with him that in some situations it is best to tolerate tyranny instead of eliminating it?

6. Do you agree with his assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of making glory the chief reward for rulers (bk. 1, chap. 8)?
7. In book 1, chapter 9, he argues that the king should look to God for his reward. Does this motivation work in a country characterized by separation of church and state?

8. Does his distinction of degrees of reward tend to lead to competition—even among those who look to God for their reward (bk. 1, chap. 10)?

9. Is his reading of human history correct: good kings have prospered, while wicked kings have suffered (bk. 1, chaps. 11 and 12)?