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Session I

Virtue and the Good Life

Readings:

- Aristotle, *Ethics*, selections.
- Deuteronomy 8.
- Psalms 1.

Guiding Questions:

- What is the aim of the art of politics? What is happiness, and why does it involve virtue?
- What role does practical wisdom play in the achievement of virtue and happiness?
- Is the good life for human beings one of moral virtue, or theoretical virtue?
- What is the good life, according to Deuteronomy and the Psalms? How does it compare to Aristotle's view of the good life?
- What role does virtue play in the good life that is described in Deuteronomy and the Psalms? Which virtues are most important, according to the Bible? How do these virtues compare with the ones emphasized by Aristotle?

Session II

Law and *Nomos*

Readings:

- Aristotle, *Ethics*, 10.9.
- Plato, *Republic*, book 2, 357a-362c and 514a-517e.
- Genesis 4.
- Exodus 19-20.
- Talmud, *Shabbat* 88a.

Guiding Questions:

- What is the purpose of law, according to Aristotle?
- According to the Myth of Gyges' Ring, what is law (*nomos*) and where does it come from? What is its relationship to human nature (*phusis*)? Which view of law—Glaucon's or Aristotle's—seems more plausible to you?
- What is education, according to the Cave Image, and what role does it play in the achievement of virtue and the good life?
- Where does law show up in the Cave Image? Does the image furnish grounds for distinguishing good laws from bad ones? Does it offer any hope that political wisdom will be recognized—that those who *should* rule, will *in fact* rule?
- Why might Cain's crime be placed in the Bible where it is? Did Cain know that he did anything wrong before God tells him?
- How does the revelation at Mount Sinai solve the problem of political authority? How does Law in Exodus 19-20 differ from the Aristotelian and Platonic understandings of *nomos*?
- What roles do autonomy and coercion play in the Giving of the Law at Sinai according to the Talmud *Shabbat* 88a?

Session III

Holiness and Piety

Readings:

- Plato, *Republic*, book 2, 368c-383c.
- Plato, *Laws*, 715e-718a.
- Exodus 19:5-6.
- Leviticus 19.
- I Samuel 1-3.
- *Kuzari*, I: 35-43, 95.

Guiding Questions:

- How does the first or natural city come into being? What idea of the good life is reflected in it? What role does piety play in its life? Why does this city decay?
- Why is reforming speech about the gods (*theologia*) the first order of business in producing a healthy regime? What are the basic principles of Socrates' political theology?
- According to Plato's *Laws*, what role do the gods and holiness play in the well-ordered city? How does revering the gods promote moderation and respect for one's ancestors?
- What is so striking about the *scope* of holiness' purview as expressed by the People of Israel in Exodus 19:5-6?
- How would you characterize the areas in human life that fall under the injunction to "Be Holy" in Leviticus 19?
- What does a life of holiness look like in the narrative of Hannah, her son Samuel, and the sons of Eli the High Priest?
- What is the source of human holiness for the *Kuzari*?

Session IV

The City

Readings:

- Aristotle, *Politics*, selections.
- John Maynard Keynes, "Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren" (1930).
- Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, 1.2.
- Genesis 11.
- Psalms 122, 126.
- Jonathan Haidt, "Why the Past 10 Years of American Life Have Been Uniquely Stupid," *The Atlantic* (April 2022).

Guiding Questions:

- What is nature, for Aristotle, and how does it furnish a basis for the good life?
- In what does the distinctive political activity of human beings consist? Is political debate and discussion an essential part of the good life?
- Why is leisure important, and what is its proper use? What would Aristotle think of Keynes' reflections on leisure?
- How does Maimonides' conception of the good life compare to Aristotle's? How does Maimonides' conception of the good life compare to the *Kuzari's*?
- Does Maimonides leave room for anything like Aristotle's idea of political debate as an end in itself?
- According to the simplest meaning of the text of Genesis 11, what is the sin of the construction of the Tower?
- What might more philosophical extensions of the sin of the Tower be to contemporary urban life?
- What are the qualities of the ideal city, according to Psalms 122 and 126?

Session V

The Nation/People

Readings:

- Aeschylus, *Persians*, 159-350.
- Genesis 12:1-3, 17:1-14.
- Deuteronomy 4:6-10.
- Sifrei Deuteronomy, 343, paragraph 6.
- Talmud, *Avodah Zarah* 2a-3b.
- Maimonides, "Letter on Astrology."

Guiding Questions:

- In Aeschylus's view, what are the main differences between Persians and Greeks? What does it mean to be Greek, and what makes Greek life uniquely dignified and free?
- According to Genesis, what are the conditions for, and rewards of, membership in the Abrahamic nation?
- What distinguishes the Jewish people and makes them uniquely blessed, according to Deuteronomy? Can these good things be lost? What must be done to maintain them? How does Maimonides' understanding of the destruction of the First Temple enrich our understanding of those "good things" given to the Jewish People?
- In the view of the rabbis, why does G-d elect the people of Israel to become His nation? To what extent does being the chosen people depend on the choice of the people? Is Chosenness a gift, or an achievement?
- What might Greeks and Jews have to learn from one another about maintaining the blessings that distinguish them from what the Greeks called barbarians and the Bible calls the nations (*hagoyim*)?