THE QUEST FOR GOD AND THE GOOD:
READINGS AND STUDY QUESTIONS

Chapter One: God and Good in the Bible: God saw that it was Good

A. Bible, Genesis 1-3; Genesis 6:9-9:17.


1. Why does the Bible begin with creation?

2. What differences in style do you notice between Genesis 1 and 2? Is this one creation story or two? If two, what is the relationship between the two stories?

3. What does the Bible mean when it tells us that God saw that the light was good? (Gen 1:4) and that God saw everything that he had made and indeed, it was very good (Gen 1:31)? Did God not know in advance that the creation would turn out well? What is the meaning of good?

4. How do you understand the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Did eating of its fruit magically give Adam and Eve wisdom?

5. Did God know Adam and Eve would eat of the fruit of the tree? If so, why did God put the tree and the snake in the garden?

6. What is the significance of the parting gesture of God in giving Adam and Eve clothes (Gen 3:21)?

7. What did the rabbis in *Genesis Rabbah* think about the human inclination to evil? Did they think that God should not have created humanity, given the human propensity to evil? (*Genesis Rabbah* VII:4-5, IX:4-11; *JPS Commentary to the Torah, Genesis*, 6:5, p. 47; Gen 8:21, p. 59)?

Chapter 2: Plato’s *Timaeus*: A Divine Craftsman shapes all for the Good

**Suggested translations:**

Donald Zeyl, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000).


1. What are the two orders of being Plato describes? What might have led Plato to arrive at such a conception of reality? Does it make intuitive sense to you? (27d-28a)

2. What leads Plato to the conclusion that the universe has a creator? (28a-c)

3. What do you think Timaeus means when he asserts that the creator is hard to find and impossible to declare to all? (28c)

4. Why does Timaeus assert that the world is a likeness or image of something? (27d-29b)

5. Why is the account of the world’s origin only a "likely account" (29b-d)

6. Why did God fashion the universe, according to Timaeus? What does this process of fashioning entail (29e-30a)?

7. In 27d, Plato makes a distinction between that which always is and has no becoming, and that which becomes, and never is. In 28b he asks of the world: “has it always been? Was there no origin (arche) from which it came to be? Or did it come to be, and take its start from some origin?” Is he talking about becoming in the same way here as in 27d? (This is a difficult question and requires careful reading and pondering.)

B. Plato, *Timaeus* 48a-53c.

8. In 48e-49a, Timaeus argues that a third kind of thing must be added to our earlier account. He elaborates on this third thing at 50a-c, 50d-51b, and most clearly at 52a-c. What is this third thing and why must it be added?

9. To further refine our question: what is the Receptacle?

   a. Is it space—a container or medium for things (52b-c)?

   b. Or is it "stuff," a material substratum, like gold (50a-c) wax (50e-51b) or the base for perfume (50e)?
c. Is there a way to combine and reconcile these two views? (think creatively! You can also try drawing a picture.)

d. How does he describe the Receptacle at 52d-53c?

e. Another way to ask this question: how do the Forms appear in our world? What might have led Plato to this description? Can you make sense of Plato’s depiction with an example from our world?

f. What was the process by which this world was created or shaped (52d-53c)?


1. How can Davies’ discussion on pp. 34-35 shed light on the Timaeus? How would you challenge Davies’ interpretation of the *Timaeus* in the last paragraph of p. 35?

2. Where does Davies find a remnant of the Platonic Forms in the modern scientific world view? (pp. 37-38)

3. How does Davies describe the Chinese, Hindu, and Jewish and Christian views of the cosmos? (note that Judeo-Christian is a misnomer; there are significant differences between Judaism and Christianity.) What do you think is at stake in each of these views of the origin of the world? What is the significance of seeing the world as created or eternal? (pp. 39-45)


1. In *Timaeus* 53b, we read that what was present in the initial chaos were traces of earth, air, fire, and water, but in the chaotic, mixed state one would expect in something absent of deity. God ordered them by giving a “distinct configuration by means of shapes and numbers.” Scholars hypothesize that Plato might have conceived of the Forms on the analogy of numbers. Can you explain how numbers might hold the key to our world?


1. How does this passage help us understand Plato’s notion of a formal structure of reality?

2. How do you think he understands the assertion that Mind orders all things?

3. How can we translate that notion in our contemporary scientific worldview? (Consult Davies, *Mind of God*).
F. Plato, *Meno* 87e-89a; *Republic* 500b-501e


1. How is the Good the key to understanding all virtues?

2. What does Plato mean by saying that the Good is the source of the being of all the Forms?

3. How is goodness the key to understanding our world, according to Plato? (See also *Phaedo* 97b).

G. *Protagoras* 351b-362; *Meno* 77a-89a, 97a-98b; *Gorgias* 499e-501c, 506c-508a, *Phaedo* 69b; *Republic* 427d-445b.


1. Is virtue simply a form of knowledge? If we all actually desire good, why do we seem to do things we know are wrong or harmful, to ourselves and to others (*Protagoras* 351b-362; *Meno* 77a-89a, 97a-98b)?

2. Is pleasure in itself good? Is suffering always a bad thing? What is the difference between Socrates’ view of pleasure in the *Protagoras* and in *Gorgias* 499e-501c and *Phaedo* 63d-69c?

3. Do we always desire the good? Is everything we desire for the sake of the good? (*Meno* 77b-78c; *Protagoras* 358c-d, *Gorgias* 499e-501c)

4. Is Socrates arguing that what we desire is always good?

5. What does Socrates mean by his famous doctrine that virtue is (a form of) wisdom? (*Meno* 87b-89a; *Protagoras* 357c-3; *Gorgias* 499e-501c; *Phaedo* 69b)?
6. What are his various arguments for this principle? Which is the strongest argument?

7. What evidence would you bring to dispute this view? How would you argue that virtue requires something other than wisdom or knowledge alone?

8. How does Plato depict the soul differently in this passage in the Republic than in the Meno, Protagoras, and Gorgias? Which model makes more sense to you: a unified soul, or a divided soul? (Republic 427d-445b)

9. What does Plato mean by the Good, the Beautiful, and the Equal? (Phaedo 72e-77a)?

H. Phaedo 97b.

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I. Plato, Meno 87e-89a; Republic 500b-501e

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Chapter 2a. A Modern Platonist: Iris Murdoch and the Sovereignty of Good


“On ‘God’ and ‘Good,’” 52-76.
1. How does Murdoch counter the existentialist emphasis on choice? What is her account of how human beings choose, or what the human personality is (54)?

2. What is prayer, and how does Murdoch think prayer can be re-constituted even for those for whom God is not a reality (“in a world without God”) (55)

3. What is Murdoch’s definition of God, and how does she apply this traditional definition to the Good? Specifically:
   a. What does she mean by an object of attention? (55)
   b. Why should the source of moral value be unitary? Why should there be one single object of moral attention? (56-58)
   c. How does Murdoch understand transcendence? What does she mean by moral realism, and how does she bridge the gap from realism to transcendence? What is her argument that one can experience the transcendence of the beautiful in a way that we cannot experience the transcendence of the good (59-60)?
   d. How does Murdoch argue for the importance of perfection? (60-62)
   e. How does she argue for certainty or necessity with respect to the Good? (63-66)
   f. How does Murdoch argue that the artist is in fact living “the good life”? What is it about the process of creating art that is a prime example of goodness for Murdoch? (64-66)
   g. What is love for Murdoch? What teaches us to treat people as persons rather than things? (66-67)
   h. What is Murdoch’s interpretation of the Form of the Good? (70-71)


1. What does Murdoch mean when she says that morality is a kind of unesoteric mysticism? How does she understand Plato’s metaphor of the Good as the sun? (90-95, 100-102 See also The Fire and the Sun, 43).

2. How do particularity and detail figure into Murdoch’s account of the Good? (96-97).
3. How are good and love related for Murdoch? (102-3).

Chapter 3: Change and Good: Chinese Perspectives

A. Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*.

Suggested translations:
Red Pine. *Lao-Tzu’s Taoteching* (Mercury House, 1996). (Includes selections from traditional commentaries.)

Chapter One

1. Why is Tao called Tao not the real, constant Tao?

2. Why can names name no last name?

3. What does it mean to say “Nameless: the origin of heaven and earth; Naming: the mother of ten thousand things?” How does naming give birth to things? (on naming, see also Chapters 2, 32, 34, 41)

4. Is there a real event of creation here? (Compare Chapters 24, 40, 42)

Chapter Two

1. Do beauty and ugliness, good and evil require each other? How would you relate these lines to Genesis 1?

2. “Therefore the Sage is devoted to non-action (*wu-wei*, non-interfering, unobtrusive action, effortless ease).” What is the connection between the first part of the chapter and the section? Why are they connected by “therefore”?

3. How does the Sage practice the teaching that uses no words? How does one teach without words?
Chapter Four

1. How can Tao be empty and yet its use never exhausted?

2. How is Tao an “endless source of inexhaustible energy” (Chapter Six)?

3. (cf Chapter Five: Yet Heaven and Earth and all the space between are like a bellows; Empty but inexhaustible, always producing more)

Chapter Six

1. Why is Tao likened to a Mysterious Female?

Chapter Eight

1. Why is Tao compared to water? Why is water a good model to emulate? (cf . 43, 78)

Chapter Nine

1. What practical advice do we find here towards living the Tao? How do we learn this from Nature’s Way?

Chapter Ten

1. What kind of practices do you think the first few lines are talking about? (qi/ch’i is mentioned also in 42, 55) How do you think the text is connecting these practices to governing the country?

Chapter Eleven

1. What are we learning from the wheel, the pot, and the room in this chapter? How is emptiness the key? How does not having or non-being lead to usefulness?

Chapter Seventeen

1. “When the work is done, Everyone says, “We just acted naturally (ziran; tzu jan).” The same term ziran (“self-so”) occurs in Chapter 25 (“Humans follow earth; Earth follows heaven; Heaven follows Tao; Tao follows its own nature (ziran).”) How are the two passages related?
Chapter Eighteen, Nineteen, Thirty-Eight

1. What specific cultural critique do we find in these chapters? (Hint: benevolence, righteousness, propriety are key terms in Confucian thought)

2. What is the significance of the uncarved block of wood? (see also Chapter 15, 28, 32, 27, 57)

Chapter Twenty

1. What does the text mean by holding up the infant and the baby in the womb as models?

2. What does the author mean by saying “others are bright and intelligent, I alone am dull, dull”? (compare 19) (Note final line in D.C. Lau, “I alone am different from others/And value being fed by the mother.”)

Chapter Twenty-Two

1. What are some of the characteristics of the Taoist Sage? How does he or she act in the world (see also Chapters 24, 26, 27, 49)

Chapter Twenty-five

1. Is the Tao changing or unchanging or both?

2. What does it mean to say that Tao follows its own nature? (ziran; tzu jan)

Chapter Twenty-Eight

1. Why is the feminine principle so important to the Tao Te Ching? What are some images of the feminine that the text uses? (See also Chapters 1, 6, 25, 51-52, 61)? How is the feminine principle related to emptiness? (See also 4, 11)

Chapter Forty

1. How can being come from non-being? What does Lao Tzu mean by non-being?
1. What is *wu-wei* (effortless action)? How does one practice it? (See also Chapter 2, 3, 41, 46-48, 57)

2. Choose a passage that particularly moves or draws you and explain why. See if you can “practice” this principle for a few days.

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**Chapter 3a. Process and Beauty: The Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead**


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2. **Chapter 4: The Harmony of Reason and Revelation: Augustine and Maimonides on Good and Evil**
A. Augustine, *Confessions*. VII:1, 3, 5, 10, 11-16.

1. In VII:12-13, Augustine seeks to resolve the problem of metaphysical evil: how does the force of evil enter creation, if the universe is created by a good God? Is evil a substance? In VII:3, 16, Augustine discusses moral evil, evils we human beings cause.

2. How does Augustine picture God in VII:1 and VII:5? According to VII:5, is matter evil?

3. How does his discussion in VII:10 and VII:14-15 resolve the errors in his earlier conception of God? How had Augustine been thinking about God’s infinity, and what is the new understanding he comes to?

4. In VII:10, p. 147, Augustine asks, Is truth then nothing at all, simply because it has no extension in space, with or without limits? What is his answer to this question?

5. What is his resolution to the problem of evil in 11, 12, and 13?


6. How does Maimonides Guide of the Perplexed III:10 help us to understand Augustine’s resolution of the problem of evil? What does Maimonides add?

7. How would you compare Maimonides’ view in III:11 to that of Socrates? What does he add to the Socratic view?

8. Read Guide of the Perplexed III:12. What are the four species of evil Maimonides describes?

   a. How does III:10 help us to understand the first species of evil?

   b. Does Maimonides really think these four species are *evils*?

   c. What distinctions in *kinds* of evil that we would make does Maimonides not seem to make?

   d. How would you articulate Maimonides resolution of the problem of evil?

Chapter Five: You are the Absolute: Philosophies of India


Brihadaranyaka Upanishad from The Upanishads, tr. Eknath Easwaran (Nilgiri Press, 1987). 38-49


Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 1.1-1.4 (pp. 7-31) 4.5 (pp. 69-71); Chandogya Upanishad, Chapter 6 (pp. 148-56) in Upanisads, tr. Patrick Olivelle (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).


1. II. 4.12 (p. 38) What does the image of salt in water tell us about the relationship between our true Self and who we think of ourselves as?

2. II. 4.14 (p. 38) What does Yajnavalkya mean by saying that there is no separate self? What does he mean when he asks, How can the knower ever be known?

3. IV.4.6-7 (pp. 43-44) What does Yajnavalkya mean by saying that the Self is the light of a human being, the light within the heart, “only seeming to think, seeming to move, the Self neither sleeps nor wakes nor dreams”?

4. III.4.7-19 (pp. 44-45) Yajnavalkya here gives an extended description of varied states of consciousness. What are these states of consciousness? What do you think is the meaning of comparing the “third state of consciousness” with the dream state?
5. III. 4. 11-32 (pp. 44-46). What is the relationship between the Self and these varied states of consciousness? What are the metaphors and images used to describe the state of union with the Self?

6. IV.3.35-IV.4.4 (pp. 46-48). How does Yajnavalkya understand the process we call death?

7. IV.4.5. (p. 48) Paragraph 5 is key for understanding Hindu psychology. What is the misidentification it describes?

8. The second paragraph and paragraph 6 articulate the law of karma. Is our ultimate goal to achieve “good karma”? Is it death and the afterlife? Is it something else?

9. IV. 4.23 (p. 49. See also IV.3.31-32, p. 46) What is the “kingdom of Brahman” or “the world of “Brahman?”

B. Chandogya Upanishad, tr. R. Hume (pp. 248-250); in Novak, The World’s Wisdom, 21-23).

1. What do these various metaphors teach us about the Self? How does the metaphor of salt and water on p. 248 (Novak, p. 23) differ from or complement the image in Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, p. 38?


Suggested translations:


The Bhagavad Gita: A New Translation with Commentary, tr. David White (New York: Peter Lang, 1988)

1. First Teaching: what is Arjuna’s dilemma?

2. Second Teaching: 2:11-30. What is Krishna’s first argument for why Arjuna should fight the battle? (This is also the first yoga or spiritual discipline of the Gita, the discipline of knowledge, jnana or samkhya yoga)

3. 2:31-38. What is his second argument?
4. 2:47-53. Here Krishna outlines the second yoga or spiritual discipline, *karma-yoga*. Why should Arjuna fight the battle, according to Krishna? How does his argument here resolve the tension between renunciation and action?

5. 3:3-9, 3:16-29. What is Krishna’s argument here? What is the danger of renunciation? What is surprising about verse 31, given what we know about karma?

6. 4:9. How is knowledge being redefined here?

7. 4:14. What surprising new teachings do we find here?

8. 4:18. Can you explain this puzzling verse? (See also 4:19-21 for help!)

9. 5: 8-9; see also 3:27-28. What is the alternative Krishna offers here to sitting in meditation?

10. 5:27; 6:11-14. These are some of the earliest meditation texts we know of. What is the value of meditation, as an adjunct to the other disciplines taught here in the *Gita*?

11. 9:22 (-9:28), 9:32. What surprising new teaching do we see here? How is this section revolutionary? (See also 12:7)

12. 12:3-7. What do you think Krishna is saying about the Upanishadic ideal of becoming one with Brahman (the unmanifest) vs. the new ideal of knowing Krishna?

**Chapter Six: Compassion, Wisdom, Awakening: the Way of Buddhism**


1. Describe each of the four noble truths in your own words. (*What the Buddha Taught*, 16-60).

2. Describe each of the three marks of existence in your own words, explaining them through examples given by the Buddha and your own understanding (Donald Lopez, “Introduction” to *Buddhism in Practice*, ed. Donald Lopez; reprinted in *Eastern Ways of Being Religious*, 118-20; see also Pema Chodron, “The Facts of Life,” in *The Places that Scare You*, 17-22).
3. What is nirvana/nibbana? (*What the Buddha Taught*, 35-44). In what ways is Nirvana similar to and different from the Hindu concepts of *brahman* and *moksha*? (Novak, *The World’s Wisdom* 34, pp. 75-76).


1. Explain the metaphor of the chariot (#35) (79-80).

2. What does it mean to say that each of the *skandhas* has “no self”? (#34) 78-79.

3. How does the Buddha explain the nature of nirvana, using the metaphor of a fire going out? (#36, 80-81).


1. Read carefully Novak 77-78, and documents 38a (p. 78) and 39a (p.80) and Kessler, *Eastern Ways of Being Religious*, 123-6. What is the Mahayana view of the content of the original teaching (*dharma*) of Theravada Buddhism: the four noble truths, the dilemma of samsara, the seeking of nirvana? You might use the notions of “conventional truth” vs. “absolute truth” and “skillful means.”

2. Read Novak 39b, pp. 80-81. What would you describe as the two sides of the way the Boddhisattva looks at the world and his or her task?

3. Novak 52a, 53, p. 100. What does Zen Master Dogen mean by teaching that practice and enlightenment are one and the same?


1. What is mindfulness? (23-29)
2. What does the author mean by saying “enlightenment is always enlightenment about something. It is not abstract.” (p. 27) What misconceptions is he trying to counter?

3. What is Buddhism’s critique of the Upanishad’s notion of Self (Atman)? (37-39)


5. How do the Upanishads and Buddhism differ in their analysis of change, and in the conclusions they draw about impermanence (anitya) ? (p. 39)

6. What is the difference between our concept of a table and the table itself? (40-41).

7. What does the author mean by the interbeing nature of things? What is the relationship between not-self (anatman) and interbeing? (43) (Note that the term dharma here has a different sense than in the Bhagavad Gita. A dharma is a constituent element of reality)

8. Explain the difference between conceptual knowledge and non-conceptual wisdom or direct experience (42-44).


10. What does the author mean when he says that “knowledge is the greatest obstacle to awakening?” (52) What does this remind you of in Socrates?

11. Explain the saying, “If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him.” (53-54)

12. How does “go and wash your bowl” mean “go and live a realized life”? (54-5).

13. What is a kung-an (koan), and how does it function as a skillful means? (56-59)

14. How does the kung-an have significance? (60-61).

15. What is the meaning of Chao Chou’s “no”? (62-65).

16. What is the difference between accepting a kung-an of our own, and studying one of others? What should be one’s attitude toward the cypress tree? (65-68)

17. What does the author mean when he says that “the kung-an is the lampshade, and Zen is the lamp itself”? (87)

18. Explain the meaning of the following famous Zen epigram: “Before practicing Zen, rivers were rivers and mountains were mountains. When I practiced Zen, I saw that rivers were no longer rivers and mountains no longer mountains. Now I see that rivers are again rivers and mountains are again mountains. (94)
Chapter Seven: Aristotle on God and Good: the Quest for Integration

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

Suggested Translations:
Terence Irwin. 1985 (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985). Faithful to the Greek and readable, with interesting, helpful notes at back).
Joe Sachs (Newburyport, Mass: Focus Publishing, 2002). Faithful to the Greek (with some idiosyncratic vocabulary), interesting notes on page.
Roger Crisp. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000) Very crisp, precise, readable translation. Only lacuna is absence of individual marginal lines (has 1097 b, but not lines 5, 10).
Sarah Broadie and Christopher Rowe. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). Superb introduction and commentary, remarkable work of scholarship. Big to carry around for undergraduates, but a wonderful resource.
Martin Ostwald (New York: Prentice Hall, 1962). Helpful notes. I don’t find as close to the Greek.

**Book One**

1. What does Aristotle mean by saying that the good is that at which everything aims? Is there one good at which all things aim, or do all things aim at their own good? What does good mean? Is it necessarily related to ends or aims? (1094a; see also 1097a 15-25)

2. How does Aristotle argue that there is a best good that we all wish for? (1094a)

3. How do people agree and how do they disagree about the supreme human good? (1095a-b)

4. What are Aristotle’s arguments against Plato’s Theory of Forms? (1096a-1097a)

5. What does Aristotle mean by arguing that the good is complete or final? (1097a)

6. What does he mean by arguing that the complete good is self-sufficient? (1097b)

7. What does Aristotle mean by arguing that happiness is not one good among many? What is his argument? (1097b 15-20)

8. What is the function of a human being and why? (1098 a)
9. How does Aristotle argue that the human good is the soul’s activity expressing virtue? (1098a)

10. What does Aristotle mean by saying that if there are more virtues than one, the good will express the “best and most complete virtue”? What are the various connotations of complete (or perfect) virtue? (1098a).

11. What does Aristotle argue here about the place of pleasure in the good life? (1099a 15)

12. Why do we need external goods added to the activity of happiness? (1099b)

13. Why, according to Aristotle, do we not call children happy? (1100a)

14. Why, according to Aristotle can the blessed person never become miserable? What is the source of the stability of his or her happiness? (1100b-1101a)

15. What are the parts or aspects of the soul, according to Aristotle? How does this description compare with that of Plato in Republic IV: 427d-445b? (1102a-1103a)

Book Two

1. What are the two kinds of virtues, and how are each acquired? (1103a)

2. In particular, how do we acquire moral virtue? (1103b-1104a)

3. From what realm does Aristotle learn the principle of the mean? (1104a)

4. How do we know if someone has actually achieved a virtue? (1104b, 1105a)

5. What is the difference between craft (techne) and virtue? (1105a)

6. Is virtue a feeling, a capacity, or a state? How does Aristotle prove this? (1105b-1106a)

7. What is the relation between virtue and the human function? (1106a)

8. How do we find the mean for ourselves? 1106a-b)

9. How does Aristotle use the analogy of a craft? (1106b)

10. How does he define precisely what we should aim for in a virtue of character? (1106b)
11. What is Aristotle’s definition of virtue? (1107a)

12. How do we find the mean state? Why is the mean sometimes closer to one extreme or the other? (1108-1109a)

13. How do we assure we hit the mean and not the extremes? (1109a-b)

Book Ten, 1177a10-1178b33

1. What is complete happiness? Is it contemplation alone, or does it include many diverse virtues? Compare the following passages:

Book One

a. The good of man is an activity of the soul in conformity with excellence or virtue, and if there are several virtues, in conformity with the best and most complete. (1098a 16-18).

b. Happiness, as we have said, requires completeness in virtue as well as a complete lifetime. (1100a 4-5)

c. The happy man (is) one whose activities are an expression of complete virtue, and who is sufficiently equipped with external goods, not simply at a given moment but to the end of his life. (Or should we add that he must die as well as live in the manner which we have defined?) (1101 a 14-16)

d. Happiness is a certain activity of the soul in conformity with perfect virtue (1102 a 5-6).

e. For the best activities encompass all these attributes, and it is in these, or in the best one of them, that we maintain happiness consists (1099a 29-31).

Book Ten

a. If happiness is activity in conformity with virtue, it is to be expected that it should conform with the highest virtue, and that is the virtue of the best part in us. (X.7, 1177a 12.)

b. It is the activity of this part (when operating) in conformity with the excellence or virtue proper to it that will be complete happiness. That it is an activity concerned with theoretical knowledge or contemplation has already been stated.

c. It follows that the activity of our intelligence constitutes the complete happiness of man, provided that it encompasses a complete span of life; for nothing connected with happiness must be incomplete. (1177b 24)
d. A further indication that **complete happiness** consists in some kind of contemplative activity is this (1178b 7)

e. Consequently happiness is **some kind of study or contemplation.** (1178b 32)

f. Now look at the following passages from Book Six and Book One: Book Six, 1141a10-1141b20; Book One, 1100b12-15. Does Aristotle hold intellectual virtue as the highest, most stable form of virtue, or moral virtue? Which is the most important part of virtue and which life is superior?

Now look at the following passages from Book Nine. In Book Ten, Aristotle argues that who we really are is our intellect. He says the same thing in Book Nine, but what he means by intellect in context seems very different from what he means in Book Ten. Explain that difference.

**Book Nine**

a. A good man “wishes for and does what is good for himself and what appears good to him—for the mark of a good man is to work hard to achieve the good—and he does so for his own sake, for he does it for the sake of the intellectual part of himself, which of course is thought to constitute what each person really is.” (IX.4, 1166a 15)

b. A person wishes good for himself as long as he remains whatever kind of being he actually is, and it is the thinking part of each individual that constitutes what he really is or constitutes it in a greater degree than anything else (1166a 23).

c. However, it would seem that such a person is actually a truer egoist or self-lover. At any rate, he assigns that is supremely noble and good to himself, he gratifies the most sovereign part of himself, and he obeys it in everything. Just as a state and every other organized system seems to be in the truest sense identical with the most sovereign element in it, so it is with man. Consequently, he is an egoist or self-lover in the truest sense who loves and gratifies the most sovereign element in him. Moreover, when we call a person “morally strong” or “morally weak,” depending on whether or not his intelligence is the ruling element within him”, we imply that intelligence is the individual. And also, we regard a man as being an independent and voluntary agent in the truest sense when he has acted rationally. Thus it is clear than a man is—or is in the truest sense—the ruling element within him, and that a good man loves this more than anything else. Hence it is he who is in the truest sense an egoist or self-lover. . . . if all men were to compete for what is noble and put all their efforts into the performance of the noblest actions, all the needs of the community will have been met, and each
individual will have the greatest of goods, since that is what virtue is. (IX.8, 1168b 28-1169 a 10).

d. We are better able to observe our neighbors than ourselves, and their actions better than our own 1169 b 32).


1. In *Eudemian Ethics* II:1, 1219a 30 Aristotle writes that

   a. “happiness must be the activity of a complete life, in accordance with complete virtue.” (1219a 30, p. 13).

   b. In 1219b 5 he adds that nothing incomplete is happy, as it does not form a whole. (p. 13).

   c. Further, in 1220a 4 he says that “as physical well being is made up of the virtues of several parts, so is the virtue of the soul, in so far as it is a complete whole” (p. 14).

   d. How may these three statements in the *Eudemian Ethics* shed light on what “complete virtue” and “complete happiness” mean in *Nicomachean Ethics* I 1098a 16.

   e. Is this the same meaning of “complete” or “perfect” (it is the same word *teleion*) that we have when Aristotle discusses “complete happiness’ in *Nicomachean Ethics* X 1077a-b?

2. In *Eudemian Ethics* Book VIII, Chapter 3, Aristotle adds a new virtue that we do not find in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: the virtue of nobility (*kalon kagathon*, the fine-and-good). In 1249a 15 he writes that “nobility is complete virtue” (p. 41). How might this passage shed light on our understanding of “complete virtue” in the *Nicomachean Ethics*? Might this be a different conception of virtue from that we find in the *Nicomachean Ethics*?

3. *Eudemian Ethics* Book VIII, Chapter 3, Aristotle writes that “whatever, whether through deficiency or excess, hinders the service and speculation of the god, is bad. Thus it is for the soul, and this is the best limit for the soul—to be aware as little as possible of the non-rational part of the soul as such.”
What are the possible meanings of “the service and speculation of the god” for Aristotle? See the suggestions of:


What light does Kenny’s discussion of the end of the *Eudemian Ethics* shed on our understanding of the relationship between moral and intellectual virtue and what constitutes *eudaimonia*?

**Chapter Seven a. Modern Aristotelian Repercussions: Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor**


1. What does Taylor mean by “strong evaluations?” (4)

2. How does Taylor argue that our respect for life and dignity and flourishing of others is not just biological, but involves what he calls a moral ontology? (4-8)

3. What does Taylor mean by the “background picture” of our moral and spiritual intuitions? (9-10)

4. What are the three axes of our moral thinking that he articulates? (15-16)

5. What does he mean by saying that frameworks today are problematic? (16-18)

**Chapter Eight: The Philosopher as Teacher: Al-Farabi on Contemplation and Action**


   a. What is the Active Intellect? (197-207) (This is difficult, but well worth understanding!)

   b. What does Alfarabi mean by felicity? What is the role of practical and theoretical reason in bringing human beings to felicity or fulfillment? (205-8)
   no. 25, pp. 39-40 (English)
   
a. How does Alfarabi depict Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle’s view of human
   happiness?

3. *The Attainment of Happiness* in *Al-Farabi’s Philosophy of Plato and
   in *Medieval Political Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963), 61,
   76-81.
   
a. Alfarabi is a true maverick with respect to the relationship between
   philosophy and religion. What startling assertions does he make about
   this relationship? (77)
   
b. What does Alfarabi mean by identifying the philosopher, prince, and
   imam? (78-79, 81)
   
c. How does Alfarabi define the counterfeit philosopher, the false
   philosopher, and the vain philosopher?

3. **Chapter Nine: The Imitation of God: Maimonides on the Active and the
   Contemplative Life**

**Maimonides, Guide of the Perplexed III:51**

Suggested Translations:


Tr. Pines abridged in *A Maimonides Reader*, ed. I. Twersky (New York: Behrman House,

this translation is abridged, students find it much more readable. It is less Latin-
influenced, and nevertheless faithful to the original Judeo-Arabic.

1. Explain the parable of the prince in his palace. What elements of this parable do
you think were controversial for traditional religious believers?

2. What do you think is the “service of God of those who have apprehended Truth”?
(“the worship peculiar to those who have apprehended the true realities”) What is
the extra element of that service (p. 187 Rabin; 620 Pines; 353 Reader)
3. What is the problem Maimonides points out of using the imagination as a way to know God? (p. 187 Rabin; 620 Pines; 343-4 Reader)

4. Why according to Maimonides does the ultimate service of God only come after one has achieved knowledge and apprehension of God? (188 Rabin; 621 Pines; 344 Reader)

5. Outline Maimonides’ prescriptions for a spiritual path. What is the place of contemplation of God, prayer, practice of the commandments? Why is developing the intellect so important in Maimonides’ view? (pp. 188-191 Rabin; 622-3 Pines; 345-6 Reader).

6. What was unique about Moses and the patriarchs, in Maimonides’ view? Why did they merit the continual providence—protection and guidance—of God? (191-192 Rabin; 623-4 Pines; 346-7 Reader).

7. Why do bad things happen to even prophets and people of perfect virtue, in Maimonides’ view? Why did they merit the continual providence—protection and guidance—of God? (193-4 Rabin; 624-7 Pines; omitted from Reader).

8. What is death through a kiss, in Maimonides’ interpretation? (194-5 Rabin; 627-8 Pines; 348 Reader).

III:52

1. Who or what is the great King who is always protecting us, in Maimonides’ parable in III:52? What is the effect of realizing this? (197-8 Rabin; 628 Pines; 349 Reader)

2. What is the purpose of the religious practices and ideas that Scriptures teaches us? (196-7 Rabin; 630 Pines; 350 Reader)

III:54

1. What are the four perfections described by philosophers and prophets? (197-200 Rabin; 634-7 Pines; 354-7 Reader) What is the fifth perfection Maimonides adds (or 4+) (200-202 Rabin; 637-8 Pines; 657-8 Reader). How does Maimonides interpret Jeremiah 9:23-24 to teach this ultimate goal?

2. Maimonides says that the third perfection, perfection of virtue, is only a gateway to something else. What is the difference between the third perfection and the way of life he describes as the ultimate goal (201-202 Rabin; 637-8 Pines; 357-8 Reader)?

Chapter Ten: The Dance of Human Expression: Al-Ghazali and Maimonides


1. How is skepticism related to the search for truth? (18-20)

2. How does Ghazali refute the veracity of sense-perception and intellectual judgment? (21-23)

3. What is the argument he makes about the phenomenon of dreaming? (23) (68-69)

4. How was his skepticism healed? What does he mean by light in this process? (p. 24).

5. What is prophecy, according to Ghazali? How is it related to dreaming? (68-9)

6. How does he refute objections to the possibility of prophecy? (69-70)

7. What does he mean by an "eye" endowed with light? (69)

8. What does he mean on p. 63 about illumination from the light of prophetic revelation? (63)

9. What is the relationship between mystical experience and language? Why do you think Ghazali objects to such terms as "inheritence," "union," and "connection"? (p. 64)

10. What is the relationship between mystical experience and prophecy? What is mystical experience? (64)

11. What does he mean by using the metaphor of taste (*dhawq*) for religious experience? (p. 70).

12. What is the role of religious ritual? How does he understand its function? (pp. 74-75)

13. What is the role of intellect for Ghazali? How does it interact with prophetic revelation? (p. 76) Is Ghazali anti-intellectual or anti-philosophical? (76, 72)