

PROBLEM OF EVIL AND DIVINE PROVIDENCE IN  
MAIMONIDES' PHILOSOPHY

İPEK BUDANUR

MAY 2011

PROBLEM OF EVIL AND DIVINE PROVIDENCE IN  
MAIMONIDES' PHILOSOPHY

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
OF  
MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

BY

İPEK BUDANUR

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR  
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN  
THE DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

MAY 2011

Approval of the Graduate School of Social Sciences

---

Prof.Dr. Meliha Altunışık  
Director

I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.

---

Prof.Dr.Ahmet İnam  
Head of Department

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Science/Arts/Doctor of Philosophy.

---

Prof.Dr.Yasin Ceylan  
Supervisor

**Examining Committee Members**

Prof.Dr.Ahmet İnam (METU,PHIL)

Prof.Dr.Yasin Ceylan (METU,PHIL)

Prof.Dr.Celal Türer (ANKARA UNİ,İLH.)

---

---

---

**I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.**

İpek Budanur :

Signature :

## **ABSTRACT**

### **PROBLEM OF EVIL AND DIVINE PROVIDENCE IN MAIMONIDES' PHILOSOPHY**

Budanur, İpek

M.A., Department of Philosophy

Supervisor : Prof. Dr. Yasin Ceylan

May 2011, 86 pages

The evident existence of evil does not appear to be compatible with the traditional theistic view of Divine Justice. On the one hand, in the course of our daily lives we observe that the innocent suffer undeservedly and the wicked prosper abundantly; and on the other we have the religious principle assuring us that God is just. This contradiction which is known as the problem of evil constitutes one of the greatest challenges to theistic religions. Moses Maimonides, the foremost Jewish philosopher of the Middle Ages offers a solution to this problem through his theory of providence. In this thesis, I argue that for Maimonides providence comes in stages and his theodicy is formed by the first two stages of his theory of providence that I take to be comprising of essentially three stages. Given the two seemingly antagonistic positions that comprise the problem of evil, how he reconciles them through the first two stages of his theory of providence by synthesizing creatively the religious and philosophical principles is the subject of this thesis. In this context, I will also consider how he further strengthens his philosophical position through the analysis of a biblical parable, i.e. the Book of Job.

Keywords: Maimonides, Problem of Evil, Providence, Book of Job

## ÖZ

### MAIMONIDES'İN FELSEFESİNDE KÖTÜLÜK PROBLEMİ VE İLAHİ İNAYET

Budanur, İpek

Master, Felsefe Bölümü

Tez Yöneticisi : Prof. Dr. Yasin Ceylan

Mayıs 2011, 86 sayfa

Dünyadaki kötülüklerin varlığı geleneksel teizmin ilahi adalet kavramı ile bağdaşmaz. Günlük hayatın akışı içerisinde pek çok kere şahit olduğumuz masum insanların haksız yere acı çektikleri gerçeğiyle, Tanrı'nın adil olduğunu öne süren dini prensip çatışmaktadır. Felsefede kötülük problemi olarak da bilinen bu çelişki teist dinlerin sorgulanmasına yol açmıştır. Ortaçağın çok önemli bir Yahudi Düşünürü olan Moses Maimonides, bu probleme ilahi inayet teorisi ile bir çözüm sunmaktadır. Bu çalışmada, birbiriyle çelişerek kötülük problemini oluşturan ve yukarıda da belirtilen bu iki pozisyonun, Maimonides tarafından dinsel ve felsefi prensiplerin yaratıcı bir şekilde bir araya getirilmesi ile nasıl uzlaştırıldığı incelenmektedir. Tezde, Maimonides'in ilahi inayet teorisinin temel olarak üç aşamadan oluştuğu ve teorinin birinci ve ikinci aşamaları ile kötülük problemine bir çözüm sunduğu öne sürülmektedir. Bu bağlamda, Tevrat'ta yer alan ve Maimonides'in ilahi inayet konusundaki felsefi pozisyonunu açıklamak için analiz ettiği Eyüp Bab'ına da değinilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Maimonides, Kötülük Problemi, İlahi İnayet

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Plagiarism page.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Öz.....	v
Table Of Contents.....	vi
CHAPTERS	
1.INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 The Problem.....	1
2.THE GUIDE FOR THE PERPLEXED AND PROVIDENCE.....	5
2.1 Target Audience: The Perplexed Intellectual.....	5
2.2 Objectives and Style.....	8
2.3 The Esoteric Issue.....	13
3.PROVIDENCE.....	17
3.1 Different Views On Providence.....	17
3.2 The Features of Maimonides' Theory of Providence.....	22
3.2.1 Evil, Matter and Form.....	22
3.2.2 Maimonides' Theory Of Knowledge.....	30
3.2.3 Virtue.....	34
3.2.4 Maimonides Cosmology.....	41
3.2.5. God.....	46
3.3 Maimonides View of Providence.....	51
3.4 Stages Of Providence.....	56
4.MAIMONIDES' VIEW OF PROVIDENCE AND THE BOOK OF JOB....	68
4.1 Bible, The Book of Job and Maimonides.....	68
4.2 Job's Story.....	71
4.3 Hermeneutic Inquiry On Job's Story.....	73
5.CONCLUSION.....	83
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	85

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 The Problem

In western philosophy the problem of evil is one of the arguments proposed against the existence of God. It is based upon the irreconcilability of the evil in the world with an all-powerful, all-knowing and a benevolent God. This problem was a major theme of the medieval period. Like many of his contemporaries, the Jewish medieval thinker Maimonides too, took up the challenge to examine the problem of evil in his philosophical work, *The Guide For The Perplexed*. (Hereinafter referred to as "The Guide")

In *The Guide*, Maimonides confirms on the one hand that God is just and every reward or punishment humans incur are deserved; and on the other, he affirms that in the daily course of life we encounter many events where we observe totally innocent and righteous individuals suffer undeservedly. Maimonides, just before he sets about analyzing the Book of Job in Chapter 22 says:

.....that which is related of him is an experience of frequent occurrence, is a source of perplexity to all thinkers....This perplexity is caused by the account that a simple and perfect person, who is upright in his actions, and very anxious to abstain from sin, is afflicted by successive misfortunes, namely, by loss of



property, by the death of his children, and by bodily disease, though he has not committed any sin.<sup>1</sup>

The source of this perplexity is stated by him in another chapter of the Guide in the following form:

...at first thought we notice an absence of system in human affairs. Some pious men live a miserable and painful life, whilst some wicked people enjoy a happy and pleasant life.<sup>2</sup>

Although Maimonides emphasizes the lack of justice in worldly affairs as quoted above, he also insists, in accordance with the traditional Jewish opinion that God is completely just and the evils or rewards people get are well deserved since they are rewarded or punished by God with justice according to their own merits. Quoting from Maimonides:

Another fundamental principle taught by the Law of Moses is this: Wrong cannot be ascribed to God in any way whatever; all evils and afflictions as well as all kinds of happiness of man, whether they concern one individual person or a community, are distributed according to justice; they are the result of strict judgment that admits no wrong whatever.<sup>3</sup>

There is apparently a contradiction here since on the one hand he asserts innocent and upright individuals suffer undeservedly and on the other he affirms the traditional Jewish opinion that God punishes or rewards people with justice in accordance with their actions.

---

<sup>1</sup> Maimonides, M. *The Guide for the Perplexed*, Trans.by M.Friedlander (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.1904 ), III/22

<sup>2</sup> Ibid,III/16

<sup>3</sup> Ibid,III/17

In this thesis, I argue that Moses Maimonides reconciles the seemingly opposing positions that comprise the problem of evil through the first two stages of his theory of providence which I take to be consisting of essentially three stages. I will examine how he formulates his theodicy by creatively synthesizing the religious and philosophical principles which is in essence a part of his theory of providence and how he further strengthens his philosophical position through the analysis of a biblical parable, i.e. the Book of Job. I suggest that Maimonides' theory of providence which establishes a very powerful link between "providence" and "intelligence" is comprised of three stages and the first two by offering a solution to the problem of evil forms his theodicy.

Maimonides discusses this issue mainly in the third part of The Guide for the Perplexed. Although he deals directly with the problem of evil and providence through Chapters 8-24 of the third part of the Guide, there are many other passages scattered throughout the book that refer to these subjects or are in some way related to them which should also be considered for a better understanding of his theory.

My first task will be to provide some preliminary remarks concerning the Guide, regarding Maimonides' motivations and objectives in writing the Book, his target audience, his style of writing, the esoteric-exoteric debate concerning the Guide and how the issue of Providence is regarded in this context.

In the third chapter, I will examine the essential features of his theory and how all these elements come together to make a consistent whole; namely, his theory of providence. These constituents as will be seen in greater detail later are concerned with his ethics, his epistemology, cosmology and metaphysics.

In the Guide, Maimonides after examining evil and providence at some length, presents an interpretation of the Book of Job in the Old Testament to illustrate his previously made points. In accordance with this, the story of Job will be considered in the fourth chapter. Here, after offering some views on Maimonides' treatment of the parables in the Bible, I will go over the parable of Job shortly and then proceed to Maimonides' interpretation of it.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE GUIDE FOR THE PERPLEXED AND PROVIDENCE

Maimonides' philosophical book, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, originally written in Arabic with the title "Dalalat al-ha'irin" is one of the most intriguing books in Jewish Philosophy. It is composed of three main parts further divided into 178 chapters. The first part of the book deals with biblical terms, the attributes of God and the theories of some Arabic Theologians. The second part is concerned with the proofs of existence of God, eternity, creation and prophecy and the last part with the problem of evil, providence, the reasons for commandments and the nature of true worship. In what follows I will discuss some points regarding the Book: the target audience, the objectives, the style and then the esoteric/exoteric debate concerning the book.<sup>4</sup>

#### **2.1 Target Audience: The Perplexed Intellectual**

Maimonides begins "The Guide of the Perplexed" with a letter addressed to his pupil, Joseph Ben Judah. In the letter Maimonides writes about his motivations leading him to compose *The Guide*. Here is an excerpt from the

---

<sup>4</sup> For more detailed information about the book see: Herbert A. Davidson, *Moses Maimonides, The Man and His Works*. Oxford University Press, Inc., 2005; Leon Roth. *The Guide For The Perplexed*, Moses Maimonides. Routledge, 2008; Raphael Jospe; *Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages*; Boston : Academic Studies Press, 2009.

letter which gives us a compact view regarding his motives and purposes in writing the book:

My dear pupil, ever since you resolved to come to me, from a distant country, and to study under my direction, I thought highly of your thirst for knowledge, and your fondness for speculative pursuits.....when you had gone with me through a course of astronomy, after having completed the [other] elementary studies which are indispensable for the understanding of that science, I was still more gratified by the acuteness and the quickness of your apprehension. Observing your great fondness for mathematics, I let you study them more deeply, for I felt sure of your ultimate success. Afterwards, when I took you through a course of logic, I found that my great expectations of you were confirmed, and I considered you fit to receive from me an exposition of the esoteric ideas contained in the prophetic books, that you might understand them as they are understood by men of culture. When I commenced by way of hints, I noticed that you desired additional explanation, urging me to expound some metaphysical problems..... I perceived that you had acquired some knowledge in those matters from others, and that you were perplexed and bewildered; yet you sought to find out a solution to your difficulty..... When, by the will of God, we parted, and you went your way, our discussions aroused in me a resolution which had long been dormant. Your absence has prompted me to compose this treatise for you and for those who are like you, however few they may be.<sup>5</sup>

This excerpt offers important insights for understanding Maimonides' expectations from his target audience and his reasons for putting this work down on paper: First of all, from the sentence in the above excerpt "*Your absence has prompted me to compose this treatise for you and for those who are like you, however few they may be.*" we can infer that Maimonides' pupil, Joseph Ben Judah, simply represents the typical audience he has in mind for his book. The typical audience he targets may be profiled as someone who has read the Scripture and at the same time studied sciences

---

<sup>5</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide*, Introduction

like astronomy, mathematics and logic; but becomes perplexed by the apparent inconsistencies between faith and reason. When a person who accepts the Bible as authoritative studies philosophy, he inevitably becomes perplexed by the contradictions between the literal understanding of the Bible and principles of philosophy. The Guide of the Perplexed targets such people. Hence the book is addressed to intellectual individuals who are torn between reason and faith. Such people, according to Maimonides' view, are very few; implying that the book is not for everyone. In the letter above from the lines where he refers to his pupil's educational background it can be inferred that he expects his readers to be knowledgeable in such fields like logic, mathematics and astronomy. Later in the coming sections he emphasizes the point that the book presupposes the knowledge of the principles of philosophy and sciences explicitly by saying:

It is not here intended to explain all these expressions to the unlettered or to mere tyros, a previous knowledge of Logic and Natural Philosophy being indispensable, or to those who confine their attention to the study of our holy Law, I mean the study of the canonical law alone; for the true knowledge of the Torah is the special aim of this and similar works.<sup>6</sup>

The book therefore is not for example for the plain, unsophisticated believer who has no doubts. In fact, he believes, imparting the knowledge contained in the book might even be harmful for such simple believers.

Later he defines his target audience succinctly and in a more explicit way. In his own words:

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Prefatory Remarks

The object of this treatise is to enlighten a religious man who has been trained to believe in the truth of our holy Law, who conscientiously fulfils his moral and religious duties, and at the same time has been successful in his philosophical studies. Human reason has attracted him to abide within its sphere; and he finds it difficult to accept as correct the teaching based on the literal interpretation of the Law, and especially that which he himself or others derived from those homonymous, metaphorical, or hybrid expressions. Hence he is lost in perplexity and anxiety.<sup>7</sup>

Maimonides' purpose therefore is to resolve the confusion of the perplexed intellectuals by showing that the bible is in fact compatible with the principles of philosophy. That being the case, biblical exegesis occupies an extensive place in the book.

## **2.2 Objectives and Style**

Maimonides declares that he has two objectives in writing this book. His first objective is to explain various words that take place in the bible but are not clarified by the Scripture as to what they refer. He aims to demonstrate that these words, apart from their literal meaning have other meanings. He states that the Scripture contains many equivocal, metaphorical and ambiguous terms and these should be interpreted correctly for a proper understanding of the Scripture.

The second objective of the book is to provide correct interpretations for the biblical parables. Maimonides thinks since most of the people are not aware that many passages in the bible are parables they take the literal meaning of the parables as their real meaning and in this case they feel they have to

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., Introduction

abandon either reason or the Torah. Maimonides, therefore makes an effort to reconcile faith and reason with The Guide. Raphael Jospe says, Maimonides with “The Guide for the Perplexed” takes up the challenge “to justify the Torah in terms of philosophy, for a person who doubted Torah.”<sup>8</sup>

However, the job Maimonides takes up is not so simple since the Law explicitly forbids some of its teachings to be disclosed publicly. The rabbis of the Talmudic periods had put a restriction on the exposition of the account of creation and account of the chariot. The topics considered as “Secrets of the Law” were not freely discussed among people as it was thought that discussing them freely would confuse the uneducated masses. Instruction in sciences and metaphysics were restricted by Talmud only to an intellectually elite.

Maimonides faced a dilemma at this point: On the one hand he aimed to make the true meaning of the Torah clear to the philosophically inclined and on the other he was obliged to hide them from uneducated masses. The solution he found for his dilemma was to express his meaning in a concealed fashion so that the uneducated would not be able to detect but the perplexed intellectual would be able to pick up.

As seen in the quotation below Maimonides himself states that’s why he usually does not provide a full treatment of the passages he takes up but only hint at their meaning. He says:

---

<sup>8</sup> Jospe R.; *Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages*; Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2009.p.402



We also stated (Mishneh torah, I. ii. 12, and iv. 10) that the expression Ma'ase Bereshit (Account of the Creation) signified "Natural Science," and Ma'aseh Mercabah ("Description of the Chariot") Metaphysics, and we explained the force of the Rabbinical dictum, "The Ma'aseh Mercabah must not be fully expounded even in the presence of a single student, unless he be wise and able to reason for himself, and even then you should merely acquaint him with the heads of the different sections of the subject. You must, therefore, not expect from me more than such heads. And even these have not been methodically and systematically arranged in this work, but have been, on the contrary, scattered, and are interspersed with other topics which we shall have occasion to explain. My object in adopting this arrangement is that the truths should be at one time apparent, and at another time concealed. Thus we shall not be in opposition to the Divine Will (from which it is wrong to deviate) which has withheld from the multitude the truths required for the knowledge of God, according to the words, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him" (Ps. xxv. 14). Know that also in Natural Science there are topics which are not to be fully explained. Our Sages laid down the rule, "The Ma'aseh Bereshith must not be expounded in the presence of two."<sup>9</sup>

This restriction on Public instruction in metaphysics led Maimonides to write in a cryptic fashion. Maimonides wrote in a complex and non-linear way and thus concealed his true meaning from the unqualified reader. He stated that he was complying with the restriction of instruction in metaphysics through this style of writing he employed.

Maimonides asserts that a subject considered a Secret of the Law should not be discussed in public since masses lack the kind of knowledge the true understanding of such a profound subject requires. As a result they may

---

<sup>9</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, Prefatory Remarks

misunderstand the discussion completely and this might in turn result in a total confusion.<sup>10</sup>

He makes an analogy here saying that he who begins with metaphysics is like a baby fed with bread, meat and wine. This type of food will definitely kill the baby not because they are harmful for the body but because they are inappropriate for the baby.

Yet Maimonides thinks people do have a need to believe in something and thus they should have some kind of beliefs about the subjects which are categorised as “Secrets of the Law”. This need to believe in something should be satisfied by the traditional and literal understanding of the Scripture although they are essentially untrue. Despite being untrue, they are appropriate for the masses as they satisfy the need to believe in something. Maimonides puts forth his view like this:

He, however, who begins with Metaphysics, will not only become confused in matters of religion, but will fall into complete infidelity..... for it is the object of the Torah to serve as a guide for the instruction of the young, of women, and of the common people; and as all of them are incapable to comprehend the true sense of the words, tradition was considered sufficient to convey all truths which were to be established; and as regards ideals, only such remarks were made as would lead towards a knowledge of their existence, though not to a comprehension of their true essence.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, I/32, I/34

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, I/33

Another method he says he employs to conceal his meaning from the uneducated is to deliberately put inconsistent and contradictory statements within the text. He enumerates the seven causes of inconsistencies that can occur in a literary work and points out that the inconsistencies in the Guide are due to either the fifth or the seventh reason.<sup>12</sup> The fifth reason is a pedagogical one. The writer in the course of his writing may address an issue that is difficult to understand and in order not to confuse the readers he formulates the position in a simple and imprecise manner intending to articulate it properly later. In such a case there may be contradictions between the former and the latter positions. The seventh reason is the situation where a metaphysical matter may partly be disclosed, but must partly be concealed. Therefore, in one context he may use a proposition that may contradict the proposition he uses in another context. Herbert Davidson regarding this point says:

The search for intentional inconsistencies that has occupied so many could be a wild goose chase. Since Maimonides composed and published the introduction before writing the body of the book, the inconsistencies that he warned 'may be found' may never actually have materialized. In the course of writing the book, he may never have become conscious of the need to introduce intentional inconsistencies of either of the two sorts that he warned readers to be on their guard for.<sup>13</sup>

The fact that Maimonides admits he conceals his opinions intentionally in the Guide led many commentators to search for hidden meaning in his works. In

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, Introduction

<sup>13</sup> Davidson, H. A., *Moses Maimonides, The Man and His Works*, Oxford University Press, Inc., 2005; p.391

the next section I will briefly explain this esoteric/exoteric debate in the twentieth century concerning the Guide and make a few remarks to situate the subject of providence in this larger context.

### **2.3 The Esoteric Issue**

Inasmuch as Maimonides wrote in a cryptic fashion and as he admitted that he intentionally tried to conceal his opinions in his writing, many commentators suggested that the Guide is full of secrets and the real opinions held by Maimonides are buried deep down the surface of the book. Herbert Davidson comments that this search for signs and inconsistencies in the text of the Guide went to such an extreme that later in the twentieth century, a philosopher hinted in one of his books that Maimonides did not genuinely believe in the existence of God at all.<sup>14</sup> , This philosopher was Leo Strauss, the writer of the book 'Persecution and the Art Of Writing' who maintained that a long line of prominent thinkers through the history wrote their books in an exoteric cover under which they concealed their true but socially unacceptable beliefs. Among such writers, In addition to Maimonides, were Plato, Al-farabi, Machiavelli, Spinoza, Leibniz, Rousseau and Locke. Leo Strauss had made such an impact on academic circles that and especially on scholars of Maimonides that "*Members of the academic community who cannot shake off the eerie notion that Maimonides may*

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.p.400

*actually have meant what he said hesitate to 'come out' lest they be viewed as gullible and naive.*"<sup>15</sup>

Daniel H. Frank writes that this esoteric-exoteric distinction cannot easily be dismissed since Maimonides is quite explicit about the need to hide the truth from those incapable of comprehending it but he points out that the problematic issue here is that some scholars may take Maimonides' precaution as a license to understand his various positions in opposite ways to his explicitly stated views. He also contends that before turning to Maimonides' philosophical views, one should first make up his mind about this esoteric-exoteric issue since the presentation of Maimonides views in the Guide will be radically different depending on the position taken.<sup>16</sup> Herbert Davidson, gives a particular example concerning this controversy. He writes that despite the fact that Maimonides explicitly and repeatedly states his belief in creation and takes pains to strengthen his position through various arguments, some scholars allege that his explicit commitment to the creation of the world was not his genuine position. Davidson writes: *"What odd cast of mind would lead someone to design a new set of arguments and present it to those whom he was trying to enlighten if by doing so he was inducing them to embrace a position*

---

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.p.398

<sup>16</sup> Popkin R.H. ed. *Columbia History of Western Philosophy*, New York, Columbia University Press 1999, p188-196, p190

*opposed to the one he himself held?*<sup>17</sup> It is true that Maimonides wrote in a cryptic fashion. Maimonides himself explicitly states that he will deliberately conceal his views but as briefly summarized above in the previous section where I considered his writing style he explains the methods of concealing his views as well. Regarding this controversial issue, I agree with Herbert Davidson who asserts that “*Maimonides speaks of veiling what he had discovered, not of misrepresenting it.*”<sup>18</sup>

Before going into an analysis of Maimonides’ theory of providence it is pertinent to note a few points regarding the position of the issue of providence in the context of the Guide. It should be noted that Maimonides regards the issue of providence as one of the “Secrets of the Law”. He says:

But the question concerning the attributes of God, their inadmissibility, and the meaning of those attributes which are ascribed to Him; concerning the Creation, His Providence, in providing for everything; concerning His will, His perception, His knowledge of everything; concerning prophecy and its various degrees: concerning the meaning of His names which imply the idea of unity, though they are more than one; all these things are very difficult problems, the true "Secrets of the Law" the secrets" mentioned so frequently in the books of the Prophets, and in the words of our Teachers...<sup>19</sup>

The fact that Maimonides classifies the issue of providence as a secret of the Law has led some researchers as explained above to conclude that the most

---

<sup>17</sup> Davidson, *Moses Maimonides, The Man and His Works* p.399

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p.387

<sup>19</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, I/35

heretical doctrine that can be revealed from the text indicates Maimonides' true opinion. Although I accept that he does not offer his opinions to the reader in a silver plate and it is toilsome to gather the knowledge from the scattered passages in the Guide, I think assuming he says what he does not mean and does not say what he means seems rather arbitrary. Reines comments that Maimonides' accepting the subject of providence as a "Secret of the Law" implies two critical points: First one is that His understanding of divine providence will differ fundamentally from the traditional understanding of providence offered by the literal understanding of the Scripture and secondly that he will deliberately discuss his theory of providence in an obscure manner.<sup>20</sup> In the following Chapters I will endeavour to show Maimonides' understanding of providence and how it differs from the traditional understanding.

---

<sup>20</sup> Reines, A., 1972, *Maimonides' Concepts of Providence and Theodicy*, Hebrew Union College Annual 43: 169-205. p.171

## CHAPTER 3

### PROVIDENCE

In the Guide, in Chapters III/16-17 Maimonides discusses his views on providence and later in Chapters 22 and 23 he analyzes Job's story in the context of this general discussion of divine providence. He states there are four different "*ancient*" views regarding providence and proceeds to explain each of them. These four main views regarding providence that are mentioned by Maimonides are Epicurus', Aristotles', Ashariyah's and Mu'tazila's views.

Later on in the book when he analyzes the story of Job, he is going to associate each view with the interlocutors in the story except the view of Epicurus which he totally denounces as absurd. After expounding on these four theories, he lists an additional fifth theory, that of the Law. Following these five views on providence, he presents his own view. In the next section I will explain these five theories in the way depicted by Maimonides.

#### 3.1 Different Views On Providence

**a. Epicurus' view:** Since there is no being that governs the universe i.e. God, there is no divine punishment, no rationality and moral purpose behind the patterns that we see. Whatever happens is due to chance. There is no providence at all.



**b. Aristotle's view:** Divine providence falls upon heavenly bodies. Living beings in this world including humans enjoy providence only on the level of the species. The durability and permanence of the species is preserved by the providence and individuals are protected only as far as they are necessary for ensuring the permanence of species; otherwise there is no providence falling upon the individual beings of the sub-lunar world. Therefore, the fate of individuals are only accidental, i.e. the outcome of chance. Maimonides says:

Aristotle sees no difference between the falling of a leaf or a stone and the death of the good and noble people in the ship; nor does he distinguish between the destruction of a multitude of ants caused by an ox depositing on them his excrement and the death of worshippers killed by the fall of the house when its foundations give way; nor does he discriminate between the case of a cat killing a mouse that happens to come in her way, or that of a spider catching a fly, and that of a hungry lion meeting a prophet and tearing him.<sup>21</sup>

As stated above, this theory does not grant any special status for the human beings and for this reason it is regarded by Maimonides as deviating from the Law.

**c. The view of the Ashariyah:** Maimonides describes this theory as '*the reverse of the second*'. According to this view everything is the way it is because God decrees so. His will alone is consequential. There is no need for the justification of his wills and he does not have to be just. Maimonides states, according to this theory, "*it is proper that God should afflict the*

---

<sup>21</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, III/17

*innocent and do good to the sinner.*<sup>22</sup> Maimonides thinks this theory involves such “*evident absurdities*”. According to him, one other absurdity of this theory is that it denies the freedom of will.

**d. The view of the Mu’tazila:** According to this view, divine wisdom is the cause of everything. Thus since God’s wisdom is the cause, we can trust everything that happens is good because he aims to provide what is good for the creatures. This theory extends providence to the other individuals of the sub-lunar world as well, i.e. animals and plants. This view advocates the doctrine of compensation in the other world. According to this, an exceptionally good man may suffer and this is in conformity with God’s Justice as he will have a reward to compensate his suffering in the afterlife. Maimonides thinks this theory like the previous one involves some absurdities and contradictions, too.

After a revision of these theories and before proceeding with the opinion of the Law, Maimonides tries to absolve the followers of the last three theories by stating that all three positions were accepted by their followers with good intentions:

Aristotle was guided by that which appears to be the nature of things. The Ashariyah refused to ascribe to God ignorance about anything..... The Mu’tazilites refused to assume that God does what is wrong and unjust...<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

Regarding this point, Charles M. Raffel comments that Maimonides “conceded that uttering a coherent view on providence is a difficult task, but assessed ancient and contemporary opinion as either philosophically ludicrous or as inoperative for a religious –legal system.”<sup>24</sup>

**e. Opinion of the Law** : Maimonides begins by reminding us the two most important principles of the Law of Moses: The principle of Free will and Justice of God. With regard to the first principle he says it is God’s will that man has the power to act according to his choice within the limits of his capacity:

According to this principle man does what is in his power to do, by his nature, his choice, and his will..... This is the Will of God; that is to say, it is due to the eternal divine will that all living beings should move freely, and that man should have power to act according to his will or choice within the limits of his capacity.<sup>25</sup>

The second principle he affirms is that Divine justice is the source of everything that happens and all kinds of rewards and evils are distributed according to the deserts of men by the Divine Justice to which no wrong can be ascribed:

We, however, believe that all these human affairs are managed with justice; far be it from God to do wrong, to punish anyone unless the punishment is necessary and merited. It is distinctly stated in the Law, that all is done in accordance with justice; and the words of our Sages generally express the same idea. They clearly say: "There is no death without sin, no sufferings without transgression."<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Raffel, C.M. (1987). *Providence as Consequent upon the Intellect: Maimonides' Theory of Providence*. *AJS Review*, 12, p.46

<sup>25</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, III/17

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*

These two fundamental principles form the substance of this position but there is another expression he adds which implies that the working of this mechanism is beyond human comprehension. The idea that Divine Justice is the ultimate determinant of rewards and punishment but that we are ignorant of its mechanism is put by Maimonides as follows:

Even when a person suffers pain in consequence of a thorn having entered into his hand, although it is at once drawn out, it is a punishment that has been inflicted on him [for sin], and the least pleasure he enjoys is a reward [for some good action]; all this is meted out by strict justice; as is said in Scripture, "all his ways are judgment" (Deut. xxxii. 4); we are only ignorant of the working of that judgment.<sup>27</sup>

To recap this theory: First, man has free will and the ability to act according to his will. Second, rewards and punishments are distributed by the divine justice according to one's merits. Therefore, the sufferings and blessings people incur are deserved through their very own actions.

Following this account on miscellaneous views concerning providence Maimonides presents his own view. I will give only a brief summary of his view here, later to come back to it again more comprehensively in section 3.3.

Maimonides' own opinion concerning providence is simply this: Individuals of the sub-lunar world, except human beings, do not fall under providence. Human beings are rewarded or punished according to their merits. The fate of other individual beings, on the other hand, are left to chance. Intelligence

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

is the distinctive factor which sets human beings apart and provide human beings with providence; that is, human beings receive providence by virtue of their intellect. Besides, as their levels of the intellectual development differ, the providence human beings attract also differ. In other words, as intellectual development is graded, providence, too, is graded. Maimonides asserts his opinion is in conformity with both the Law and philosophic principles.

My next task will be examining his views on some particular subjects that contribute to his formulation of the theory of providence. These issues are concerned with his cosmology, epistemology, ethics and metaphysics and are scattered throughout the Guide. In the next section I will endeavour to gather and present these bits of information and demonstrate how they unite to form Maimonides' Theory of Providence.

### **3.2 The Features of Maimonides' Theory of Providence**

Below, I will discuss some topics in Maimonides' philosophy that are related in some way to Maimonides' theory of Divine providence. From this discussion it will be possible to observe how the positions Maimonides holds on various topics come together concertedly to form the position Maimonides arrives regarding the issue of providence.

#### **3.2.1 Evil, Matter and Form**

In this section I will start with how Maimonides views evil and then proceed with his views on matter and form. In Chapter 10 Maimonides stresses the point that God is not an agent of evil. God creates only existence and all

existence is good in itself. According to him, evils are not existing things but rather are privations. For example blindness is the absence of sight and not the opposite of sight. Evil, therefore is non-being. He says:

...the [so-called] evils are evils only in relation to a certain thing, and that which is evil in reference to a certain existing thing, either includes the nonexistence of that thing or the non-existence of some of its good conditions. The proposition has therefore been laid down in the most general terms, "All evils are negations." Thus for man death is evil: death is his non-existence. Illness, poverty, and ignorance are evils for man: all these are privations of properties.....After these propositions, it must be admitted as a fact that it cannot be said of God that He directly creates evil, or He has the direct intention to produce evil: this is impossible. His works are all perfectly good. He only produces existence, and all existence is good: whilst evils are of a negative character, and cannot be acted upon.....God creates evil only in so far as He produces the corporeal element such as it actually is: it is always connected with negatives and on that account the source of all destruction and all evil.<sup>28</sup>

Maimonides thinks the reason people assume God is directly responsible from evil stems from their erroneous belief that the universe is man-centered and not God centered. Man's perspective is very narrow and the fact that he evaluates the universe from his own perspective makes him think God directly creates evil. Maimonides affirms that ultimately man is responsible for all evils:

The numerous evils to which individual persons are exposed are due to the defects existing in the persons themselves. We complain and seek relief from our own faults: we suffer from the

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. III/10

evils which we, by our own free will, inflict on ourselves and ascribe them to God, who is far from being connected with them!<sup>29</sup>

In Chapter 11 he stresses that all evils caused by humans result from ignorance which is a privation, i.e. “*absence of wisdom.*” He asserts:

A blind man, for example, who has no guide, stumbles constantly, because he cannot see, and causes injury and harm to himself and others. In the same manner various classes of men, each man in proportion to his ignorance, bring great evils upon themselves and upon other individual members of the species.<sup>30</sup>

Maimonides lists three kinds of evil, the first of which results from the imperfect nature of matter. Evils like birth defects or injuries caused by accidents are due to the deficient nature of matter which is the constituent of all mortal beings.

The second kind of evils are imposed by human beings upon other human beings. The examples Maimonides gives to this kind of evil are killing or robbing one’s neighbour and the atrocities that occur during war times.

Finally, the third kind of evils are those which people inflict upon themselves by their very own actions like excessive eating, drinking or too much indulgence in superfluous things. This third class of evils Maimonides thinks forms the largest class. Maimonides says when a person indulges in superfluous things he desires them even more. These people as a result are

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.III/12

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.III/11

in constant pain since it is impossible to satisfy their limitless desires. Maimonides affirms that people don't really know what is good for them and as they mistakenly think that good comes from luxuries and bodily pleasures they bring, they seek goodness where they shouldn't. He says this desire to have more bodily pleasure is never satisfied and contrary to the popular belief, the more one seeks luxury, the more he suffers. First of all, their time and strength are spent in pursuit of those unnecessary things and second, during the course of this pursuit they meet with even more troubles. Moreover, he points out that if we are moderate in our demands it is easy to satisfy our needs since the more necessary a thing is, the more often it is found and the cheaper it is; and the less necessary a thing is, the less often it is found and the more expensive it is.

According to him, wise people on the other hand do not indulge themselves in superfluous things. They only eat and clothe for their survival and seek the comprehension of Divine Knowledge instead of spending their life in pursuit of superfluous things. This opinion of Maimonides also reflects that for him, what is truly significant is intellect and a human being can reach perfection through intellect only.

Maimonides purports that, a human individual, just like all the other entities of the sub-lunar world, is composed of two parts: matter and form. Both matter and form give man certain qualities. The human form gives him the



primary quality of being rational or intellectual in essence. Form alone, though it gives man the essence peculiar to his species, is not enough to produce an actual, concrete individual. For the individual human being to exist, matter is a requisite. Matter, as well as providing man with a body, gives him transience. Individuals therefore necessarily perish due to matter that is inherently instable. In Maimonides' own words:

Transient bodies are only subject to destruction through their substance and not through their form.....Now it was clear that this was the case,--it was impossible, according to the wisdom of God, that substance should exist without form, or any of the forms of the bodies without substance, and it was necessary that the very noble form of man, which is the image and likeness of God, as has been shown by us, should be joined to the substance of dust and darkness, the source of all defect and loss.<sup>31</sup>

Human defects, can ultimately be attributed to the nature of matter, matter being the source of all defect and loss. With respect to physical and moral deficiencies that matter causes Maimonides says:

It is therefore clear that all corruption, destruction, or defect comes from matter. Take, e.g., man; his deformities and unnatural shape of limbs; all weakness, interruption, or disorder of his actions, whether innate or not, originate in the transient substance, not in the form. All other living beings likewise die or become ill through the substance of the body and not through its form.<sup>32</sup>

In the paragraph below Maimonides explains how matter causes intellectual deficiency. He states that the corporeal element in man puts a screen that prevents him from comprehending the abstract terms and the Divine Being:

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. III/8

<sup>32</sup> Ibid III/8

The corporeal element in man is a large screen and partition that prevents him from perfectly perceiving abstract ideals: this would be the case even if the corporeal element were as pure and superior as the substance of the spheres; how much more must this be the case with our dark and opaque body. However great the exertion of our mind may be to comprehend the Divine Being or any of the ideals, we find a screen and partition between Him and ourselves. Thus the prophets frequently hint at the existence of a partition between God and us. They say He is concealed from us in vapours, in darkness, in mist, or in a thick cloud: or use similar figures to express that on account of our bodies we are unable to comprehend His essence. This is the meaning of the words, "Clouds and darkness are round about Him"<sup>33</sup>

Maimonides, to explain why matter which is the source of all evil was created points to the principle of supreme Goodness. He puts this principle in the following form: *the principle that it was intended by the Creator to produce in its present form everything whose existence is possible.*<sup>34</sup> Reines explains this principle as follows:

As existence is good in and of itself, everything that is possible to exist should exist. This means that God is supremely good if he creates everything that can possibly exist and if he does not this means he is deficient. His goodness is determined by the variety of beings he creates and not by the happiness of them. Therefore human suffering is irrelevant to Him. Human beings are composed of matter and form and the very combination of these two ensures their place in the order of all existents and makes men unique. He is unique in the sense that due to his composition he occupies a special place in the order of beings. If man did not exist this place would be left vacant. This would disprove God's supreme goodness.<sup>35</sup>

According to this principle existence in itself is good and the supreme good is to bring into existence the greatest number and variety of existents. On

---

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. III/9

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. III/25

<sup>35</sup> Reines, 1972, *Maimonides' Concepts of Providence and Theodicy*, p.200

account of this principle, Maimonides purports, God created all possible existents and among them matter. The existence of matter is therefore good as existence in itself is good.

Furthermore, Maimonides tries to justify God's creation of man out of matter by stating that genesis can only take place through destruction and without the destruction of the individual members the species would not exist permanently. He states:

His works are all perfectly good. He only produces existence, and all existence is good..... Even the existence of this corporeal element, low as it in reality is, because it is the source of death and all evils, is likewise good for the permanence of the Universe and the continuation of the order of things, so that one thing departs and the other succeeds.<sup>36</sup>

Man who is composed of both matter and form, in addition to having certain characteristics due to matter, has certain other characteristics owing to its form. Maimonides associates matter with the weaknesses of the individuals; and form with the virtues. He explains:

Man's shortcomings and sins are all due to the substance of the body and not to its form; while all his merits are exclusively due to his form. Thus the knowledge of God, the formation of ideas, the mastery of desire and passion, the distinction between that which is to be chosen and that which is to be rejected, all these man owes to his form; but eating, drinking, sexual intercourse, excessive lust, passion, and all vices, have their origin in the substance of his body.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed* , III/10

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.III/8

The fundamental essence given to man by his form is his intellect. Maimonides affirms that the purpose of man should be to develop this “*noble*” essence as much as possible and act in accordance with it through the course of his life. In his own words:

Some persons constantly strive to choose that which is noble, and to seek perpetuation in accordance with the direction of their nobler part,—their form: their thoughts are engaged in the formation of ideas, the acquisition of true knowledge about everything, and the union with the divine intellect which flows down upon them, and which is the source of man's form. Whenever they are led by the wants of the body to that which is low and avowedly disgraceful, they are grieved at their position.....Man must have control over all these desires, reduce them as much as possible, and only retain of them as much as is indispensable. His aim must be the aim of man as man, viz., the formation of ideas, and nothing else. The best and sublimest among them is the idea which man forms of God, angels, and the rest of the creation according to his capacity. Such men are always with God, and of them it is said, "Ye are princes, and all of you are children of the Most High" (Ps. lxxxii. 6). This is man's task and purpose.<sup>38</sup>

#### **Hints to His Theory of Providence:**

Matter, although a source of limitation, is necessary at the same time for the creation of individuals. Man, who is composed of both matter and form has the ability to transcend evils through his intellect bestowed upon him by his form. Intelligence is the distinctive factor that puts men apart from other animals. In other words, it is the essence given to him by his form. The fact that we have the option of transcending evils and deficiencies of our material nature through intellectual thought is where God's providence lies. The importance of intelligence which is deemed by Maimonides as the essence

---

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. III/8

of human beings lead us next to examine Maimonides' epistemology at some length.

### **3.2.2 Maimonides' Theory of Knowledge**

Maimonides does not engage in a systematic discussion of the theory of knowledge. His views on knowledge are drawn again from many scattered remarks he makes in the Guide in the context of other topics like psychology, soul, cosmology and metaphysics.

According to Maimonides soul is something inseparable from the body in the same way that form is inseparable from matter. Although the soul of an individual possesses multiple powers, two of them are especially important: imaginative and rational. The imagination functions as *"to retain impressions by the senses, to combine them, and chiefly to form images."*<sup>39</sup> These images are then used in the intellectual processes. Reason is the other important function of the soul. He distinguishes between two activities of reason: Practical (Moral) and Theoretical (Speculative).

**Practical Activity:** The task of practical reason is to distinguish between good and evil. Through this type of activity man gains mastery over his passions. Practical reason evaluates the appropriate responses to stimuli drawing on past experience. It weighs the pros and cons of a situation and based on this evaluation figures out the most efficient way to realize a goal.

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. II/36

Theoretical Activity: This is pure reason that distinguishes true from false. Through this activity man actualizes his capacity for abstract thought and acquires a true knowledge of God. For Maimonides the acquisition of knowledge of eternal truths is the ultimate aim of human existence as it provides its possessor with immortality. Through intellectual development one attains a new mode of consciousness. Affirming this point, Reines suggests that *“intellectual activity, for Maimonides, has an ontological dimension beyond its cognitive function.”*<sup>40</sup> It goes without saying that of these two forms of activity Maimonides considers theoretical activity superior to practical activity.

Maimonides examines the perfections of the practical and theoretical intellect in Chapter III/27 of the Guide. The former involves the perfection of man, from satisfying bodily needs to the performance of virtuous actions and development of moral qualities. It is related with the well-being, actions and moral qualities of an individual. The latter, on the other hand enables speculative learning to take place and it depends on the achievement of the first perfection. The second perfection is considered superior and as the only source of eternal life by Maimonides. He explains this second perfection in the following form:

The second perfection of man consists in his becoming an actually intelligent being; i.e., he knows about the things in existence all that a person perfectly developed is capable of knowing. This second perfection certainly does not include any

---

<sup>40</sup> Reines, 1972, *Maimonides' Concepts of Providence and Theodicy*, p.188

action or good conduct, but only knowledge, which is arrived at by speculation, or established by research.<sup>41</sup>

Maimonides distinguishes between the human intellect in its potential state and in its actual state. The potential state indicates the ability to understand, rooted in the senses, memory and imagination. The actual state on the other hand involves the totality of knowledge of truth that a person has acquired. When the intellect is actualized it is considered as an independent spiritual being no longer dependent on bodily organs.

According to Maimonides, a human being is born with the potential of knowledge and thought but actualizing this ability depends on continuous development through learning. Senses and imagination are knowledge in potential and the child learns through them. A newly born infant is not actually, but only potentially rational. This is the stage of hylic intellect. Hylic intellect consists in the ability to know that is carried in the senses and imagination. The initial stage of the rational faculty is the hylic intellect. It may be defined as the capacity to understand intelligibles or potential to know. Such an intellect becomes actualized at a later stage through abstraction and apprehension of intelligible forms.

When a person starts to learn by forming concepts he achieves the first stage of intellectual actualization. At this stage the intellect has not yet achieved independent existence. Human intellect becomes pure, eternal and independent only when it focuses on the conceptual knowledge or

---

<sup>41</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, III/27

intellectual objects of thought that transcends materiality. At its fully actualized stage, intellect does not need the senses any longer to abstract new forms; it already possesses all forms in its repertoire. This stage is called the acquired intellect.

Maimonides thinks the ultimate perfection for a human being “*consists in his becoming an actually intelligent being; i.e., he knows about the things in existence all that a person perfectly developed is capable of knowing.*”<sup>42</sup> The acquired intellect is not a faculty residing in the body: it is separate from the body. When intellect focuses on the knowledge of objects which transcend the material world, it becomes like them: eternal and independent of body. Through acquired intellect one can become immortal. Leon Roth says “*What is to be said about Maimonides’ account of prophecy may be perhaps most summarily expressed by saying that it is his theory of knowledge.*”<sup>43</sup>

According to Maimonides, an individual at the time of his birth is not yet truly a human being. Only through developing himself intellectually, an individual can actualize himself as a human being. When he talks about intellectual perfection in Chapter III/54, he states that “*on its account he is called man.*” If he does not choose to actualize his intellectual potential which is his essential characteristic given to him by his human form, he does not truly become a human being. As put by Menachem Kellner in explaining

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.III/27

<sup>43</sup>Roth L., *The Guide For The Perplexed: Moses Maimonides*. London, Routledge,c.1948, 2008.p.65



Maimonides' opinion in this regard *"Those who fail to do so are not truly human beings in actuality. They are potential humans who have never actualized their humanity."*<sup>44</sup>

### **Hints to His Theory of Providence:**

Intellect which is only potential at birth may be actualized by studying sciences and metaphysics. When it is actualized fully, it transforms into acquired intellect. Acquired intellect is not a part of the body. It is a separate entity comprised of intellectual entities. A man becomes a man only through actualizing his intellect and to the extent that he actualizes it.

For Maimonides, there are two types of perfection. One involves the perfection of an individual as a moral being and the other involves the perfection of an individual as an intellectual being. The latter is the real virtue. Considering this, my task in the next chapter will be to explore Maimonides' account of Human virtue.

### **3.2.3 Virtue**

To understand Maimonides' view on providence falling upon individual human beings, it is essential to know about his view of human virtue. Maimonides' view of virtue differs from that of traditional theistic view where a person is deemed good if he obeys the commands of the holy book and tries to fulfill the particular ethical considerations these religions emphasize like charity, honesty and temperance. Maimonides maintains that a person

---

<sup>44</sup> Kellner, M.M., *Maimonides on Human Perfection*, Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1990. p.24

who is pious, kind, religious and moral in the traditional sense has not yet attained the ultimate virtue if he hasn't developed his intellectual powers and realized his intellectual capacity through the study of science and metaphysics. We should also point out here that according to Maimonides, a person who has developed his intellectual faculties and realized its full potential possesses at the same time the moral qualities.

For him there are mainly two kinds of perfection as explained in the previous section. Maimonides put his view concerning this topic in a very clear and concise form:

For it has already been found that man has a double perfection: the first perfection is that of the body, and the second perfection is that of the soul. The first consists in the most healthy condition of his material relations, and this is only possible when man has all his wants supplied, as they arise; if he has his food, and other things needful for his body, e.g., shelter, bath, and the like. But one man alone cannot procure all this; it is impossible for a single man to obtain this comfort; it is only possible in society, since man, as is well known, is by nature social. The second perfection of man consists in his becoming an actually intelligent being; i.e., he knows about the things in existence all that a person perfectly developed is capable of knowing. This second perfection certainly does not include any action or good conduct, but only knowledge, which is arrived at by speculation, or established by research.

It is clear that the second and superior kind of perfection can only be attained when the first perfection has been acquired; for a person that is suffering from great hunger, thirst, heat, or cold, cannot grasp an idea even if communicated by others, much less can he arrive at it by his own reasoning. But when a person is in possession of the first perfection, then he may possibly acquire the second perfection, which is undoubtedly of a superior kind, and is alone the source of eternal life.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, III/27

Maimonides considers a person as virtuous insofar as he realizes his intellectual potential through studying science and metaphysics. This view of virtue explains why people who seem to be good suffer: The reason for their suffering is due to their lack of true virtue. This point will be discussed again later in section 4.3 when we examine Maimonides' interpretation of Job's story.

In Chapter III/54, Maimonides examines the four kinds of perfection. The first, second and third kind of perfection all together correspond to the first kind of perfection he writes about in III/27. The fourth perfection, on the other hand, refers to the second perfection in III/27.

These four kinds of perfections are, in his own words: *”perfection as regards property”* *“perfection of the shape, constitution, and form of man’s body”*, *‘moral perfection’* and *“the possession of the highest, intellectual faculties”*<sup>46</sup>

For Maimonides, intellectual perfection constitutes the higher perfection for a human being. He says:

The fourth kind of perfection is the true perfection of man: the possession of the highest, intellectual faculties; the possession of such notions which lead to true metaphysical opinions as regards God. With this perfection man has obtained his final object; it gives him true human perfection; it remains to him alone; it gives him immortality, and on its account he is called man.<sup>47</sup>

In Chapter III/51 of the Guide, Maimonides explains his views on levels of perfection by means of a parable. The parable is this:

---

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. III/54

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

A king is in his palace, and all his subjects are partly in the country, and partly abroad. Of the former, some have their backs turned towards the king's palace, and their faces in another direction; and some are desirous and zealous to go to the palace, seeking "to inquire in his temple," and to minister before him, but have not yet seen even the face of the wall of the house. Of those that desire to go to the palace, some reach it, and go round about in search of the entrance gate; others have passed through the gate, and walk about in the ante-chamber; and others have succeeded in entering into the inner part of the palace, and being in the same room with the king in the royal palace. But even the latter do not immediately on entering the palace see the king, or speak to him; for, after having entered the inner part of the palace, another effort is required before they can stand before the king--at a distance, or close by--hear his words, or speak to him.

Maimonides aims to explain through this parable the seven ranks that people are divided into. With this parable he emphasizes once again the significance of intellectual development. The ranks which are metaphorically explained in the parable are as follows:

- (1) People outside the city: They don't have any religious beliefs. They are irrational beings who have the shape and form of a human being.
- (2) Those who are in the city but not facing the palace: These are the people who have adopted incorrect beliefs and a false faith. They are dangerous because they can mislead other people with their wrong opinions.
- (3) People who are in the city and searching for the palace: These are the simpletons who follow the commandments.

(4) People who reach the palace and looking for its gate: They are the people who know the Law well and received the correct opinions from experts but not investigated their truth themselves.

(5) Those who entered the gate and walk through the entrance hall: These are the people who study the principles of religion with their own intellect.

(6) People who have entered the inner court but cannot still see the King or speak with Him: These are the persons who have reached the metaphysical truths and *“who have a true knowledge of God, so far as a true knowledge can be attained, and are near the truth, wherever an approach to the truth is possible”*

(7) Those who are in the presence of the King and who can see or speak with Him: These are the greatest prophets who attain the greatest possible knowledge of God and turn away from everything and focus their efforts on understanding God’s governance of the world which leads to an imitation of God’s governance on a socio-political level.

Maimonides says also that those who are engaged in studying the Mathematical Sciences and Logic, belong to the fourth rank; those who are experts at Physics and natural sciences are in the fifth rank: those who master Metaphysics are in the sixth. Finally, those who devote themselves entirely to God after the attainment of perfection in Metaphysics and employ

all their intellectual faculties in the study of the Universe to learn in every possible way how God rules all things form the class of those who have entered the palace, namely, the seventh rank, the class of prophets. The highest stage a man can attain according to Maimonides is prophecy.

For Maimonides worship at its highest is the contemplation of God alone only after studying scientific knowledge. He says:

The true worship of God is only possible when correct notions of Him have previously been conceived. When you have arrived by way of intellectual research at a knowledge of God and His works, then commence to devote yourselves to Him, try to approach Him and strengthen the intellect, which is the link that joins you to Him.<sup>48</sup>

On the other hand, the God people without any scientific knowledge talk about *“does not correspond to any being in existence: it is a thing invented by their imagination.”*<sup>49</sup>

For Maimonides a prophet is defined by the perfection of acquired intellect. There are certain preconditions to being a prophet. Possesing an intellect capable of understanding abstract thoughts at the highest level and to have mastered philosophy and science is one of the prerequisites. Secondly, the prophet has to have an imaginative faculty whose main function is to fashion images. Using these images he communicates the divine truths to masses. Thirdly he must have attained a moral level that protects him against

---

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. III/51

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. III/51

sensual desires and therefore lets him focus on higher realms. The intellect of such a perfect soul then gets in tune with the active intellect and ready to receive its emanations. Prophecy is an emanation from the active intellect to the human intellect. Human intellect then conjuncts with the active intellect. Maimonides holds since providential care comes through the intellect alone only intellectually perfect human beings are able to receive providence. He puts this idea in the following form:

Hence it follows, in accordance with what I have mentioned in the preceding chapter, that the greater the share is which a person has obtained of this Divine influence, on account of both his physical predisposition and his training, the greater must also be the effect of Divine Providence upon him, for the action of Divine Providence is proportional to the endowment of intellect, as has been mentioned above. The relation of Divine Providence is therefore not the same to all men; the greater the human perfection a person has attained, the greater the benefit he derives from Divine Providence.....In the same proportion as ignorant and disobedient persons are deficient in that Divine influence, their condition is inferior, and their rank equal to that of irrational beings: and they are "like unto the beasts" (Ps. xlix. 21).....This belief that God provides for every individual human being in accordance with his merits is one of the fundamental principles on which the Law is founded.<sup>50</sup>

### **Hints to His Theory of Providence:**

In a nutshell, we can say, according to Maimonides' view a virtuous man is a man who has perfected his intelligence. Maimonides also stated explicitly as can be seen from the quotations above that man will receive providence

---

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.III/18

according to the intellectual level he has attained. The level of the intellectual realization he has achieved is the main determinant of the level of providence he will receive. Thus providence is graded as human perfection is graded. The highest level that a man can attain is the level of prophecy. At this level, man has achieved the perfection of the acquired intellect. For Maimonides, although one grasps the metaphysical truths through acquired intellect; for the realization of such truths the continuous flow from the Active intellect which may be reckoned as an intellectual entity mediating between God and man is also crucial. This concept, Active intellect, will be examined later in greater detail in the next section.

### **3.2.4 Maimonides' Cosmology**

Maimonides maintains that the universe is made up of three parts: The intelligences, the bodies of the spheres and the *materia prima*, bodies of the sublunar world. In his own words:

The whole creation consists of three parts, (1) the pure intelligences, or angels; (2) the bodies of the spheres; and (3) the *materia prima*, or the bodies which are below the spheres, and are subject to constant change.<sup>51</sup>

Maimonides, although does not give a fixed number of spheres, states there are at least eighteen spheres. He says:

The number of these spheres encompassing the Universe cannot possibly be less than eighteen: it may even be larger; but this is a matter for further investigation.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. II/10

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. I/72



According to Maimonides, the universe is created through an act of emanation by God that produces the first intelligence. The first intelligence then produces the first sphere and the second intelligence; the second intelligence then creates the second sphere and the third intelligence. This process continues until the Active intellect is created. These intelligences, however all have free will and act according to their own choices:

The spheres and the Intelligences are conscious of their actions, and select by their own free will the objects of their influence,..... angels are conscious of what they do, and have free will in the sphere of action intrusted to them, just as we have free will within our province, and in accordance with the power given to us with our very existence.....the Intelligences and the spheres always perform that which is good, they contain nothing except what is good and perfect....<sup>53</sup>

With the creation of the active intellect, the creation of heavens is complete.

In Maimonides' own words:

Furthermore, we desire to show that the ruling power emanates from the Creator, and is received by the Intelligences according to their order: from the Intelligences part of the good and the light bestowed upon them is communicated to the spheres, and the latter, being in possession of the abundance obtained of the Intelligences, transmit forces and properties unto the beings of this transient world. ... the creative act of the Almighty in giving existence to pure Intelligences endows the first of them with the power of giving existence to another, and so on, down to the Active Intellect, the lowest of the purely spiritual beings. Besides producing other Intelligences, each Intelligence gives existence to one of the spheres, from the highest down to the lowest, which is the sphere of the moon..<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> Ibid II/11

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.II/11

Active intellect is an incorporeal being consisting in pure thought and it emanates all the abstract human thoughts. It is the active intellect that sets the human mind into moving and causes the mere capacity to think to actual thinking. As put by Leon Roth *"it is pure intellect calling out ours."*<sup>55</sup>

Herbert Davidson puts Maimonides' understanding very eloquently in the following quotation taken from his book, "Moses Maimonides, The Man and His Works":

Maimonides is saying that when a human being thinks an abstract thought, the thought is not formed by the person himself but comes to him, fully fashioned from outside. The Human being's role consists in preparing his intellect for thinking the abstract thought and thereby attuning himself for receiving the emanation, or transmission, or broadcast of the active intellect. When a human intellect is properly prepared, it automatically taps into that emanation and thinks the thought-just as in the modern world, a properly attuned radio or television receiver immediately receives whatever signal it is attuned for.<sup>56</sup>

Following the creation of the active intellect, the process of creation continues with the creation of the sub-lunar world by the active intellect.

Maimonides equates the active intellect with Nature. He says:

When we assert that Scripture teaches that God rules this world through angels, we mean such angels as are identical with the Intelligences..... all parts of the Universe, even the limbs of animals in their actual form, are produced through angels: for natural forces and angels are identical.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> Roth, *The Guide For The Perplexed: Moses Maimonides*, p.67

<sup>56</sup> Davidson, *Moses Maimonides, The Man and His Works*..p.371

<sup>57</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed* , II/6

Physical bodies of the sub-lunar world are formed from the primary matter, which after receiving the forms of four elements from the Active intellect, is transformed into the physical bodies of the four elements: earth, water, air and fire.

In the sub-lunar world, the individuals are all transient although the species are eternal. All transient things after a limited time span, change and transform unlike the individual intelligences and spheres which exist eternally. The transience of the sub-lunar world is ultimately linked to the motion of the spheres which is caused by the outermost sphere. This motion, reaching finally to the sub-lunar world, causes the generation and corruption of the individuals of this world.

According to Maimonides the universe is not self-sufficient and continually sustained by God. God therefore is the continuing ground of being, the first intelligence and each successive intelligence in turn is the continuing ground of the sphere and the intelligence it produces. He affirms that actions can be attributed to God only as the ultimate ground of the universe.

.....God is the "cause" of every event that takes place in the world, just as He is the Creator of the whole universe as it now exists. It has already been explained in the science of Physics, that a cause must again be sought for each of the four divisions of causes. When we have found for any existing thing those four causes which are in immediate connexion with it, we find for these again causes, and for these again other causes, and so on until we arrive at the first causes..... everything occurring in the

universe, although directly produced by certain nearer causes, is ascribed to the Creator...He is therefore the ultimate cause.<sup>58</sup>

Thus according to Maimonides, man and his world are created and preserved by the Active intellect. The only providential act God does is to create and preserve the first intelligence. Nevertheless since God sustains the universe, He is the ground of being and without God, there is no universe.

Reines suggests this aspect of Maimonides' view of providence presents also an esoteric understanding of the Scriptures since Scripture, taken literally, implies that God exercises direct and supernatural providence over man. According to the traditional understanding, care and guidance that comes from God miraculously is regarded as providence. Scriptures ascribe everything to the direct action of God instead of natural causation whereas Maimonides regards the ordinary workings of the natural universe as providence. According to his view, God, being the ultimate ground of the universe, exercises providence over the sub-lunar world through nature, i.e. the actions of the Intelligences and spheres.<sup>59</sup> God does not exercise providence over man directly. He does not interfere with the affairs of human world but he is the ultimate ground of being. His providence over the sub-lunar world is through the action of the intelligences and spheres.

---

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.I/69

<sup>59</sup> Reines, 1972, *Maimonides' Concepts of Providence and Theodicy*,p.173-74

### **Hints to His Theory of Providence:**

There is a big gap between human beings and God. God is the ultimate ground of being but He is not in a direct relationship with human beings; therefore he does not exercise direct providence over human beings. His providence extends to us through the laws of nature. Active intellect is the source of all human thoughts. If we are to enjoy providence we have to develop our intellectual abilities and key in to active intellect through our intellect.

### **3.2.5 God**

Maimonides in I/1 of the Guide states that God's words "Let us make man in our image, after Our likeness" means man was created as resembling to God inasmuch as he is endowed with the ability to think intellectual thoughts.

In his words:

On this account, i.e., on account of the Divine intellect with which man has been endowed, he is said to have been made in the form and likeness of the Almighty, but far from it be the notion that the Supreme Being is corporeal, having a material form.<sup>60</sup>

Maimonides declares that God is beyond the reach of human knowledge and human speech and man can never grasp God's essence. To know the essence of a thing, human mind ascribes the thing to a larger class first and then adds the distinguishing characteristic of that thing that separates him from the other things in the class. For example to define a human being, we

---

<sup>60</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide*, I/1

ascribe human being first to a class, that is animals and then proceed with adding the human being's distinctive character, rationality. Therefore human being is defined as a rational animal. However, God, as He does not belong to any category, but rather He is a category by Himself, cannot be defined. Although this is the case, Scripture is full of descriptions of God. Maimonides says such descriptions should be interpreted as attributes of God's actions or as expressions of perfection according to what man regards as perfection. For example, when Scripture uses the word merciful for God, the intent is that God performs actions which resemble the human actions done out of mercy. However God's actions do not result from mercy or any kind of emotion since He is not subject to emotions. In the same vein, when Scripture calls God angry or vengeful, the intention is not to imply that He has such emotions but that his actions resemble the actions of a human who have those emotions. Quoting from Maimonides: "*....all attributes ascribed to God are attributes of His acts, and do not imply that God has any qualities.*"<sup>61</sup> The point is that descriptions in the Scripture pertaining to God should not be taken to represent Him as having emotions. Regarding this Maimonides says:

Whenever any one of His actions is perceived by us, we ascribe to God that emotion which is the source of the act when performed by ourselves, and call Him by an epithet which is formed from the verb expressing that emotion.....He performs acts similar to those which, when performed by us, originate in certain psychical dispositions, in jealousy, desire for retaliation, revenge, or anger: they are in accordance with the guilt of those

---

<sup>61</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide*, I/54

who are to be punished, and not the result of any emotion: for He is above all defect! The same is the case with all divine acts: though resembling those acts which emanate from our passions and psychical dispositions, they are not due to anything superadded to His essence....<sup>62</sup>

Maimonides proposes that the Scripture uses anthropomorphic language to convince the unsophisticated people of the existence of God for whom it is very difficult to envisage an incorporeal being. Regarding this point he asserts:

The Torah speaks according to the language of man," that is to say, expressions, which can easily be comprehended and understood by all, are applied to the Creator. Hence the description of God by attributes implying corporeality, in order to express His existence: because the multitude of people do not easily conceive existence unless in connection with a body, and that which is not a body nor connected with a body has for them no existence.<sup>63</sup>

Although this is the case Maimonides urges that the incorporeality of God and that the fact that He cannot be compared with His creatures "*must be explained to every one according to his capacity, and they must be taught by way of tradition to children and women, to the stupid and ignorant...*"<sup>64</sup>

Maimonides emphasizes that as God is in no way similar to us and is incomparable to any other being; and the terms like wisdom, power, existence etc. mean completely different things when they are used for God and when they are used for humans. As Kenneth Seeskin puts it: For

---

<sup>62</sup>Ibid. I/54

<sup>63</sup>Ibid. I/26

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. I/35

Maimonides, God is not at the top of the scale; He is completely off the scale.<sup>65</sup>

Thus those who believe in the presence of essential attributes in God, viz., Existence, Life, Power, Wisdom, and Will, should know that these attributes, when applied to God, have not the same meaning as when applied to us, and that the difference does not only consist in magnitude, or in the degree of perfection, stability, and durability.....the term existence, when applied to God and to other beings, is perfectly homonymous. In like manner, the terms Wisdom, Power, Will, and Life are applied to God and to other beings by way of perfect homonymity, admitting of no comparison whatever.<sup>66</sup>

Maimonides says there can be no relation between God and his creatures as they have nothing in common. Furthermore, he points out that even the term existence expresses totally different meanings when applied to God and when applied to humans: God has absolute existence, man's existence on the other hand is only possible. To put it another way, for a human being, the quality of being existent is accidental but for God it is identical with His essence. That there is no relation between God and his creatures is put by him like this:

Now, as God has absolute existence, while all other beings have only possible existence, as we shall show, there consequently cannot be any correlation [between God and His creatures]. That a certain kind of relation does exist between them is by some considered possible, but wrongly. It is impossible to imagine a relation between intellect and sight, although, as we believe, the same kind of existence is common to both; how, then, could a relation be imagined between any creature and God, who has nothing in common with any other being; for even the term existence is applied to Him and other things, according to our

---

<sup>65</sup> Seeskin, K. *Maimonides : a guide for today's perplexed*. West Orange, N.J. : Behrman House, 1991.p.31

<sup>66</sup>Maimonides, *The Guide*, I/56



opinion, only by way of pure homonymy. Consequently there is no relation whatever between Him and any other being.<sup>67</sup>

Maimonides in III/16 explores God's knowledge of human particulars. He summarizes how some philosophers of the past arrived at the idea that God lacks the knowledge of individuals. His explanation briefly is this: The fact that we perceive a lack of system in human affairs where some pious men have painful lives and the wicked have pleasurable lives has led many philosophers to question God's knowledge of particulars. Based on the observation that there is no system governing human affairs, philosophers judged that either God does not know about human individuals at all or he knows about them but does not do anything to correct things. If the reason is the latter, it should be concluded that either He is impotent or He does not care. As these two positions implied evil disposition and weakness they ruled them out. The only remaining option was that He was altogether ignorant concerning the knowledge of particulars. Regarding this point Maimonides comments:

They have fallen into a greater evil than that from which they sought to escape, because they refuse to say that God neglects or forgets a thing, and yet they maintain that His knowledge is imperfect, that He is ignorant of what is going on here on earth, that He does not perceive it.

Maimonides who maintains that God knows everything and nothing is hidden from Him, declares that the reason that led philosophers to question

---

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.I/52,

God's knowledge of human individuals was a misunderstanding on their part as regards to what constitutes a pleasurable life.

### **Hints to His Theory of Providence:**

God cannot be properly described through the use of our language. Scripture when it calls God, angry, vengeful or gracious does not mean that He has these emotions but that His actions resemble the human actions when a human has those feelings. In the same vein, when we refer to God's wisdom, knowledge or providence, we should not think these terms apply to God in the same way as they apply to human beings. We should keep in mind that God is radically different from us and is a category by himself. We go astray the moment we think of Him in human terms. God knows everything and is not ignorant of particulars. The reason that led philosophers to accept the idea that God lacked the knowledge regarding individuals is due to their misconception about what really constitutes a pleasurable life.

Maimonides emphasizes frequently that as God is in no way similar to us and incomparable to any other being, the terms like wisdom, power, existence etc. mean completely different things when they are used for God and when they are used for humans.

### **3.3 Maimonides' View of Providence**

In the traditional understanding of theistic religions God is described anthropomorphically and providence is considered as the protection of an all

mighty God who intervenes with the affairs of the human kind whenever he sees fit.

Reines states that Maimonides implies that since the traditional view of providence is based on the literal understanding of the Scripture, it should neither be taken as the real opinion of Judaism nor the true opinion suitable for the philosophically trained thinker.<sup>68</sup>

Maimonides says the term providence when applied to God is very different from the way we understand it when it is applied to humans: In these two cases the term providence is just equivocal but mean completely different things. He asserts:

The term "management" (Providence) is likewise homonymously used of our management of a certain thing, and of God's management. In fact management, knowledge, and intention are not the same when ascribed to us and when ascribed to God. When these three terms are taken in both cases in the same sense, great difficulties must arise: but when it is noticed that there is a great difference whether a thing is predicated of God or of us, the truth will become clear. The difference between that which is ascribed to God and that which is ascribed to man is expressed in the words above mentioned, "And your ways are not my ways."<sup>69</sup>

Maimonides, after reviewing different theories on Providence as explained in section 3.1 declares his own view. He comments that his view is in accord with both the principles of the Mosaic Torah and the intellectual reasoning :

---

<sup>68</sup> Reines, 1972, *Maimonides' Concepts of Providence and Theodicy*, p.172

<sup>69</sup>Ibid. III/20

My opinion on this principle of Divine Providence I will now explain to you. In the principle which I now proceed to expound I do not rely on demonstrative proof, but on my conception of the spirit of the Divine Law, and the writings of the Prophets. The principle which I accept is far less open to objections, and is more reasonable than the opinions mentioned before.<sup>70</sup>

Charles Raffel, referring to Maimonides' above statement purports that Maimonides admits the basis for the intellectualizing element of his theory is philosophic speculation rather than the objective intent of Scripture.<sup>71</sup>

According to Maimonides' view, creatures on earth fall under providence only on the level of species and thus the fates of individual members of the species are determined by chance; and the only exception to this rule is the case of human beings. In his words:

In the lower or sublunary portion of the Universe Divine Providence does not extend to the individual members of species except in the case of mankind. It is only in this species that the incidents in the existence of the individual beings, their good and evil fortunes, are the result of justice, in accordance with the words, "For all His ways are judgment." But I agree with Aristotle as regards all other living beings, and à fortiori as regards plants and all the rest of earthly creatures. For I do not believe that it is through the interference of Divine Providence that a certain leaf drops [from a tree], nor do I hold that when a certain spider catches a certain fly, that this is the direct result of a special decree and will of God in that moment..... In all these cases the action is, according to my opinion, entirely due to chance, as taught by Aristotle.<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. III/17

<sup>71</sup> Raffel, C.M. *Providence as Consequent upon the Intellect: Maimonides' Theory of Providence*. p.48

<sup>72</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide*, III/17

After clarifying that he is in agreement with Aristotle concerning individual providence regarding animals and plants but not human individuals; he adds a critical point:

Divine Providence is connected with Divine intellectual influence, and the same beings which are benefited by the latter so as to become intellectual, and to comprehend things comprehensible to rational beings, are also under the control of Divine Providence, which examines all their deeds in order to reward or punish them.<sup>73</sup>

According to Maimonides, individual providence is attached to people who are intellectually developed and not to other living beings which has no intellectual capacity, that is non-rational beings.

Cohen remarks that Maimonides' opinion that good and bad befall man according to what is justly deserved is in confirmity with the verse 'All His ways are just' (Deut.32:4) but that he changes the condition for such worthiness: instead of moral acts, intellectual perfection is the vehicle through which divine providence is received.<sup>74</sup>

Maimonides states that human beings, unlike the other individuals belonging to other species, receive divine providence on the level of individuals on account of their intellect. The divine emanation comes ultimately from the most perfect intellect or God. He says:

I hold that Divine Providence is related and closely connected with the intellect, because Providence can only proceed from an

---

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.III/17

<sup>74</sup> Cohen, M. Z., *Maimonides' Disagreement With the Torah In His Interpretation of Job*; Zutot: Perspectives on Jewish Culture, 2007, Volume 4, Part 3, 66-78, DOI: 10.1007/1-4020-5454-8\_9 p.73

intelligent being, from a being that is itself the most perfect Intellect. Those creatures, therefore, which receive part of that intellectual influence will become subject to the action of Providence in the same proportion as they are acted upon by the Intellect.<sup>75</sup>

According to Maimonides, although human beings are endowed with intellect, not everyone has the same level of intellect. They participate in reason through their own efforts according to their capacity and they receive providence in proportion to their participation. Therefore, Providence is attached to individual human beings in proportion to their level of intellectual development. In other words the more an individual perfects his intellectual faculty, the more providence he attracts. He emphasizes this point by saying:

Hence it follows.....that the greater the share is which a person has obtained of this Divine influence, on account of both his physical predisposition and his training, the greater must also be the effect of Divine Providence upon him, for the action of Divine Providence is proportional to the endowment of intellect, as has been mentioned above. The relation of Divine Providence is therefore not the same to all men; the greater the human perfection a person has attained, the greater the benefit he derives from Divine Providence. This benefit is very great in the case of prophets, and varies according to the degree of their prophetic faculty.....In the same proportion as ignorant and disobedient persons are deficient in that Divine influence, their condition is inferior, and their rank equal to that of irrational beings:.....This belief that God provides for every individual human being in accordance with his merits is one of the fundamental principles on which the Law is founded.<sup>76</sup>

Providence, then is a function of intellectual attainment and the more a person's intellect is developed the more providence he enjoys.

---

<sup>75</sup>Maimonides, *The Guide*, III/17

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.III/18

Maimonides describes a virtuous person as being intellectually developed. Since only the intellectually developed human individuals, i.e. virtuous individuals fall under providence by virtue of their intellect, we can conclude that his theory of providence establishes Divine Justice. We can summarize this position in the following form:

- i) Divine justice entails that virtuous people are rewarded
- ii) The real virtue is to develop the intellectual faculty.
- iii) People attract providence by virtue of their intellect and to the extent that they develop their intellect.
- iv) Therefore, there is divine justice.

Now let's look at closely how intellect provides us with providence through an examination of the stages of providence. By examining the stages of providence I will also try to demonstrate how he formulates his solution to the problem of evil.

### **3.4 Stages of Providence**

I suggest that Maimonides' theory of providence can be examined in three stages. The first stage of his theory of providence indicates that it is possible to prevent evils to a certain extent through the use of intellect. An individual who takes his decisions on the basis of sound judgements formed in accordance with the dictates of reason can avoid misfortunes to some extent. Although this is the case, we are all vulnerable to unpredictable evils

and we cannot always prevent them from occurring. At this point the second stage of providence comes in. This is the stage where a human being through his intellect gains psychological immunity to evils. The third and final stage is immortality. I argue that the first two stages of Maimonides' theory of providence offers a philosophical solution to the problem of evil and forms his theodicy. I will proceed by explaining these stages in detail.

#### i) Stage One: Prevention of Evils Through the Use of Intellect

As explained above, according to Maimonides' theory of providence, a man has the ability to transcend the evils through his essence bestowed on him by his form. This essence is his intellect. Thus man can overcome the suffering caused by evil by the realization of his intellect.

Maimonides thinks man is ultimately responsible for all evils, yet he blames God when things go wrong. As I have detailed in section 3.2.1., according to Maimonides God has bestowed man with intelligence and through his intelligence he has the ability to prevent evils. Maimonides says:

...the Creator gave to the form of man power, rule, and dominion over the substance;--the form can subdue the substance, refuse the fulfilment of its desires, and reduce them, as far as possible, to a just and proper measure. The station of man varies according to the exercise of this power..<sup>77</sup>

Man can avoid some natural, social and personal evils and prevent them to a certain extent through the use of his intelligence. First of all, one can grasp

---

<sup>77</sup>Ibid. III/8



the laws of the natural world through his intellect and by understanding the relationship between cause and effect in the natural order of things, he can prevent suffering resulting from natural events to a certain degree. For example, if one knows that a particular cause will result in a disastrous effect then he can avoid the situation altogether or he may try to prevent these causes from coming into existence in the first place. Secondly by controlling his passions and subduing his greed he can refrain from indulging himself in superfluous things and protect himself from the harmful effects of overeating, drinking or the other possible evils he may come across while he is chasing the superfluous things he really does not need, as explained in section 3.2.1.

Both Reines<sup>78</sup> and Raffel<sup>79</sup> explain the relationship between wisdom and providence through the following illustration Maimonides gives in Chapter 17:

It may be by mere chance that a ship goes down with all her contents, as in the above-mentioned instance, or the roof of a house falls upon those within; but it is not due to chance, according to our view, that in the one instance the men went into the ship, or remained in the house in the other instance: it is due to the will of God, and is in accordance with the justice of His judgments, the method of which our mind is incapable of understanding.<sup>80</sup>

Reines and Raffel both agree that Maimonides means in this case a man's decision to aboard the ship or not is based on the considerations of the

---

<sup>78</sup> Reines, *Maimonides' Concepts of Providence and Theodicy*, p.188

<sup>79</sup> Raffel, *Providence as Consequent upon the Intellect: Maimonides' Theory of Providence*, p.61

<sup>80</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide*, III/17

practical intellect concerning the situation. If he were wise enough, he would have evaluated the situation well, i.e. the construction of the ship, the fitness of the ship to navigate, the weather conditions that could affect the navigation and avoided travelling in an unsafe ship. Raffel comments that *“This interpretation understands providence to be a direct and natural result of the deliberations of one’s own practical intellect.”*<sup>81</sup>

The prevention of evils through the use of intellect forms the first stage of providence. To put it another way, the first stage of providence may be defined as the ability of man to conduct his life prudently. For Maimonides knowledge is virtue and ignorance is sin. In some cases we mistakenly assume that innocent people suffer. However, in these cases most of the time people suffer because of their lack of knowledge and since lack of knowledge or ignorance is sin, their suffering is deserved.

According to Maimonides, one is virtuous insofar as he uses his intellect and insofar as he uses his intellect, he can prevent evils. Thus people incur evils or rewards in accordance with their merits. Regarding this point Maimonides states:

In the same proportion as ignorant and disobedient persons are deficient in that Divine influence, their condition is inferior, and their rank equal to that of irrational beings: and they are "like unto the beasts" (Ps. xlix. 21). For this reason it was not only considered a light thing to slay them, but it was even directly

---

<sup>81</sup> Raffel, *Providence as Consequent upon the Intellect: Maimonides' Theory of Providence*.p.61

commanded for the benefit of mankind. This belief that God provides for every individual human being in accordance with his merits is one of the fundamental principles on which the Law is founded.<sup>82</sup>

The sinful ignorant as they have negligible contact with the emanation from above are exposed to the whims of everyday life. The punishment of such people are not executed by God or any other higher being; they are just left unprotected.

Maimonides makes an analogy between knowledge and the sight of the eye. He says just as a blind man stumbles and wounds himself or others on his way because of the absence of sight, a man who does not have knowledge harms himself and other people he meets because of his ignorance. He says:

If men possessed wisdom, which stands in the same relation to the form of man as the sight to the eye, they would not cause any injury to themselves or to others: for the knowledge of truth removes hatred and quarrels, and prevents mutual injuries.<sup>83</sup>

Although evils can be prevented to a certain extent through intelligence, man cannot protect himself from all evils; he is subject to unexpected occurrences. This brings us to the next stage of providence.

## ii) Stage Two: Psychological Immunity Towards Evils

In Maimonides' Philosophy, man through intellectual study not only gains knowledge but attains a new level of consciousness. This happens due to the nature of human intellect as explained above in section 3.2.2. The

---

<sup>82</sup>Maimonides, *The Guide*, III/18

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. III/11

intellect at birth which is called the hylic intellect is a mere potentiality. Hylic intellect is transformed gradually into actual intellect through learning. When the intellect is actualized to a point where it becomes a new entity it is called the acquired intellect. Acquired intellect is produced by studying abstract science and metaphysics. Quoting from Chapter III/51:

If man frees his thoughts from worldly matters, obtains a knowledge of God in the right way, and rejoices in that knowledge, it is impossible that any kind of evil should befall him while he is with God, and God with him. When he does not meditate on God, when he is separated from God, then God is also separated from him; then he is exposed to any evil that might befall him; for it is only that intellectual link with God that secures the presence of Providence and protection from evil accidents. Hence it may occur that the perfect man is at times not happy, whilst no evil befalls those who are imperfect; in these cases what happens to them is due to chance.

Maimonides' point here is that suffering is, at the end of the day, a state of mind. At this stage of providence, as one realizes that the material possessions are not really the essential parts of our lives, the loss of them will no longer be a reason for suffering. Once we become aware that material aspects of life are inessential and that the proper object of life is the knowledge of God, our suffering ends. If the person undergoing the misfortunes realizes this and engages himself with the contemplation of God, he will not suffer.

Raffel makes the following comment concerning this point:

In dealing with the full realm of the human personality, human virtue cannot consistently surmount the world of accident, of contingent events, and cannot generate, in and of itself,

permanent human happiness. As a result, the exclusive pursuit of theoretical wisdom is not only man's ultimate goal, but also his only refuge.<sup>84</sup>

If we are intellectually developed and able to contemplate about God, this is the virtue and the reward we get in return at the same time. We should not think in material terms when we speak of rewards. The reward in this second stage of providence is in fact quite abstract. Through contemplation of metaphysical concepts we set ourselves apart from the material world and in turn attain a type of psychological immunity towards material evils. Oliver Leaman comments that the attainment of this kind of providence does not mean that by some magical process all our physical and social problems vanish but that these problems are put into perspective.<sup>85</sup>

When we contemplate the metaphysical concepts and engage ourselves in the study of science and metaphysics we will eventually come to a point where we will realize that God is totally dissimilar from us and the term "providence" is equivocal when it is used for human beings and when it is used for God. We will not expect God to give us material rewards in return for being virtuous just like a child expects to be rewarded by his mother if he is well-behaved.

---

<sup>84</sup> Raffel, *Providence as Consequent upon the Intellect: Maimonides' Theory of Providence* p.67.

<sup>85</sup> Leaman, O., *Evil and suffering in Jewish philosophy*, Cambridge ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 1995. p.91

According to Reines, at this stage of intellectual development, providence signifies the emergence of a new self means enjoying a totally different mode of consciousness. The activity of this mode of consciousness is free from all worries related to material world and it involves contemplating theoretical concepts of science and metaphysics and engaging in abstract speculation. Thus a man who has attained acquired intellect is free from suffering as the real reason of all suffering is ultimately matter. This new mode of consciousness brings man to a state of bliss and makes him unaware of the material misfortunes. He continues to enjoy the intellectual contemplation whatever afflictions may befall him.

Reines points out that Maimonides' statement that no evil befalls someone in a state of intellectual contemplation should not be taken to mean that "*such contemplation will keep an earthquake or invading army away.*" He affirms further that the correct explanation of Maimonides' claim is that one can overcome the suffering through intellectual contemplation and not that intellectual contemplation by itself can prevent natural or social evils.<sup>86</sup>

Hence if one cannot keep himself away from a disastrous event by using one's intellect, this stage of providence will put the intellectually perfect person in a state of bliss, thereby prevent his suffering. Thus he will no longer be affected by the disastrous outside events.

---

<sup>86</sup>Reines, *Maimonides' Concepts of Providence and Theodicy*,p.191

Clearly, man is not able to prevent all natural or moral evils. However, at a more developed intellectual stage, the inner state of a person changes putting him in an internal state of bliss which is impossible to be affected by the disastrous outside events.

Hence at this stage, providence prevents suffering by providing a man with a different mode of consciousness which makes him regard the physical requirements of him as relatively unimportant and in so doing removes anxiety resulting from the material aspects of life. It does not prevent evil or misfortunes from occurring but may keep someone from suffering due to these misfortunes.

There is on the other hand a point where even this stage of providence fails. It fails if a person falls out of the mode of consciousness where he contemplates the intelligible objects and gets instead engaged with the world of material events. Such a person will only suffer when he loses this state of consciousness. As man is made of matter, even the most perfect man loses his contact with this level of consciousness and gets involved in material concerns now and then. At such times, like the ordinary human beings he is also open to suffering, although his suffering is less intense. Maimonides makes an analogy here to compare the intensity of the sufferings of those who have attained the acquired intellect once but withdrawn from this new level of consciousness and who have not attained the acquired intellect at all:

... those who, perfect in their knowledge of God, turn their mind sometimes away from God, enjoy the presence of Divine Providence only when they meditate on God; when their thoughts are engaged in other matters, divine Providence departs from them. The absence of Providence in this case is not like its absence in the case of those who do not reflect on God at all: it is in this case less intense, because when a person perfect in his knowledge [of God] is busy with worldly matters, he has not knowledge in actuality, but only knowledge in potentiality [though ready to become actual]. This person is then like a trained scribe when he is not writing. Those who have no knowledge of God are like those who are in constant darkness and have never seen light. We have explained in this sense the words: "The wicked shall be silent in darkness" (1 Sam. ii. 9), whilst those who possess the knowledge of God, and have their thoughts entirely directed to that knowledge, are, as it were, always in bright sunshine; and those who have the knowledge, but are at times engaged in other themes, have then as it were a cloudy day: the sun does not shine for them on account of the cloud that intervenes between them and God.<sup>87</sup>

Maimonides also states that the character of the things one is engaged with or the duration of the moments he withdraws from his attained level of consciousness determines the degree of the suffering that befalls a perfect man.

Hence it appears to me that it is only in times of such neglect that some of the ordinary evils befall a prophet or a perfect and pious man: and the intensity of the evil is proportional to the duration of those moments, or to the character of the things that thus occupy their mind.<sup>88</sup>

The second stage of providence signifies a further stage in the level of intellectual attainment. In the first stage we talked about application of intelligence to the practical events of life but the point here in this new

---

<sup>87</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide*, III/51

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*



stage of providence is the attainment of a new mode of consciousness through contemplation of God. At this level of intellectual attainment one is psychologically indifferent to the material evils. For this reason he does not suffer. One who has attained this level of intellectual development will not suffer due to evils. The psychological immunity he attains as a result of his virtue, namely his intellect, is a kind of reward for him that protects him from evils and pain.

### iii) Stage Three: Immortality

This third phase of providence is not related to the problem of evil and it is not discussed at length in the Guide but I will briefly touch upon it to give a full picture of Maimonides' Theory of Providence. Maimonides refers to the subject of human immortality in a couple of instances in the Guide. For example, he says in III/27 that perfecting the intellect is the only source of eternal life. He mentions immortality later in Chapter III/51. At the end of Chapter III/51, he says:

When this perfect man is stricken in age and is near death, his knowledge mightily increases, his joy in that knowledge grows greater, and his love for the object of his knowledge more intense, and it is in this great delight that the soul separates from the body. To this state our Sages referred, when in reference to the death of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, they said that death was in these three cases nothing but a kiss.... The meaning of this saying is that these three died in the midst of the pleasure derived from the knowledge of God and their great love for Him.....This kind of death, which in truth is deliverance from death, has been ascribed by our Sages to none but to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. The other prophets and pious men are beneath that degree: but their knowledge of God is strengthened when death approaches. Of

them Scripture says, "Thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward" (Isa. lviii. 8). The intellect of these men remains then constantly in the same condition, since the obstacle is removed that at times has intervened between the intellect and the object of its action: it continues for ever in that great delight, which is not like bodily pleasure.

What he says here is that the body which is made up of matter will inevitably die and those characteristics of man dependent upon it will perish with it. However someone who contemplates abstract concepts of metaphysics attains the acquired intellect. Since acquired intellect is separate from the body, it survives the death of the body and it continues its contemplation joining with the Active intellect. Oliver Leaman comments on this point by saying :

It is important to point out that what remains is an entirely impersonal kind of immortality, since all that survives death are the thoughts, not the thinker. And not just any thoughts, but only thoughts which are abstract and capable of functioning without participation by our physical constitution.....In so far as providence watches over those abstract thinkers, it watches over the thoughts rather than the bearers of the thoughts, and the only reward which the latter can look forward to is the pleasure in having the thoughts themselves.<sup>89</sup>

Such a conception of immortality thus, forms the third stage of providence.

---

<sup>89</sup> Leaman, *Evil and suffering in Jewish philosophy*, p.74

## CHAPTER 4

### MAIMONIDES' VIEW OF PROVIDENCE AND THE BOOK OF JOB

In this Chapter after making some general remarks on the Biblical commentaries of Maimonides, I will make a brief summary of the story of Job in the bible and then proceed with an analysis of Maimonides' interpretation of the story. With this analysis, I aim to show more clearly how Maimonides through his theory of providence establishes the justice of God in the face of the apparent lack of system in human affairs.

#### 4.1 Bible, The Book of Job and Maimonides

Sara Klein-Braslavy, in her article concerning the Biblical Commentaries of Maimonides states that there are two assumptions determining the character of Maimonides' exegesis. These are, first, the relevant importance of philosophy over religion; and second that Bible is essentially esoteric. Religion through myths and images hides the philosophical truths from the ordinary masses and at the same time hints at them revealing them only to those who are intellectually developed enough. These assumptions, she affirms, allow him to resolve the contradictions between bible and the philosophical truths by means of exploring the hidden meaning behind the biblical parables.<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup> Seeskin, K. Ed., *Cambridge Companion to Maimonides* p.245

As stated in the section 2.2, the second purpose of the Guide is *“to explain certain obscure figures which occur in the Prophets, and are not distinctly characterized as being figures”*<sup>91</sup>.

Maimonides says:

Ignorant and superficial readers take them in a literal, not in a figurative sense. Even well informed persons are bewildered if they understand these passages in their literal signification, but they are entirely relieved of their perplexity when we explain the figure, or merely suggest that the terms are figurative.<sup>92</sup>

Figures here indicate parables which are the verses and passages that have two meanings: an exoteric meaning and an esoteric meaning. The exoteric meaning, which is the external meaning is conceived by the literal and common understanding of the text; whereas the esoteric meaning is *“profound wisdom, conducive to the recognition of real truth.”*<sup>93</sup> Maimonides also points out that exoteric meaning has its uses too. He says: *“Taken literally, such expressions contain wisdom useful for many purposes, among others, for the amelioration of the condition of society”*<sup>94</sup>

Maimonides maintains that there are two types of parables: In the first kind of parables each and every word represents a certain idea and is essential for a correct interpretation of the parable. The second kind on the other hand is

---

<sup>91</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide*, Introduction

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

embellished with many details but these details are not crucial for understanding the parable; they are there only to enrich the narration or to conceal the idea in a better way. Contrary to the first kind of parable, each word in the parable does not represent a certain idea but the parable “as a whole, represents a general idea”<sup>95</sup>

Klein-Braslavy indicates that Maimonides considers the Book of Job as a parable of the second kind: It involves many details that don't contribute directly to the interpretation of the story but rather serve to conceal the true meaning from unqualified readers or to function merely as aesthetic elements.<sup>96</sup>

Maimonides' interpretation of Job's story serves as an illustration of his theory of providence.. Cohen, in his article concerning Maimonides' interpretation of the Book of Job says:

“Maimonides is celebrated in Jewish Intellectual History both as a bold innovator and vigorous champion of rabbinic tradition. The tensions implied by this combination emerge in his reading of Job in *The Guide of The Perplexed* III.22-23, particularly where he seems to take issue with the Torah itself. Though somewhat of an overstatement, this apparent disagreement reveals much about Maimonides' endeavour to find his own voice within the Hebrew Literary tradition.”<sup>97</sup>

---

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Seeskin, K. Ed., *Cambridge Companion to Maimonides*, p. 266

<sup>97</sup> Cohen M. Z., *Maimonides' Disagreement With the Torah In His Interpretation of Job*, p. 66

In the next section I will make a short summary of the Book of Job and then proceed in the following section to the Hermeneutic inquiry of the story of Job by Maimonides

#### **4.2 Job's Story**

The story opens with the introduction of Job, the main protagonist of the story. He is a righteous, pious and a wealthy individual blessed with many animals, servants and children.

Next we read the conversation between God and Satan about Job. God praises Job to Satan and Satan replies that Job's devotion to God is not genuine and if all the blessings he is endowed with were taken away he would definitely curse God. In response to this challenge God allows Satan to take away all his possessions from Job.

Following this we read the reports of Job's losses : the loss of all his material possessions; his animals, his children, his servants. Even in the face of all these losses Job does not curse God. This time, Satan challenges God again saying Job would curse Him if he were to lose his health. God accepts this challenge and gives Satan the power to afflict Job with illness. Satan afflicts Job with sore boils from head to foot; but even then Job does not curse God.

Next Job's three friends; Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar come to comfort him but being astounded by his condition they sit in silence for seven days and nights. At the end of seven days in silence, Job finally speaks. From his

monologue we understand that Job is perplexed about what happened to him. He feels he does not deserve all these misfortunes since he was a righteous and upright individual in the past and he curses the day he was born.

Following his speech, his three friends offer their views on the situation of Job. In the next section, in the course of examining Maimonides' interpretation of the story these views will be put into consideration. There are three cycle of speeches that goes on between these four until Chapter 32.

In Chapter 32 a young person, Elihu comes into the scene. Elihu points out that Job's attitude to his suffering is wrong. He says God is not his enemy and his suffering is not meant to punish him. Elihu confirms God's justice, goodness and greatness.

Following this scene God speaks to Job from the whirlwind. God demands Job that he answer His questions and then asks a series of questions concerning the creation and nature .These questions serve to uncover God's great wisdom and power and contrast it with the limited understanding of Job. Job cannot answer God and confesses that he has a limited understanding and that he spoke about things that are beyond his comprehension. He abhors himself and repents. Then God rebukes Job's three friends for misrepresenting Him and restores Job's losses.

### 4.3 Hermeneutic Inquiry on Job's Story

To illustrate his theory of providence, Maimonides gives an interpretation of the Book of Job. He discusses the story of Job in Part III, Chapters 22 and 23 of the Guide. This section is devoted to exploring these two chapters. As will be seen in detail below, Job's transformation in this story signifies Job's transition from the first stage to the second stage of providence.

Maimonides starts his analysis by stating that Job's story is a fictional story designed with *"the purpose of explaining the different opinions which people hold on Divine Providence."*<sup>98</sup>

Maimonides says the story of Job puts forth an important problem into consideration that has puzzled many people. The essence of the puzzlement is delineated by him like this:

This perplexity is caused by the account that a simple and perfect person, who is upright in his actions, and very anxious to abstain from sin, is afflicted by successive misfortunes, namely, by loss of property, by the death of his children, and by bodily disease, though he has not committed any sin.<sup>99</sup>

Job who was pious and upright was afflicted with a series of misfortunes. As he thought he was innocent before God, he assumed his suffering was unjust.

---

<sup>98</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide*, III/22

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.



According to Maimonides, Job, although righteous was ignorant and his being ignorant is the key in his suffering since it is due to his ignorance that he takes Scripture literally. He says:

It is remarkable in this account that wisdom is not ascribed to Job. The text does not say he was an intelligent, wise, or clever man; but virtues and uprightness, especially in actions, are ascribed to him. If he were wise he would not have any doubt about the cause of his suffering, as will be shown later on.<sup>100</sup>

Raffel describes Job as *“the parade example of the failure of practical intellect to guarantee complete providential care.”*<sup>101</sup>

In the parable, Job’s friends visit him to offer him comfort for his intense suffering and each of them trying to make sense of his predicament comes up with an explanation.

According to Maimonides, the characters in the story represent the four main views on providence which he examined in Chapter 17/III of the Guide except the view of Epicurus. Maimonides quotes each character to show how these verses typically reflect and correspond to the views regarding providence he discussed earlier.

Job is of the opinion that everyone whether righteous or wicked is equal in the eyes of God. He represents the view of Aristotle that maintains there is no providence over individuals. Maimonides, as an evidence quotes him

---

<sup>100</sup>ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Raffel, *Providence as Consequent upon the Intellect: Maimonides' Theory of Providence* p.64

saying *"This is one thing, therefore I said it, He destroyeth the perfect and the wicked."*

Eliphaz the Temanite who assumes that Job is being punished because of his sins is the representative of the tradition and Torah view which says God punishes or rewards people according to their actions.. Eliphaz is quoted saying *"Is not thy wickedness great and thine iniquities infinite?"* Against Job's insistence that he is sinless, Eliphaz argues that even the most upright individual is not blameless before God and that our sins are sometimes hidden from our perception.

Bildad the Shuhite represents the Mutazila view that Divine wisdom is the ultimate determinant. This view also holds that he is being tested now in return for a great award later. He says: *"If thou wert pure and upright; surely now he would awake for thee, and make the habitation of thy righteousness prosperous. Though thy beginning was small, yet thy latter end should greatly increase."*

The Ashariyah view is represented by Zophar the Naamathite which holds that everything happens by the divine decree and we should not question or seek the reasons of God's wills. He says Job's suffering is due to God's will and should not be questioned. In the text Zophar says: *"But oh that God would speak, and open his lips against thee; And that he would shew thee the secrets of wisdom....Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?"*

Finally Elihu appears. At this point Maimonides says:

These were the ancient views on Providence; later on a new theory was set forth, namely, that ascribed to Elihu. For this reason he is placed above the others, and described as younger in years but greater in wisdom. He censures Job for his foolishly exalting himself, expressing surprise at such great troubles befalling a good man, and dwelling on the praises of his own deeds. He also tells the three friends that their minds have been weakened by great age. A profound and wonderful discourse then follows.<sup>102</sup>

Maimonides' view of providence is represented by Elihu. Kalman says: *"According to Maimonides, Elihu provides the correct explanation. Proof of this assertion is established by the fact that he, unlike others, is not chastised at the end of the biblical book."*<sup>103</sup>

Elihu starts his speech first by reprimanding Job for trying to justify himself rather than God and then his three friends for not being able to provide an answer to Job's predicament. Maimonides says Elihu introduces a new notion into the discussion: an angel's intercession. Maimonides does not explain the meaning of this term but many commentators agree that it denotes the active intellect which Maimonides explicitly equates with angels.

Elihu says: *"If there be with him an angel, An interpreter, one among a thousand, To show unto man what is right for him; Then God is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit, I have found a ransom."*<sup>104</sup>

---

<sup>102</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide*, III/23

<sup>103</sup> Kalman J., *Job the Patient/Maimonides The Physician: A Case Study in the Unity of Maimonides' Thought*, *AJS Review* 32:1 (2008), 117-140

<sup>104</sup> Job 33:23-24: For the quotations from the Bible, except the ones which Maimonides himself makes in *The Guide*, King James Version is used which can be found online at the following web address: <http://www.biblegateway.com/versions/King-James-Version-KJV-Bible>

When Elihu is done with his speech God appears from the whirlwind and speaks to Job. He demands that Job answer Him and asks a series of questions which in effect displays Job's limited capacity and understanding when compared with God. Concerning this point Raffel says:

Elihu's additional insights joins with Job's prophetic revelation to focus on the description of natural matters which suggests that the problem of the suffering of the righteous can be resolved when the universe is understood properly as God-centered and not man-centered.<sup>105</sup>

Job finally realizes his mistake. Following this, he is relieved from suffering.

Job says:

Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? Therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak/I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.<sup>106</sup>

What did Job realize at this point that relieved him from his suffering?

Maimonides explains this point as follows:

As soon as he had acquired a true knowledge of God, he confessed that there is undoubtedly true felicity in the knowledge of God; it is attained by all who acquire that knowledge, and no earthly trouble can disturb it. So long as Job's knowledge of God was based on tradition and communication, and not on research, he believed that such imaginary good as is possessed in health, riches, and children, was the utmost that men can attain: this was the reason why he was in perplexity...<sup>107</sup>

---

<sup>105</sup> Raffel, *Providence as Consequent upon the Intellect: Maimonides' Theory of Providence* p.56

<sup>106</sup> Job 42: 3-6

<sup>107</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide*, III/23

Joel Laks in his article "The Enigma of Job"<sup>108</sup> explaining Maimonides' opinion of what Job realized after God's appearance from the whirlwind states that before the appearance of God from the whirlwind, Job mistakenly assumed that pain or satisfaction refer to material pleasures and pains. Since he was not wise enough and knew God only through tradition and not contemplation he erroneously thought that contentment was possessing wealth, family and children.

After God's speech, Job, going through an intellectual metamorphosis finally realizes that God being unique, is not comparable to anything in His creation. God is a category by himself, unlike anything in the universe. Realization of the True knowledge of God as Job did entails understanding that God's relationship to us should not be thought of as a relationship between a human king and his subjects. The meaning of providence when applied to God is utterly different from the providence when applied to a human king. We expect to be rewarded by God in return for being moral just like we expect to be rewarded by a King in return for loyalty. This is a mistake because God is nothing like us. This difference is not a matter of degree but of a kind. We envisage our relationship to God as resembling to our relationships here in the world. That is where we are mistaken. We expect rewards in the form of material goods but the real reward is the

---

<sup>108</sup> Laks,H.J *The Enigma of Job: Maimonides and the Moderns*, Journey of Biblical Literature, Vol. 83, No. 4 (Dec., 1964), pp. 345-364 p.361

intellectual knowledge of God that we attain. Regarding this point Raffel comments: “*Job is transformed from a man who displays ‘moral virtue and righteousness in action,’ but who suffers, to a man who ‘knew God with a certain knowledge’ and transcended suffering.*”<sup>109</sup>

The point is that we must not associate pleasure and happiness with material rewards and evil with the absence of them. The real happiness lies in contemplating God and attaining a true knowledge of him through contemplation and metaphysical study. Our ignorance as to what true happiness consists in is what makes us suffer.

Oliver Leaman points to the distinction here between the people who adhere to religion because of what they hope to get out of it and those who worship God solely from love of God. Leaman says for Maimonides these are two different forms of worship and the latter is clearly the superior form. He says Maimonides in his analysis of the story of Job, shows “*how there can be a development of the individual from one form of worship to the other.*”<sup>110</sup>

The purpose of the book according to Maimonides is to make the distinction between providence and governance when applied to God and when applied to Humans. Although we use the same terms for humans and God they

---

<sup>109</sup> Raffel, *Providence as Consequent upon the Intellect: Maimonides' Theory of Providence* p.63

<sup>110</sup> Leaman, *Evil and suffering in Jewish philosophy*, p. 84

should not be considered the same. This is where Job goes wrong.

Maimonides asserts:

But the term management, when applied to God, has not the same meaning which it has when applied to us; and when we say that He rules His creatures we do not mean that He does the same as we do when we rule over other beings. The term "rule" has not the same definition in both cases: it signifies two different notions, which have nothing in common but the name. In the same manner, as there is a difference between works of nature and productions of human handicraft, so there is a difference between God's rule, providence, and intention in reference to all natural forces, and our rule, providence, and intention in reference to things which are the objects of our rule, providence, and intention. This lesson is the principal object of the whole Book of Job; it lays down this principle of faith, and recommends us to derive a proof from nature, that we should not fall into the error of imagining His knowledge to be similar to ours, or His intention, providence, and rule similar to ours. When we know this we shall find everything that may befall us easy to bear; mishap will create no doubts in our hearts concerning God, whether He knows our affairs or not, whether He provides for us or abandons us.<sup>111</sup>

In his examination of Maimonides' interpretation of Job, Oliver Leaman makes the following remark regarding this point:

God is radically dissimilar from us, and when we come to wonder what role providence plays in our own individual lives we must free ourselves from the model of servants and master. Virtuous people cannot expect to be rewarded in the way that valuable servants might tend to expect to be rewarded.<sup>112</sup>

Job thought the loss of family, property and health was not fair as he was without sin. The fact that he saw his situation through the traditional understanding of the masses and his lack of intellectual powers is the main reason that caused his suffering. He attains a kind of psychological immunity

---

<sup>111</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide*, III/23

<sup>112</sup> Leaman, *Evil and suffering in Jewish philosophy*, p.73

from suffering when he realizes that his mistake was to take material world as the measure of His happiness whereas true happiness lies in continuous contemplation of God and being occupied by Him unceasingly.

In summarizing Maimonides' thought Joel Laks says, when Job understands that happiness is true knowledge of God and not having wealth and children, he drops his earlier values that made him grieve over his losses. Job thus goes through a major transformation in terms of his values and his perspective on life. Laks points out that, Job who goes through a major transformation finally comprehends that "*the great spiritual truth that true joy lies in the enjoyment of the Divine Vision, that pain is really a spiritual 'vacuum,' the lack of or deprivation from the Divine vision.*"<sup>113</sup>

Reines puts Maimonides' point even more strongly in his examination of Maimonides interpretation of Job's story:

....Job was not virtuous; he was on the contrary, evil, and the suffering he went, consequently, was deserved. Job, according to Maimonides, was an ignorant man; and inasmuch as ignorance is sin, and intellectual perfection alone virtue, despite all appearances Job was evil. It is true that Job appeared to be pious and moral, but this was not intellectual or real virtue, rather goodness as understood by the uneducated masses.<sup>114</sup>

Reines says here simply that Job is suffering and his suffering is well deserved as he is sinful. His sin is ignorance. Job's suffering, therefore his being evil is due to the fact that his belief was based on the traditional literal

---

<sup>113</sup> Laks, *The Enigma of Job: Maimonides and the Moderns*, p.362

<sup>114</sup> Reines, *Maimonides' Concepts of Providence and Theodicy*, p.195



understanding of the Scripture. Beliefs based on the traditional understanding of the Scripture do not provide a person with providence. One can attract providence only through developing his intellectual capacities and this can be done through the study of science and metaphysics. When he thoroughly understood that pleasures that come from material world are not real, he acquired a new mode of consciousness and became virtuous. In this new mode of consciousness material losses are no more important for the individual. Hence the loss of his wealth, children and bodily health no longer caused pain for him.

One last point should be added here. Jason Kalman states that throughout his oeuvre Maimonides' approach to suffering is consistent: He suggests the commitment to knowledge as the remedy to suffering in all of his writings. Kalman expresses that *"From his personal experience and his medical studies he knew that all suffering is psychological; Jobs could be no different."*<sup>115</sup>

---

<sup>115</sup> Kalman, *Job the Patient/Maimonides The Physician: A Case Study in the Unity of Maimonides' Thought*, p.140

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSION**

Maimonides offers a solution to the problem of evil through the first two stages of his three-staged theory of providence. According to Maimonides providence is a function of intellectual attainment and the more a person's intellect is developed the more providence he enjoys. Maimonides describes a virtuous person as being intellectually developed. Since, according to his theory only the intellectually developed human individuals, i.e. virtuous individuals fall under providence we can conclude that his theory of providence which establishes Divine Justice offers a solution to the problem of evil.

He asserts that terms like rule, providence, justice etc. although equivocal, express totally different meanings when they are applied to Humans and when they are applied to God. As regards to the problem of evil, our mistake is imagining God's governance as similar to that of Humans'. If we consider ourselves 'good', i.e morally upright, we expect to be awarded by God with material rewards just like we would expect from a King to reward his loyal servant with medals or favours. This is all too human and God's providence does not work that way.

Human beings can attract providence only through their intellect which is their defining essence bestowed upon them through their form by the active

intellect. The more he uses his intelligence the more he protects himself. If one has knowledge regarding how things work in this world, he can prevent evils to a certain extent. This is the first stage of providence. Nevertheless, he is not immune to all evils and cannot prevent unexpected misfortunes from occurring. This brings us to the second stage.

In the second stage, although the intellectually developed human being is still as susceptible to misfortunes as any other human being, he does not feel pain anymore in the face of these evils as he has acquired a true knowledge of God and thus developed a new consciousness which puts him in communion with God and a state of bliss. To arrive at this stage one has to acquire a new mode of consciousness through his efforts which is attainable by reaching a true knowledge of God.

Although there is a further stage in Maimonides' theory of providence, it is not a part of his theodicy. This further stage is concerned with the immortality of the souls.

In light of all this, we can assert that Maimonides through the first two stages of his theory of providence offers a solution to the problem of evil. It links the level of intellectual developments of individuals with the rewards or punishments they get and in so doing establishes the Justice of God.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Burrell, D. B, *Faith and Freedom : An Interfaith Perspective*, Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2004.

Davidson, H. A, *Moses Maimonides, The Man and His Works*, New York, N.Y: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2005.

Dobbs-Weinstein, I.; Goodman, L. E., Grady, J. A. Ed; *Maimonides and His Heritage*; Albany: SUNY Press, 2009.

Nadler, Steven; Rudavsky, T.M. Ed, *The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Harris, J. M. Ed. *Maimonides after 800 years : Essays on Maimonides and His Influence*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007.

Jospe, R., *Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2009.

Kellner, M., *Maimonides on Judaism and the Jewish People*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991.

Kellner M., *Maimonides on Human Perfection*, Atlanta, Ga: Scholars Press, 1990.

Kraemer, J.L ed. and with contributions by Berman L. V.; *Perspectives on Maimonides : Philosophical and Historical Studies*, London ; Portland, Or.: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1991.

Leaman, O. *Evil and Suffering in Jewish Philosophy*, Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Leaman O., Frank D. ed. *History of Jewish philosophy*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Maimonides, M., *The Guide for the Perplexed*, Trans.by M.Friedlander, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd. 1904

Maimonides M., *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Trans.by S.Pines, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1963

Roth, Leon, *The Guide For The Perplexed, Moses Maimonides*, London: Routledge, 2008 c.1948.

Schweid, E., and translated by Levin, L. *The Classic Jewish Philosophers : from Saadia through the Renaissance* . Leiden: Brill, 2008.

Seeskin, K., *Maimonides : a Guide for Today's Perplexed*. West Orange, N.J. : Behrman House, 1991.

Seeskin, K., ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Maimonides*, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Sirat, C. *A History of Jewish philosophy in the Middle Ages* . Cambridge ; New York : Cambridge University Press , 1990.

Popkin, R.H. ed. *Columbia History of Western Philosophy*, New York, Columbia University Press 1999

Reines, A. 1972, Maimonides' Concepts of Providence and Theodicy, Hebrew Union College Annual 43: 169-205.

Raffel, C. M., 1987, *Providence as Consequent upon the Intellect: Maimonides' Theory of Providence*, AJS Review, 12, p.46

Cohen M. Z., *Maimonides' Disagreement with the Torah in His Interpretation of Job*; Zutot: Perspectives on Jewish Culture, 2007, Volume 4, Part 3, 66-78, DOI: 10.1007/1-4020-5454-8\_9

Laks, H.J., *The Enigma of Job: Maimonides and the Moderns*, Journey of Biblical Literature, Vol. 83, No. 4 (Dec., 1964), pp. 345-364

Kalman, J., *Job the Patient/Maimonides The Physician: A Case Study in the Unity of Maimonides' Thought*, AJS Review 32:1 (2008), 117-140

Altmann, A., *Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas: Natural or Divine Prophecy?*; AJS Review; Jan 1978, Vol. 3 Issue 1, p1-19,

Frank, D. H., *The End of the Guide: Maimonides on the Best Life for Man*; Judaism, Fall 85, Vol. 34 Issue 4, p485,

McCallum, D., *Approaches to Maimonides' Guide*; European Judaism Volume 37 No:2 Autumn '04