

the circumstances of people, | of the wicked and the good, and that in their opinion these matters were not well ordered; as was said by those among us who were ignorant: *The way of the Lord is not well ordered.*⁸

After I have explained that the discussion concerning knowledge⁹ and that concerning providence are connected, I shall begin to explain the opinions of those engaged in speculation concerning providence. After that I shall begin to resolve the doubts expressed with regard to the deity's knowledge of particular things.

CHAPTER 17

The opinions of people about providence are five in all.¹ And all of them are ancient; I mean that they are opinions that have been heard at the time of the prophets, since the true Law has appeared that has illumined all this darkness.

The first opinion is the profession of those that consider that there is no providence at all with regard to anything whatever in all that exists; that everything in it, the heavens and the things other than they, has happened by chance and in accordance with the way things were predisposed; and that there is no one who orders, governs, or is concerned with anything. This is the opinion of Epicurus. He also professes that there are atoms, and holds that they mingle according to chance and that what is generated out of them, is generated by chance. Those in *Israel* who were unbelievers also professed this opinion; they are those of whom it is said: *They have belied the Lord, and said: It is not He.*² Aristotle has demonstrated that this opinion is inadmissible; that it cannot be true that all things should have been generated by chance; and that, on the contrary, there is someone who orders and governs them. In what precedes we have already mentioned something of this.³

The second opinion is the opinion of those who hold that providence watches over certain things and that these exist through the governance | and the ordering of one who governs and orders, whereas other things are left to chance. This is the opinion of Aristotle. I will sum up for your benefit

8. Ezek. 33:17. 9. I.e., God's knowledge.

1. On Maimonides' sources for this chapter, cf. Translator's Introduction.

2. Jer. 5:12. 3. Cf. II 20.

his opinion on providence. He holds that God, may He be exalted, takes care of the spheres and of what is in them and that for this reason their individuals remain permanently as they are. Alexander has formulated this, saying that in Aristotle's opinion God's providence ends at the sphere of the moon. This is a branch deriving from his root doctrine concerning the eternity of the world, for he believes that providence corresponds to the nature of what exists. Accordingly with regard to the spheres, whose individuals are permanent, and what is in them, providence regarding them means that they remain permanent in a changeless state. But just as the existence of other things — whose individuals have not, but whose species have, an enduring existence — derives necessarily from theirs, there is likewise an overflow from the providence in question, which overflow necessitates the durability and permanence of the species, though the durability of the latter's individuals be impossible. However, the individuals of every species are also not neglected in every respect. For in all portions of this matter that have been purified to the point of receiving the form of growth, there are placed faculties that preserve them for a certain time through attracting toward them that which agrees with them and through repelling that which is not useful for them. Again in those portions of the matter in question that have been purified to a greater extent so that they received the form of sensation, there are placed other faculties, which preserve and safeguard them, as well as another capacity: namely, that of moving so as to direct themselves toward that which agrees with them and so as to flee from that which disagrees. Furthermore every individual has been given that which the species he belongs to needs. Finally such portions of the matter in question that have been purified to the point of receiving the form of the intellect have been given another faculty through which every one of them, according to the perfection of the individual in question, governs, thinks, and reflects on what may render possible the durability of himself as an individual and the preservation of his species. As for the other motions⁴ that occur in all | individuals of a species, they occur by chance and do not, according to Aristotle, come about through the governance or ordering of one who governs or orders. For instance, if a hurricane or a wind of less than hurricane force should blow, it would indubitably bring some leaves of this particular tree to fall, break a branch of another tree, topple a stone from a certain fence, raise up the dust so that it covers a certain plant and causes its destruction, and agitate great waves in the water so that a ship that is there would founder and so that all the people that are on board, or at least some

4. Or: all the motions.

of them, would be drowned. Consequently, according to him,⁵ there is no difference between the fall of the leaf and the fall of the stone, on the one hand, or the drowning of the excellent and superior men that were on board the ship, on the other. Similarly he does not differentiate between an ox that defecates upon a host of ants so that they die, or a building whose foundations are shaken upon all the people at their prayers who are found in it so that they die. And there is no difference, according to him, between a cat coming across a mouse and devouring it or a spider devouring a fly, on the one hand, or a ravenous lion meeting a prophet and devouring him, on the other. To sum up, the basis of his opinion is as follows: Everything that, according to what he saw, subsisted continuously without any corruption or change of proceeding at all—as, for instance, the states of the spheres—or that observed a certain orderly course, only deviating from it in anomalous cases—as, for instance, the natural things—was said by him to subsist through governance; I mean to say that divine providence accompanied it.⁶ On the other hand, all that, according to what he saw, does not subsist continuously or adhere to a certain order—as, for instance, the circumstances of the individuals of every species of plants, animals, and man—are said by him to exist by chance and not through the governance of one who governs; he means thereby that they are not accompanied by divine providence, and he also holds that it is impossible that providence should accompany these circumstances. This is consequent upon his opinion concerning the eternity of the world | and the impossibility of that which exists being in any respect different from what it is. Those who, deviating from our Law, believed in this opinion were those who said: *The Lord hath forsaken the earth.*⁷

The third opinion is opposed to this second opinion, being the opinion of those who hold that in all that exists there is nothing either among universal or particular things that is in any respect due to chance, for everything comes about through will, purpose, and governance. Now it is clear that everything that is governed is also known.⁸ This is the opinion of the Islamic sect, the Ash'ariyya.⁹ Great incongruities are bound up with this opinion, and those who hold it are burdened with them and obliged to accept them. Thus they agree with Aristotle regarding the equality that he establishes between the fall of a leaf and the death of a human individual. They say: This is so; but the wind does not blow by chance, for God sets it in

5. I.e., Aristotle.

6. According to Aristotle's opinion.

7. Ezek. 9:9.

8. Or: that everyone that governs also knows.

9. On this sect, cf. Translator's Introduction.

motion; and it is not the wind that causes the leaves to fall, for every leaf falls through an ordinance and a decree of God; and it is He who causes them to fall now in this particular place; it is not possible that the time of their falling should be postponed or retarded; nor is it possible that they should fall in another place than this, for all this has been everlastingly decreed. In consequence of this opinion, they are obliged to think that every motion and rest of animals has been decreed and that man has in no way the ability to do or not to do a thing. It is likewise a consequence of this opinion that the nature of the possible is abolished regarding these matters, so that all things are either necessary or impossible. They were accordingly obliged to accept this and said that the matters that we designate as possible—such as Zayd's standing up and 'Umar's coming—are only possible with reference to us, but that there is nothing whatever possible in them with reference to Him, may He be exalted; rather | they are either necessary or impossible. It also follows necessarily from this opinion that what the Laws entail is quite useless; for man for whose benefit every Law has come, has not the ability to do anything either to fulfill what he has been commanded or to avoid what he has been forbidden. In fact this sect says that He, may He be exalted, willed this: to send messengers, to command, to forbid, to threaten, to give hope, and to instill fear, even though we do not have the ability to do anything of our own accord; it is permissible that He should impose upon us impossible things; and it is likewise permissible that, having obeyed His order, we should be punished; and that, having transgressed it, we should be rewarded. It also necessarily follows from this opinion that His actions, may He be exalted, have no final end. They bear the burden of all these incongruities for the sake of the integrity of this opinion. They go so far as to hold that if we see an individual who was born blind or a leper, although we are unable to say that he might have deserved this because of a previous sin of his, we should say: He has willed this. And if we see that an excellent man who was devoted to God's worship has been killed through torture, we should say: He has willed this. And in this there is no injustice, for according to them, it is permissible for God to punish one who has not sinned and to reward a sinner with benefits. Their dicta on these matters are well known.

The fourth opinion is the opinion of those who hold that man has the ability to act of his own accord; it is for this reason that, according to them, the commandments, prohibitions, rewards, and punishments figuring in the Law are well ordered. They hold that all the actions of God are consequent upon wisdom, that injustice is not permissible for Him, and that He

does not punish a man who does good. The Mu^ctazila¹⁰ also hold this opinion though, according to them, the ability of man to act of his own accord is not absolute. They also believe that He, may He be exalted, has knowledge of the falling of this particular leaf and of the creeping of this particular ant, and that His providence watches over all the beings. | Incongruities and contradictions follow necessarily also from this opinion. As for the incongruity, it is as follows. If some human individual is born with an infirmity without having sinned, they say: This is consequent upon His wisdom, and it is better for this individual to be thus than to be sound in body; we do not know in what this benefit consists, but this has not happened as a punishment for him, but as a benefit. And they have a similar answer with regard to the case in which an excellent man perishes, saying that this happens in order that his reward in the other world should become greater. Finally discussion with these reached a point at which they were asked: Why is He just toward man and not just to what is other than man? because of what sin has this particular animal been killed? Whereupon they assumed the burden of the following disgraceful answer: This is better for it,¹¹ so that God should compensate it in the other world. Even when a flea and a louse are killed, it is necessary that they have a compensation for them from God. They say in the same way that if this mouse, which has not sinned, is devoured by a cat or a hawk, His wisdom has required this with regard to the mouse and that the latter will receive compensation in the other world for what has happened to it.

To my mind no one among the partisans of these three opinions concerning providence should be blamed, for every one of them was impelled by strong necessity to say what he did. Aristotle followed what is manifest¹² in the nature of that which exists. The Ash^cariyya tried to avoid having to ascribe to Him, may He be exalted, ignorance with regard to anything, for it is not seemly to say that He knows this particular thing and is ignorant of that other particular thing. Thus the incongruities referred to were necessarily attached to, and borne by, them. The Mu^ctazila also tried to avoid having to ascribe to Him, may He be exalted, injustice and wrongdoing. Moreover it was not fitting in their opinion to go against the inborn disposition by saying that there is no injustice in inflicting pain on one who has not sinned. Nor was it fitting in their opinion that all the prophets should have been sent and the Law revealed for no | intelligible purpose. Accordingly they too were burdened with incongruities referred to above,

10. On this sect, cf. Translator's Introduction.

11. I.e., for the animal. 12. *zāhir*, a word also used to signify "external."

and self-contradiction necessarily attached to them. For they believe both that He, may He be exalted, knows everything and that man has the ability to act; and this leads, as the slightest reflection should make clear, to self-contradiction.

The fifth opinion is our opinion, I mean the opinion of our Law. I shall let you know about it what has been literally stated in the books of our prophets and is believed by the multitude of our scholars; I shall also inform you of what is believed by some¹⁵ of our latter-day scholars; and I shall also let you know what I myself believe about this. I say then: It is a fundamental principle of the Law of *Moses our Master*, peace be on him, and of all those who follow it that man has an absolute ability to act; I mean to say that in virtue of his nature, his choice, and his will, he may do everything that it is within the capacity of man to do, and this without there being created for his benefit in any way any newly produced thing. Similarly all the species of animals move in virtue of their own will. And He has willed it so; I mean to say that it comes from His eternal volition in the eternity a parte ante that all animals should move in virtue of their will and that man should have the ability to do whatever he wills or chooses among the things concerning which he has the ability to act. This is a fundamental principle about which—praise be to God!—no disagreement has ever been heard within our religious community. It is likewise one of the fundamental principles of the Law of *Moses our Master* that it is in no way possible that He, may He be exalted, should be unjust, and that all the calamities that befall men and the good things that come to men, be it a single individual or a group, are all of them determined according to the deserts of the men concerned through equitable judgment in which there is no injustice whatever. Thus if some individual were wounded in the hand by a thorn, which he would take out immediately, this would be a punishment for him, and if he received | the slightest pleasure, this would be a reward for him—all this being according to his deserts. Thus He, may He be exalted, says: *For all His ways are judgment, and so on.*¹⁴ But we are ignorant of the various modes of deserts.

I have summed up these opinions for you as follows: All the various circumstances of the individuals among the Adamites are considered by Aristotle as due to pure chance, by the Ash'arite as consequent on will alone,¹⁵ by the Mu'tazila as consequent on wisdom,¹⁶ and by us as consequent on the individual's deserts, according to his actions. For this reason the

13. Or: one.

14. Deut. 32:4.

15. I.e., the divine will.

16. I.e., the divine wisdom.

Ash'arite considers it as permissible that God should punish¹⁷ an excellent and good man in this world and make him subsist eternally in that fire which is said to be in the other world. One merely says: He willed it so. The Mu'tazila consider that this is injustice; and that one that has been punished, be it even an ant, as I have mentioned to you, receives a compensation; and that the fact that the being in question was punished in order to receive a compensation is consequent on His wisdom. As for us, we believe that all the human circumstances are according to the deserts, that He is exalted above injustice, and that among us only those deserving punishment are punished. This is what is stated literally in the *Torah of Moses our Master*, namely, that everything is consequent upon the deserts; and the multitude of our scholars also speak in accordance with this opinion. For you will find them saying explicitly: *There is no death without sin, and no sufferings without transgression.*¹⁸ And they also say: *A man is measured with the measure he uses himself;*¹⁹ this is the text of the *Mishnah*. And in every passage they state clearly that for Him, may He be exalted, justice is necessary and obligatory; namely, that an obedient individual receives compensation for all the pious and righteous actions he has accomplished, even if he was not ordered by a prophet to do them, and that he is punished for all evil acts committed by him, even if he was not forbidden by a prophet to do them; this being forbidden | by the inborn disposition — I refer to the prohibition against wrongdoing and injustice. Thus they say: *The Holy One, blessed be He, does not withhold from any creature that which it has deserved.*²⁰ They also say: *Everyone that says that the Holy One, blessed be He, is indulgent [in forgiving] should have his bowels torn. Rather is He long-suffering, but He exacts what is due to Him.*²¹ And: *He who does [a thing] having been commanded [to do it] does not resemble him who does [it] without having been commanded.*²² Thus they have made it clear that even he who has not been charged with a commandment *is given his reward*. All their discourse consistently conforms to this principle. However, in the discourse of the *Sages*, there occurs something additional over and above what is to be found in the text of the *Torah*, namely, the dictum of some of them regarding the

17. Unjustly, according to human judgment. 18. B.T., Shabbath, 55a.

19. *Mishnah*, Sota, I 7.

20. B.T., Baba Qamma, 38b; B.T., Pesahim, 118a.

21. *Genesis Rabbah*, LXVII; B.T., Baba Qamma, 50a.

22. B.T., Qiddushin, 31a; B.T., Baba Qamma, 87a; B.T., 'Abodah Zarah, 3a. The talmudic text that has come down to us differs somewhat from Maimonides' quotation. It may be translated: *He who has been commanded [to do a thing] and does [it] is greater than he who does without having been commanded.*

*sufferings of love.*²³ For according to this opinion, sometimes misfortunes befall an individual not because of his having sinned before, but in order that his reward should be greater. This is also the teaching of the Mu'tazila. But there is no text in the *Torah* expressing this notion. For you should not be led into error by what is said about *putting to trial*, as when *God put Abraham to a trial*,²⁴ and as when it says: *And He afflicted thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and so on.*²⁵ You shall hear the discourse about this later on.²⁶ Our Law is exclusively concerned with the circumstances of human individuals; and in ancient times the story of this compensation accorded to animals has never been heard in our religious community;²⁷ nor was it ever mentioned by one of the *Sages*. But some²⁸ of the later-day *Gaonim*, *may their memory be blessed*, have heard it from the Mu'tazila and have approved of it and believed it.

As for my own belief with regard to this fundamental principle, I mean divine providence, it is as I shall set it forth to you. In this belief that I shall set forth, I am not relying upon the conclusion to which demonstration has led me, but upon what has clearly appeared as the intention of the book of God and of the books of our prophets. This opinion, which I believe, is less disgraceful than the preceding opinions and nearer than they to intellectual reasoning. For I for one believe that | in this lowly world — I mean that which is beneath the sphere of the moon — divine providence watches only over the individuals belonging to the human species and that in this species alone all the circumstances of the individuals and the good and evil that befall them are consequent upon the deserts, just as it says: *For all His ways are judgment.*²⁹ But regarding all the other animals and, all the more, the plants and other things, my opinion is that of Aristotle. For I do not by any means believe that this particular leaf has fallen because of a providence watching over it; nor that this spider has devoured this fly because God has now decreed and willed something concerning individuals; nor that the spittle spat by Zayd has moved till it came down in one particular place upon a gnat and killed it by a divine decree and judgment; nor that when this fish snatched this worm from the face of the water, this happened in virtue of a divine volition concerning individuals. For all this is in my opinion due to pure chance, just as Aristotle holds. According to me, as I consider the matter, divine providence is consequent upon the divine overflow; and the species

23. B.T., Berakhoth, 5a. 24. Gen. 22:1. 25. Deut. 8:3. 26. Cf. III 24.
27. *milla*. 28. Or: one. 29. Deut. 32:4.

with which this intellectual overflow is united, so that it became endowed with intellect and so that everything that is disclosed to a being endowed with the intellect was disclosed to it, is the one accompanied by divine providence, which appraises³⁰ all its actions³¹ from the point of view of reward and punishment. If, as he³² states, the foundering of a ship and the drowning of those who were in it and the falling-down of a roof upon those who were in the house, are due to pure chance, the fact that the people in the ship went on board and that the people in the house were sitting in it is, according to our opinion, not due to chance, but to divine will in accordance with the deserts of those people as determined in His judgments, the rule of which cannot be attained by our intellects.

I was impelled to adopt this | belief by the fact that I never found in the book of a prophet a text mentioning that God has a providence watching over one of the animal individuals, but only over a human individual. The prophets are even sometimes astonished because providence watches over human individuals—man being too insignificant for providence to watch over him—and all the more, over the other animals. Thus it says: *What is man, that Thou takest knowledge of him, and so on.*³³ *What is man, that Thou art mindful of him, and so on.*³⁴ Sometimes, however, there are clear texts concerning providence watching over all the human individuals and exercising a surveillance over all their actions. Thus: *He that fashioneth the hearts of them all, that considereth all their works.*³⁵ It says: *For Thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of man, to give every one according to his ways.*³⁶ It is also said: *For His eyes are upon the ways of man, and He seeth all his goings.*³⁷ The *Torah* too sometimes makes explicit statements concerning providence watching over human individuals and exercising a surveillance over their actions. Thus it says: *Nevertheless in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them.*³⁸ And: *Whosoever hath sinned against Me, him will I blot out of My book.*³⁹ And: *That same soul will I destroy.*⁴⁰ And: *I will even set My face against that soul.*⁴¹ Such statements occur frequently. And all the stories figuring [in Scripture] concerning *Abraham* and *Isaac* and *Jacob* are an absolute proof of there being an individual providence. As for the other individuals of animals, the position with regard to them is indubitably as Aristotle sees it. For this reason killing them and

30. *qaddarat*. The word also means "determines"; it is possible that it was this latter sense that Maimonides had in view in this passage.

31. I.e., those of the individuals belonging to this species.

32. Aristotle. 33. Ps. 144:3. 34. Ps. 8:5.

35. Ps. 33:15. 36. Jer. 32:19. 37. Job 34:21. 38. Exod. 32:34.

39. Exod. 32:33. 40. Lev. 23:30. 41. Lev. 20:6.

employing them usefully, as we wish, has been permitted and even enjoined. A proof that there is no providence watching over the animals other than man, except the kind of providence mentioned by Aristotle, may be found in the dictum of the prophet when he saw *Nebuchadnezzar's* tyranny and his great massacres of people. For the prophet says: O Lord, it is as if men were neglected and abandoned like fishes and insects of the earth; he indicates by this dictum that these species are neglected. For this is what he says: *And makest man as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them. They take up all of them with the angle, and so on.*⁴² Thereupon,⁴³ however, the prophet explains that this is not so; that what happened was not due to neglect and the withdrawal of providence, but was a punishment for those men because they deserved what befell them. For he says: *O Lord, thou hast ordained them for judgment, and Thou, O Rock, hast established them for correction.*⁴⁴

Do not think that this opinion may be refuted in opposition to me by means of its dicta: *He giveth to the beast his food, and so on;*⁴⁵ *The young lions roar after their prey, and so on;*⁴⁶ *Thou openest Thy hand, and satisfiest every living thing with favor;*⁴⁷ and also by means of the dictum of the *Sages: He is seated and feeds all things from the horns of buffaloes to the eggs of lice.*⁴⁸ You will find many such texts; but there is nothing in them that disproves this opinion of mine. For all these texts refer to providence watching over the species and not to individual providence. It is as if they described His bounty, may He be exalted, which prepares for every species the food necessary for it and the matter for its subsistence. This is clear and manifest. Aristotle likewise holds that this kind of providence is necessary and exists. Alexander⁴⁹ too mentions this concerning Aristotle, namely, the preparation of the existence of the food required by every species for its individuals. Were it not for this, the species would indubitably perish. This is clear upon the slightest consideration. As for their dictum: [*To avoid causing*] *suffering to animals is [an injunction to be found] in the Torah*⁵⁰ — in which they refer to its dictum: *Wherefore hast thou smitten thine she-ass*⁵¹ — it is set down with a view to perfecting us so that we should not acquire moral habits of cruelty and should not inflict pain gratuitously without any utility, but that we should intend to be kind and merciful even with a chance animal individual,

42. Hab. 1:14-15.

43. Actually Maimonides here refers to verses preceding those he has just quoted.

44. Hab. 1:12. 45. Ps. 147:9.

46. Ps. 104:21. The verse continues: *and seek their food from God.*

47. Ps. 145:16.

48. B.T., Shabbath, 107b; B.T., 'Abodah Zarah, 3b.

49. Of Aphrodisias.

50. B.T., Baba Meši'a, 32b. Cf. B.T., Shabbath, 154b.

51. Num. 22:32.

except in case of need — *Because thy soul desireth to eat flesh*⁵² — for we must not kill out of cruelty or for sport. It does not follow for me that by virtue of this opinion, one may pose to me the following question, namely: Why does He watch over the human individuals, and does not watch in the same way over the individuals | belonging to the other species of animals? For he who propounds this question ought to ask himself: Why did He give intellect to man and not to the other species of animals? The answer to this last question is: He willed it so; or, His wisdom has required this to be so; or, nature has required this to be so — all according to which of the three preceding opinions one adopts. Now the selfsame answers may be given to the first question.

Grasp my opinion up to its last implications. I do not believe that anything is hidden from Him, may He be exalted, nor do I attribute to Him a lack of power. But I believe that providence is consequent upon the intellect and attached to it. For providence can only come from an intelligent being, from One who is an intellect perfect with a supreme perfection, than which there is no higher. Accordingly everyone with whom something of this overflow is united, will be reached by providence to the extent to which he is reached by the intellect. This is the opinion that to my mind corresponds to the intelligible and to the texts of the Law. As for the three preceding opinions, they either are excessive or they fall short. Those that are excessive lead to an absolute confusion and to contesting the intelligible and to opposing what is perceived by the senses; whereas the others that greatly fall short entail most vicious beliefs concerning the deity, as well as the ruin of order in human existence and the obliteration of all good qualities of man, both the moral and the rational. I am referring to the opinion of those who abolish providence with respect to human individuals, putting the latter on a par with the individuals of the other species of animals.

CHAPTER 18

After what I have stated before about providence singling out the human species | alone among all the species of animals, I say that it is known that no species exists outside the mind, but that the species and the other universals are, as you know, mental notions and that every existent outside the mind is an individual or a group of individuals. This being known, it is

52. Deut. 12:20.

also known that the divine overflow that exists united to the human species, I mean the human intellect, is merely what exists as individual intellects — that is, what has overflowed toward Zayd, ‘Umar, Khalid, and Bakr. Now if this is so, it follows necessarily according to what I have mentioned in the preceding chapter that when any human individual has obtained, because of the disposition of his matter and his training, a greater portion of this overflow than others, providence will of necessity watch more carefully over him than over others — if, that is to say, providence is, as I have mentioned, consequent upon the intellect. Accordingly divine providence does not watch in an equal manner over all the individuals of the human species, but providence is graded as their human perfection is graded. In accordance with this speculation it follows necessarily that His providence, may He be exalted, that watches over the prophets is very great and proportionate to their degree in prophecy and that His providence that watches over excellent and righteous men is proportionate to their excellence and righteousness. For it is this measure of the overflow of the divine intellect that makes the prophets speak, guides the actions of righteous men, and perfects the knowledge of excellent men with regard to what they know. As for the ignorant and disobedient, their state is despicable proportionately to their lack of this overflow, and they have been relegated to the rank of the individuals of all the other species of animals: *He is like the beasts that speak not.*¹ For this reason it is a light thing to kill them, and has been even enjoined because of its utility. This matter is one of the fundamental principles of the Law, which is built upon it, I mean to say upon the principle that providence watches over | each human individual in the manner proper to him.

Consider in what way the texts [of Scripture] speak of providence watching over the details of the circumstances of the *Patriarchs* in their various activities and even in their acquisition of property, and what they were promised in consequence of providence accompanying them. It was said to *Abraham*: *I am thy shield.*² And to *Isaac*: *And I will be with thee, and will bless thee.*³ And to *Jacob*: *And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee whithersoever thou goest.*⁴ And to the Master of the prophets: *Certainly I will be with thee.*⁵ And to *Joshua*: *As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee.*⁶ All these are explicit affirmations of providence watching over them according to the measure of their perfection. With regard to providence watching over excellent men and neglecting the ignorant, it is said: *He will keep the*

1. Ps. 49:13 and 21. 2. Gen. 15:1. 3. Gen. 26:3. 4. Gen. 28:15.
5. Exod. 3:12. 6. Josh. 1:5.

*feet of His holy ones, but the wicked shall be put to silence in darkness; for not by strength shall man prevail.*⁷ It says thereby that the fact that some individuals are preserved from calamities, whereas those befall others, is due not to their bodily forces and their natural dispositions—this being the meaning of the dictum, *For not by strength shall man prevail*—but to their perfection and deficiency, I mean their nearness to, or remoteness from, God. For this reason, those who are near to Him are exceedingly well protected: *He will keep the feet of His holy ones*; whereas those who are far from Him are given over to whatever may happen to befall them. For there is nothing to protect them against whatever may occur; for they are like one walking in darkness, whose destruction is assured. With regard to providence watching over the excellent ones, it is also said: *He keepeth all his bones, and so on;*⁸ *The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and so on;*⁹ *He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him, and so on.*¹⁰ The texts that occur with regard to this notion are so numerous that they cannot be counted; I refer to the notion of providence watching over human individuals according to the measure of their perfection and excellence. The philosophers too mention this notion. Abū Naṣr [al-Fārābī] says in the Introduction to his Commentary on Aristotle's "Nicomachean [Ethics]":¹¹ | Those who have the capacity of making their soul pass from one moral quality to another are those of whom Plato has said that God's providence watches over them to a higher degree.

Consider how this kind of consideration has conducted us to the knowledge of the correctness of what all the prophets, may peace be on them, have said concerning individual providence watching over each individual in particular according to the measure of his perfection, and how this consideration follows necessarily from the point of view of speculation, provided that, as we have mentioned, providence is consequent upon the intellect. It would not be proper for us to say that providence watches over the species and not the individuals, as is the well-known opinion of some philosophic schools. For outside the mind nothing exists except the individuals; it is to these individuals that the divine intellect is united. Consequently providence watches only over these individuals. Consider this chapter as it ought to be considered; for through it all the fundamental principles of the Law will become safe for you and conformable for you to speculative philosophic opinions; disgraceful views will be abolished; and the form of providence, as it is, will become clear to you.

7. I Sam. 2:9. 8. Ps. 34:21. 9. Ps. 34:16.
10. Ps. 91:15. 11. This commentary seems to be lost.

After we have mentioned the opinion of people engaged in speculation concerning providence and the manner in which God governs the world, I shall also sum up for you the opinion of the people of our religious community concerning knowledge¹² and a discourse of mine about this.

CHAPTER 19

NO doubt it is a primary notion that all good things must exist in God and that with regard to Him all deficiencies must be denied. It is almost a primary notion that ignorance with regard to anything whatever is a deficiency and that He, may He be exalted, is ignorant of nothing. However what incited, as I have mentioned to you, some¹ of the people of speculation | to have the temerity to say, He knows thus and not otherwise, was what they imagined as to the lack of order in the circumstances of the human individuals. Yet most of these circumstances are not merely natural, but also consequent upon the fact that man is endowed with the ability to act and with reflection. The prophets have already mentioned that the ignorant infer that the deity has no knowledge of our actions merely from the fact that they see wicked people living in prosperity and abundance. For this impels the excellent man to think that his inclination toward the good and the hardships due to the opposition of others that he endures because of that, are useless. Thereupon the prophet has mentioned that he had let his thought wander freely with regard to this subject until it had become clear to him that things should be considered as they are in their final outcome and not in their beginnings. This is how he describes the order of all these thoughts. He says: *And they say: How doth God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High? Behold, such are the wicked; and they that are always at ease increase riches. Surely in vain have I cleansed my heart, and washed my hands in innocency.*² Then he says: *And when I pondered how I might know this, it was wearisome in mine eyes; until I entered into the sanctuary of God, and considered their end. Surely in slippery places, and so on.*³ *How are they a desolation in a moment, and so on.*⁴ These same thoughts are mentioned by

12. I.e., divine knowledge.

1. Or: one. 2. Ps. 73:11-13.

3. The whole phrase reads: *Surely Thou settest them in slippery places.*

4. Ps. 73:16-19.