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# Divine Providence in the Thought of Maimonides, Spinoza, and Buber

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for Ordination

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Referee: Dr. Barry S. Kogan

Dedicated to Those Who Have Contributed Most To My Education

My Loving Family:

Beth Jarecky Singer

Ruth Lubarsky

Marilyn Lubarsky

Sandra Lubarsky

Marcus Ford

Amy Jarecky

Lori Jarecky

Lee Jarecky

And to the memory of my father:

Dr. Robert Lubarsky

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CONTENTS

# DIGEST

The image of a Divinely wrought pillar of fire leading the Israelites through the wilderness from slavery to freedom beautify exemplifies the significance of Divine providence in Jewish tradition. Taught by Torah that God enters into history, we moderns are caught in the unfortunate quandary of wanting to faithfully accept such a proposition, but find that our rational predispositions will not allow us to do so. Once again faith and reason come into conflict. The human spirit wants to believe that God is immanent and caring, while the rational mind refuses in light of experience to accept such a proposition.

Jewish thought has attempted to prove that the conflict between faith and reason concerning Divine providence need not be eternal. Since the middle ages, Jewish thinkers have sought to respectfully examine the premises of their faith from the perspective of reason. The philosophies that they developed as a result of their search have contributed to the vitality of Judaism. In the process they have abandoned the traditional view of Divine providence in favor of positions that are more in accordance with the standards of reason.

This thesis examines three different approaches concerning the efficacy of Divine providence. Maimonides, Spinoza, and Buber, represent three distinct periods of Jewish thought. Each developed a sophisticated concept of Divine providence. Aspects of their positions, may aid us as we seek our own answers.

# INTRODUCTION

"He (God) is dead. He spoke to us and now is silent, all that we touch now is his corpse."

(Jean Paul Sartre)

The assertion that God is dead is not so much a statement of fact as an expression of frustration manifested by the sense of loneliness that pervades contemporary life. Divine providence as depicted in the Bible does not seem to be a reality in the modern existential situation. God does not appear to be active in a world that despite its many advances, still contains suffering and pain. If Divine providence was ever a reality, such philosophers as Sartre and Nietzsche conclude, God has either abandoned us or died. Even those who have resisted accepting Nietzsche and Sartre's dire assertion find themselves in a state of perplexity regarding God and God's role in the world. Their commitment to reason and scientific knowledge conflicts with their spiritual longings and traditional beliefs. Despite this tension, many somehow maintain their religious faith, but God becomes ever more mysterious for them, and the possibility of Divine providence ever more remote.

The announcement of God's death is premature. It may have resulted from unreasonable expectations concerning Divine providence. If Divine providence is understood as the incursion of deity into the life of humanity as a force for the good that corrects all wrongs via miraculous means and limits the excesses of evil, then, obviously, it is difficult to accept its efficacy

in the modern age. According to Alvin Reines, the traditional Jewish notion of providence was similar to this rather difficult position. Reines writes:

> Providence, according to traditional Jewish usage, may be defined broadly as "the guidance of a potent and prescient God, conceived of as a person, who creates and conserves the universe, and who, through continuous miraculous intervention in human history, cares for the Jews in particular and mankind in general."[1]

Our rational sense does not allow for miraculous intervention in a universe that operates according to natural law. From experience we know that evil is still present in our lives and that our world is far from perfect. But if Divine providence is understood differently, in a more general sense, as the manifest ways in which God acts in the world, then it is still possible to believe that God infuses our existence.

Jewish philosophy has struggled for centuries with the issue of Divine providence. As Jewish thinkers devised rational constructs and integrated them into their belief systems, they had to critically evaluate the concept of Divine providence. Unaware of miraculous incursions in their own lives, they too questioned the Biblical descriptions of how God acts in the world. The solutions to the problem of providence that they developed should prove of interest to the modern religious seeker who believes as they did, that religion and reason need not necessarily be in conflict.

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[1] Alvin J. Reines, "Maimonides' Concept of Providence and Theodicy," as printed in The Hebrew Union College Annual Vol.43. Samuel Sandmel ed., Cincinnati, 1972, p. 171.

This thesis will examine the views of three Jewish philosophers concerning Divine providence. Utilizing both the traditional definition and the general definition of Divine providence as described above, we will study the thought of Moses Maimonides, Baruch Spinoza, and Martin Buber. These thinkers were chosen because each represents a different period of Jewish thought; Maimonides was a medieval thinker, Spinoza, one of the first modernists, and Buber a near contemporary. They are also noteworthy because of their importance and influence in the history of philosophy. Our concerns will include an evaluation of how the philosopher in question conceives of providence in philosophical terms, what this philosopher's principal paradigms of providence are and how they fit into his philosophical system, what relation this philosopher sees between Divine providential activity and human activity, and how this philosopher treats the problem of evil in relation to his overall theory of providence.

## Chapter I

### Guiding The Perplexed: Moses Maimonides and Divine Providence

> God is very near to everyone who calls
> If he calls truly and has no distractions;
> He is found by every seeker who searches for Him,
> If he marches towards Him and goes not astray.[1]

With this statement, Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (Rambam) or Maimonides as he is commonly named, completed the third and final part of his philosophic magnum opus, The Guide of the Perplexed. The Guide, written at the end of the twelfth century, is one of the most important and controversial works of Jewish thought. After nearly eight hundred years of study, this complex and esoteric tome still contains rich apples of gold, hidden beneath its silver traceries,[2] yet to be discovered, and lessons yet to be learned by inquisitive modern minds.

Lenn Evan Goodman has written that, "for the medieval thinker there was only one mystery, the mystery of the nexus between an infinite God and finite creation."[3] The modern thinker

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[1] Moses Maimonides, The Guide of the Perplexed, As it appears in the translation by Shlomo Pines, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1963. III:54, p.638. Further citations will be noted as follows: Guide III:54, p.638. This notes that we are citing Part III, chapter 54, and page 638.

[2] Guide I:Introduction, p.11-12.

[3] Lenn Evan Goodman, Rambam: Readings in the Philosophy of Moses Maimonides, the Viking Press, New York, 1976, p.282.

is not so fortunate because our world is in many ways much more mysterious. Today, unlike the middle ages, scripture and reason are not regarded as equal sources of truth.[4] God is not believed to be necessarily infinite or omnipotent and the faithful are no longer sure of God's ability to providentially aid them. And yet the questions asked by moderns are similar to the questions asked by medievals. Both are in search of that nexus between God and humanity, both are searching for a point of contact, a sign of divine love, a reason to hope.

Maimonides responded to the seekers of his day in The Guide of the Perplexed. The Guide represents Maimonides' attempt to show those who had wandered away from the Jewish path in their search for philosophic meaning, the way back to the path by proving that the God of reason and the God of Jewish tradition do not live in tension, but are one and the same. Yet perhaps he knew that the book would be utilized by generations to come. The philosophic problems and solutions that he considered are far greater in scope and complexity than those dealt with by his Jewish philosophic predecessors and by many of his successors.

This chapter will critically examine Maimonides' views concerning Divine providence as expressed in the Guide. Maimonides was a rationalist, committed to the pursuit of knowledge and intellectual freedom as a means to finding God. As such he has much to teach us. Our goal may be to learn from him

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[4] Harry Blumberg, "Theories of Evil in Medieval Jewish Philosophy," As printed in the Hebrew Union College Annual, Vol. 43, Samuel Sandmel ed., Cincinnati, 1972, p.148.

in order to "rediscover what we Jews already once knew, and have simply forgotten."[5]

Historical Overview

Critical works of philosophy and religion, that have profound influence upon subsequent generations, often arise in response to societal crisis, and the perception that major change is in the making. The social upheaval that ensued after the Jewish defeat in the Bar Kochba revolt is often cited as one reason for the redaction of the Mishna.[6] So too, Judah Halevi wrote the Kuzari in the aftermath of the Reconquista, as a defense of a Judaism that he believed was challenged by new political realities and was vulnerable to the resurgent interest in Greek philosophy.

Maimonides completed the Guide some fifty years after the publication of the Kuzari. Like Halevi, he lived in a period of disruption and despair for the Jewish people. Born in 1138 in Cordova, Spain, at the age of thirteen he had to flee from before the conquering Almohades, an Islamic sect which persecuted religious minorities. With his family he wandered through Spain and North Africa, until he finally settled in Fustat (old Cairo), Egypt.[7] There he became an important figure working as a court

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[5] Guide II:11, p.276.

[6]. Morris Adler, The World of the Talmud, Schocken Books, New York, 1963, p.36.

[7]. David Yellin and Israel Abrahams, Maimonides His Life and Work, Hermon Press, New York, p.49.

physician. He "emerged as the untitled leader of the Jewish community," serving as rabbi, judge, and overseer of Jewish philanthropies while fulfilling other important duties.[8] Despite all of his responsibilities, he found time to produce some of the most important works of Jewish literature. He wrote a commentary on the Mishna, the Mishneh Torah - one of the first comprehensive codes of Jewish law, and the Guide.

The challenges that the Jewish community faced in Maimonides' day were not solely political and economic, but also intellectual. The fascination with Greek thought that Halevi had responded to, continued. According to Abraham S. Halkin, in the Moslem milieu, the Jews became aware of Greek and Oriental philosophy. He wrote:

> Within this milieu they discovered not only some of the original writings of Plato and Aristotle with their Neoplatonic commentators, but also the clash and consequent compromise evolved in the Christian church;...the questioning and doubts within the Moslem world; the rational, antireligious attacks by various people; the anti-Jewish arguments from several quarters; and certain centrifugal, disruptive tendencies which had developed in the Jewish community under these several influences.[9]

Well educated Jews were attracted to and influenced by the new Aristotelianism and were most likely troubled by some of the

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[8] Isadore Twersky, A Maimonides Reader, Behrman House, Inc., New York, 1972, p.5.

[9] Abraham S. Halkin, "Judeo-Arabic Literature," As printed in The Jews: Their History, Culture, and Religion, Vol.II, ed. Louis Finkelstein, The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1949, p.805.

suppositions of Aristotelian metaphysics that contradicted their Jewish beliefs. The Guide responded to their concerns. Its purpose according to Maimonides was to:

> give indications to a religious man ... being perfect in his religion and character, and having studied the sciences of the philosophers...The human intellect having drawn him on and led him to dwell within its province, he must have felt distressed by the externals of the Law...Hence he would remain in a state of perplexity and confusion as to whether he should follow his intellect, renounce what he knew concerning the terms in question, and consequently consider that he has renounced the foundation of the Law....[10]

If Maimonides truly wanted to bring an end to the distress that such people were experiencing, then the issue of Divine providence was one area that he had to address in the Guide. He did so skillfully, and in attempting to end the perplexity of uncertain Jews he wrote one of the treasures of Jewish thought.

Esoteric Concerns

Attaining an understanding of Maimonides' true notion of Divine providence is more formidable a task than one might imagine. The diversity of scholarly opinion regarding Maimonides' actual intention is a tribute to his success in constructing the Guide as an esoteric religious document. He was especially sensitive to the "dangers" of teaching philosophic conceptions of religion to those not intellectually prepared to understand them fully. He noted in the Introduction to the Guide that traditionally ma'asey merkavah, the account of the chariot (which Maimonides took to mean metaphysics) is only to be taught on an

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[10] Guide, I:Introduction, p.5.

individual basis to one who is wise, "and able to understand by himself, in which case only the chapter headings may be transmitted to him."[11] The parable in the Talmud in which four rabbis enter the Pardes (literally "orchard" but here used as an allusion to metaphysical speculation) emphasizes the traditional concern with the danger of prematurely confronting the secrets of the universe; only one rabbi, Akiva, emerged intact.

By writing down metaphysical secrets in a book available to all, even though he claimed that he was simply conveying conclusions that he had arrived at alone, without the direction of a teacher, Maimonides acknowledged that he would be challenging, perhaps undermining, tradition. To avoid this he came upon the imaginative solution of writing the Guide in an esoteric fashion. He decided to include contradictory arguments and conceal his true intention by fragmenting his ideas and diffusing them throughout the book. In so doing, the ignorant would be protected and the elite would succeed in reaching a higher level of understanding. Another motivation for writing in this manner, according to some scholars, may well have been that Maimonides was concerned with protecting himself from those who would oppose his "radical" ideas.

Perhaps Maimonides was too successful. Today we too face the problem of distinguishing between truth and fiction when reading the Guide. Leo Strauss noted that many scholars simply ignore

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[11] Guide I:Introduction, p.6.

Maimonides' warning and pretend that there are no contradictions. To avoid some of his "traps" we must approach the work by reading thoughtfully. Much of the secondary literature on the Guide must also be read critically because the articles seem to be excessively influenced by the author's preconceived philosophic and religious commitments. We shall proceed by treading carefully, with all of this in mind.

Providence In The Guide

The Guide was divided by Maimonides into three sections and the subject of providence is dealt with primarily in Part III. But Maimonides touches upon the subject of providence throughout the text. He noted in I:35 that Divine providence is an obscure matter that "ought not be spoken of except in chapter headings, as we have mentioned..."[12] This serves as a reminder not to simply approach this book as one would another, and turn directly to the section on providence. To understand his views concerning providence one must seek them out chapter by chapter.

Essential to Maimonides theory of providence are his conception of God and his cosmological views which are explained in Parts I and II of the Guide. Alvin Reines argued that in fact "Maimonides' theory of providence is intimately related to his cosmology and cosmogony,"[13] but Maimonides' position on cosmogony

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[12] Guide I:35, p.80-1.

[13] Alvin Reines, "Maimonides' Concepts of Providence and Theodicy," as printed in the Hebrew Union College Annual Vol.43, Samuel Sandmel ed., Cincinnati, 1972, p.174.

is unclear because he did not precisely commit himself to a belief in either the eternity of the universe or creatio ex nihilo. His God concept and cosmological views though, must be considered because how one understands God's role in the system of the universe influences one's position concerning Divine providence. The philosopher who argues that God is an all powerful force permeating the universe will have a vastly different view of Divine providence from that of the philosopher who accepts the premise that God is an unmoved mover, actual in all respects and potential in none.

In section I of the Guide, Maimonides asserted that many of the misperceptions held concerning God are due to a misreading of the biblical texts. In various sections of the Bible for example, God is likened to a king flying across the heavens on a chariot or as a mighty warrior - both of which are images that imply corporeality. This contradicts the medieval rationalist position that God is an incorporeal being whose essence cannot be described in human terms. The purpose for utilizing anthropomorphic language in the Bible, Maimonides taught, is to convey some sense of God to human beings. Torah was intended for human use, and therefore had to be written in the language of men. Confusion and misunderstanding arise, Maimonides warned, when these anthropomorphisms are taken literally. In the beginning of the Guide, he attempted to limit this confusion by analyzing the problematic terms and by explaining their true intention. Within this framework of explicating the equivocal

terms of the Bible, Maimonides established his conception of God and his theory of cosmology.

The God portrayed by Maimonides is a radical departure from God as described in the Torah. Maimonides did not simply clarify the meaning of a few words that could be mistakenly understood, but established that nearly every word mentioned in the text in reference to God is equivocal. Correct comprehension of these terms he claimed would "be a key permitting one to enter places the gates to which were locked."[14] The ability to locate the key is dependent upon the astute apprehension that despite the anthropomorphism of the Bible, God is really radically incorporeal. The deity is so "other" that it is difficult if not impossible for human beings to comprehend or even discuss. Others had already taught that God has no body but Maimonides explored the implications of this belief with unparalleled rigor. Thus for example, in explaining the use of the words "approaching" or "coming near" in reference to God he wrote:

> He, may He be exalted, does not draw near to or approach a thing nor does anything draw near to or approach Him, may He be exalted, inasmuch as the abolition of corporeality entails that space be abolished; so that there is no nearness and proximity, and no remoteness, no union and no separation, no contact and no succession.[15]

But Maimonides also went far beyond the traditional understanding of God's incorporeality. He asserted that God really acts in no

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[14] Guide I:Introduction, p.20.

[15] Guide I:18, p.44.

way like man. Words like "see," "think," or "hear" are equivocal. The God who suffers along with his people as depicted in the midrashic literature, is not present for Maimonides. He asserted that we should not think that God sees, hears, smells, or does anything similar to a human being. For Maimonides:

> He is not a body and...His acts are performed through His essence and not through an organ... Accordingly he does not possess any faculty. Thereby I mean that there does not exist in Him anything other than His essence in virtue of which object He might act, know, or will. For the attributes are merely faculties with regard to which the terminology, and nothing else, has been changed.[16]

This does not mean that God does not have knowledge and does not care or act, but how God knows, acts, or cares is a mystery to us, for it is far beyond our human comprehension. Yet in some ways we can see hints of God's action, knowledge, and caring. As we shall discuss later, Maimonides believed that the study of nature - the evidence of God's having acted - will reveal much to humanity.

His radical notion of God's otherness did not prevent Maimonides from attempting to develop a cosmological position concerning God's place in the universe in Part II of the Guide. He admitted that his position on cosmology is theoretical, but he concluded that it is the most compelling theory that he could envision.[17] Maimonides cosmological view was influenced by Aristotle. H.A. Wolfson stated that Maimonides accepted, "the

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[16] Guide I:46, p.102.

[17] Guide II:3, p.254.

neo-platonic - Aristotelian concept of the physical universe prevalent in his time."[18] In fact Maimonides attempted to harmonize Jewish tradition with the Aristotelian cosmology. He wrote:

> There is nothing in what Aristotle for his part has said about this subject that is not in agreement with the Law...For we ourselves believe that all this has been created, and that God has created the separate intellects and has put in the sphere the force of desire toward them, and that it was He who created the intellects and the sphere and put in them the governing forces.[19]

Their disagreement for the most part pertained to Aristotle's belief in the eternity of the universe. More importantly, Maimonides revealed his acceptance of the Aristotelian conception of the universe as a sphere system. Shlomo Pines noted that the proofs Maimonides utilized cannot:

> be considered purely metaphysical...all of them presuppose the existence of motion or of change, i.e., the existence of the cosmos, and are in this respect in accord with Averroes (and with Aristotle himself).[20]

For Maimonides, God is the unmoved mover who is in a sense operative on the outermost sphere. Other intellects control the other spheres, but in differing from Aristotle, he does not refer to them as other gods, but as the servants of God. They are the

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[18] Harry Austryn Wolfson, Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion Vol. 2, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1977, p. 60.

[19] Guida II:6, p.265.

[20] Shlomo Pines, "Translators Introduction: The Philosophic Sources of The Guide of the Perplexed," As printed in The Guide of the Perplexed, trans. Shlomo Pines, University of Chicago Press, 1963, p.cxiii.

angels of Jewish tradition and they are created for the singular purpose of doing God's bidding.[21]

The power of God emanates throughout the sphere system. The sphere system though, while consisting of many parts, is a unified structure. It is one; a single body. Maimonides stated,

> The differences between its substances, I mean the substances of this sphere with everything that is within it, are like unto the differences between the limbs of a man, for instance...The sphere in question as a whole is composed of the heavens, the four elements, and what is compounded of the later. In that sphere there is absolutely no vacuum; it is solid and filled up. Its center is the sphere of the earth...[22]

God is different from Aristotle's unmoved mover because the force coming from God, emanating throughout the system is perceived as a force that affects the rest of the universe for the good, down through the lowest sphere. This force is transmitted by the angels of the other spheres, with the active intellect being the final angelic servant of the Deity. Wolfson noted that, "To Maimonides all events in the world are brought by God through intermediate causes."[23] Thus if God is going to act providentially at all, then it is not through direct action but via agents. These agents are the angels or intellects of the sphere system. According to this model, God does not directly create the earth for that is the duty of the last agent. God qua

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[21] Guide II:6, 262-5.

[22] Guide I:72, p.184.

[23] Harry Austryn Wolfson, op. cit., p.61. also Guide II:6, p.262 -"For you never find therein that an act was performed by God otherwise than through an angel."

God in relation to humanity is exceedingly distant.

God's distance as depicted in the Maimonidean cosmology as well as God's radical incorporeality could lead one to conclude that there is no such thing as Divine providence. Certainly the issue of incorporeality needs to be clarified. If God is so "other" how can God affect humanity? Has Maimonides really found the nexus between the incorporeal and the corporeal? Why would and how could an unmoved mover who is totally self concerned create corporeal objects and attempt to influence matter? Perhaps the answer lies in the differences that Maimonides has with Aristotle. Maimonides' God is not totally self centered, but is in a sense concerned with other things (e.g. spheres, angels, matter, people) that are either outside of itself or contained within God. God's perfection overflows throughout the system.[24] Humanity also is not as completely other in Maimonides' system as we might conclude. The human ability to think is what makes humanity similar to God. Our ability to think is our essence he argued when he stated:

> It is the true reality of the thing in so far as the latter is that particular being. In man that notion is that from which human apprehension derives. It is on account of this intellectual apprehension that it is said of man: In the image of God created He him (Gen. 1:27)."[25]

Humanity's cognitive ability is one key to the gate of understanding of the Divine -human nexus.

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[24] Guide II:11, p.275.

[25] Guide I:1, p.22.

Maimonides' cosmological system is another key to the problem of providence. Reines argues, "Foremost is the notion that God takes no direct part in exercising providence over man. God neither creates man nor cares for him."[28] Acceptance of this assertion must lead to the conclusion that there can be no such thing as Divine providence. But Maimonides' proposition that there is Divine overflow precludes such a conclusion. The Divine overflow can be considered as we shall see, a providential caring act and it is an essential concept for Maimonides. God's concern spreads throughout the system via this overflow and God's agents perform God's will. This does not have to mean as Reines asserted, that God does not care. Certainly the conception that angels directed by God as forces that affect existence was not alien to Jewish tradition. The Bible portrays numerous instances in which angels perform God's will and the Targum goes even further in its effort to remove all anthropomorphic references to God. Just as an architect can lovingly design a beautiful building and oversee it's construction by agents, so it is conceivable that God as ultimate designer and creator can act similarly.

According to the Guide, Divine providence can flow throughout the system of the universe, but what then is its quality? How does it affect our existence and how do we connect with the overflow? We must consider if Maimonides is speaking of particular providence or general providence. If God created

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[28] Alvin Reines, op. cit., p.177

everything according to its perfect nature as Maimonides later argues then why is Divine providence necessary? Is there still a need for such overflow and how can one explain the problem of evil if one posits the existence of an omnipotent, providential deity? Before explaining in detail his views on Divine providence and attempting to answer most of the preceding questions, Maimonides decided to first address the latter question by considering the problem of evil.

The Problem of Evil

The prevailing conception of Divine providence implies that God is a caring deity. According to biblical and rabbinic conceptions of God this is certainly true. God as creator is concerned with the well-being of his creation and maintains a special relationship with Israel. God intervenes in history to free us from Egypt, and gives us the Law as a guide to correct behavior. Both in biblical and rabbinic literature God is also perceived as being all powerful. God can intervene in human affairs at will and affect the human situation for the better. It is clearly stated in the Torah that at times, God, in meting out punishment, can be violent and destructive. But in most cases the punishment is deserved and serves as a lesson to the people. Thus God is not perceived of as acting wrongfully. Nonetheless, it is acknowledged that evil exists in the universe that God created.

In the medieval period Jewish philosophers began to examine what Goodman called the "paradox of providence."[27] At issue is

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[27] Lenn Evan Goodman, op.cit., p.284.

the inconsistency of arguing that on the one hand God is good and all powerful, while on the other hand acknowledging that evil exists in the world. How can a providential deity allow this situation to persist, and if God is the creator of all does this not imply that God is also the creator of evil? According to Harry Blumberg, "To most medieval Jewish thinkers it was inconceivable that God, the quintessence of goodness, should create evil."[28] But if God did not create it and evil exists, what does this say about the deity? Certainly a philosopher's conception of evil affects his/her theory of Divine providence.

In Maimonides' day the question of evil was even more pressing because it was a violent period of change for the Jews. The Mutkallimun, the scholastic theologians of Islam and Judaism, were also addressing the issue. Some were attempting to resolve the conflict of a good God and the existence of evil by arguing much as some modern theologians argue today, for the existence of a limited God, who is not only all powerful, but also not all knowing.[29] Again Aristotelian philosophy was dominant in intellectual circles of the day and the conception of God as not caring about the existence of humanity - Divine providence not extending below the sphere of the moon, as Aristotle had argued, had to be addressed. These were in conflict with traditional Jewish beliefs and Maimonides responded to them in his arguments concerning evil.

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[28] Harry Blumberg, op. cit., p.150.

[29] Lenn Evan Goodman, op. cit., p.298 (Guide III:16).

In the Guide, Maimonides decided to address the nature of evil prior to fully expressing his conception of Divine providence. His reasons for doing so will become clear as we proceed. He first approached the issue by utilizing the Aristotelian notion of privation. He stated, "The nature and the true reality of matter are such that it never ceases to be joined to privation."[30] Matter of which all living things are created, is therefore in a constant state of change and is always taking on new forms. The potential to be corrupted into something else implies the privation of that which preceded. He argued that death for man is a privation of life, as his/her matter proceeds to take on another form. Poverty is the privation of wealth and illness the privation of health. In fact, Maimonides concluded that all evils are privations.

The importance of the privation argument for Maimonides lies in its relation to God as agent. In regard to evil, one could conclude that if God created the entire universe, then ultimately God also created evil as an aspect of the phenomena that exist in that universe. But Maimonides disagrees with this. To him, God cannot be the direct source of evil for he states, "..the true reality of the act of God in its entirety is for the good of being."[31] God as agent creates existent things for the good. To Maimonides privations are not existent things, but the lack of

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[30] Guide III:8, p.430-1.

[31] Guide III:10, p.440.

something. In creating then, "the act of the agent can in no way be connected with a privation.."[32] God is therefore not directly responsible for the existence of evil.

Maimonides however, did not completely remove the responsibility for the existence of evil from God. God as agent does not intend to create evil, but the agent can "be said to have produced the privation by accident."[33] If God is going to produce things out of matter the nature of matter being its corruptibility due to privation, then what we refer to as evil will exist in the universe. But that is the price of existence. God as an act of goodness creates being and for Maimonides, all being is good. It is better that God create such matter then not create at all. He concluded:

> Even the existence of this inferior matter, whose manner of being it is to be a concomitant of privation entailing death and all evils, all this is also good in view of the perpetuity of generation and the permanence of being through succession. For this reason Rabbi Meir interpreted the words: And, behold, it was very good- and, behold, death was good..."[34]

Maimonides also addressed the question of evil in the form of a response to Razi's assertion that there is more evil than good in the universe. Maimonides position as expressed here is a second level argument that is more humane and pragmatic than philosophical. He argues that the existence of evil can be better understood if we recognize that all evils that human beings

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[32] Guide III:10, p.439.

[33] Guide III:10, p.439.

[34] Guide III:10, p.440.

experience can be divided into three different categories. The first category includes all of the evils that occur as a result of our corporeality. This is a continuation of the privation argument. Human beings as part of their nature must eventually disintegrate. Just as part of our reality is growth and development, so too is the eventual corruption and destruction of our bodies. Galen, Maimonides argued, perhaps put it best when he said:

> Do not set your mind on the vain thought that it is possible that out of menstrual blood and sperm there should be generated a living being that does not die, is not subject to pain, is in perpetual motion, or is as brilliant as the sun.[35]

Creation out of matter sets limits on the human being. The evils of a physical nature resulting from natural wear and tear are therefore necessary evils.

The second category consists of evils that human beings inflict upon one another. This includes the majority of acts that we consider to be either unethical or criminal. Murder, robbery, hatred, and the infliction of pain whether physical or emotional are all evils that individuals commit against others.

The third and final category includes evils that individuals inflict upon themselves. Maimonides was speaking of all the vices that human beings pursue, including gluttony, avarice, greed, lethargy, and all forms of self-abasement. This to Maimonides is the greatest source of evil in the world. All of our diseases and ailments develop because of our failings in this category. The

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[35] Guide III:12, p.444.

human tendency to focus on material desires instead of developing the mind deters humanity from discovering solutions to many of the evils that they suffer. Not knowing, is therefore also a self-inflicted evil.

Maimonides' position on the question of evil is a fascinating rationalization of the problem. Evil as a result of direct divine action does not exist. To blame God for the onset of cancer, the murder of a family member, or any other evil, is to really redirect the blame away from its true source. Evils that result from the disintegration of the body are simply the result of our existential reality. To blame God for our suffering is then to also blame God for life. Maimonides seems to be asserting that we cannot rationally expect to be both thankful for life and angry at God for our death. Death is not an evil but part of the natural process.

The problem that Maimonides' does not adequately address is why God had to create humanity out of such an imperfect matter. The nature of matter may well be its corruptibility and connection to privation but this does not imply that human beings therefore have to suffer.One could imagine the creation of a human being who dies at the age of 120 just as Moses did, without physical anguish and pain. Maimonides does however, speak of limitations that even God has to adhere to. God cannot do the logically impossible e.g. destroy himself or make another God. Perhaps God could not have made human beings any other way. In any case, Maimonides clearly wanted to direct the blame for this

kind of "evil" away from God.

It is also clear that Maimonides has great difficulty with matter. He admitted that matter is a divine gift and that life could not exist without it, but he also recognized that matter is the great impediment to the human desire to know God. He wrote:

> Matter is a strong veil preventing the apprehension of that which is separate from matter as it truly is...Hence, whenever our intellect aspires to apprehend the deity or one of the intellects, there subsists this great veil interposed between the two.[38]

But Maimonides did not take this view to the extreme. The body does not become evil for him, rather acceptance of the fact that we have a body and are therefore fundamentally limited is necessary if we are going to truly come to terms with ourselves. The great rationalist wanted us to accept the limitations of our reality while not becoming complacent. Our ability to affect that reality is one of the providential gifts that we will discuss in the next section

Providence

Following his discussion of evil Maimonides proceeded by explaining in detail his theory of Divine providence. The sequence is a natural one because Maimonides had established that the so called paradox of providence is no paradox at all. Divinely caused evil does not exist for Maimonides and God therefore can be just, omnipotent, and providential. How God acts providentially for Maimonides the rationalist, though, will prove to be very different than the providential views of fundamental

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[38] Guide III:9, p.436-7.

traditionalists.

Maimonides laid the groundwork for his position on Divine providence in his closing arguments concerning evil. There he established that God shows providential care for humanity in three ways.[37] First, God provided us with everything that we need. The earth is filled with all the basics necessary for human survival. There is more than enough food and natural products to go around. Human beings simply need to learn how to develop the earth's resources and justly distribute its riches. Much of the source of anguish in our world stems therefore not from the lack of necessities but from greed for the inessentials of life. Maimonides stated:

> When one endeavors to seek what is unnecessary, it becomes difficult to find even what is necessary. For the more frequently hopes cling to the superfluous, the more onerous does the matter become; forces and revenues are spent for what is unnecessary and that which is necessary is never found.[38]

He also held that all creatures are provided with what they need to survive. Each species is created in the best possible way. Individuals among the species are equal in that none at the start is essentially better than the other. The fact that each species has senses, and the ability to survive, is also a manifestation of Divine providence.

Secondly, God provided humanity with a governing faculty. Human beings are able to order their affairs, create communities,

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[37] Guide III:12, p.436

[38] Guide III:12, p.446.

establish court systems, and act justly because God graciously gave them such an ability. God also graciously gave human beings control over the self. Despite the fact that we are created out of matter, through self discipline and education we can choose to improve ourselves and lessen the impact of material corruption upon the self. God, Maimonides tells us, "granted it - I mean the human form - power, dominion, rule and control over matter, in order that it subjugate it, quell its impulses, and bring it back to the best and most harmonious state that is possible."[39] Human beings possess this ability, to influence the duration and quality of life only due to God's providential concern for them.

Finally, the gift of the Law (Torah) is a sign of God's providential concern for humanity. Maimonides' conception of revelation is dependent upon his understanding of prophecy which is not the focus of this chapter. It is clear that he did not hold that God physically transmitted information to Moses for that would be too anthropomorphic. It seems that Moses via his rational faculty unites with the Active Intellect and receives revelation. In any case what is important for our purpose is that God is understood to be the source of this knowledge. The Torah exists as a guide for all and by keeping its commandments humanity will flourish and thrive. As a proof text for this Maimonides quoted Psalm 25 and stated:

> "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep His covenant and his testimonies." By this he (the psalmist) says that those who keep to the

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[39] Guide III:8, p.432.

> nature of that which exists, keep the commandments of the Law, and know the ends of both, apprehend clearly the excellency and the true reality of the whole.[40]

Apprehension of the "whole" - including knowledge of Torah thus leads one to the proper way of life. We must conclude that such apprehension would not be possible without the revelation of the law.

In each of the preceding categories Maimonides established that Divine providence exists not independent of humanity, but in relationship to humanity. God grants the possibility of the "good" life to humanity by providing human beings with a governing faculty - the mind, an abundant earth, and even a guide to live by. Humanity's willingness to enter into partnership with the Divine and take advantage of these wonderful gifts is essential for the possibility of providence. The key to the providential gate is the development of human knowledge. God granted human beings the ability to acquire knowledge, in fact Maimonides asserted that this is what it means to be created in God's image. The ability to acquire knowledge, to think, is what makes human beings God like. Through the use of reason, human beings can develop the mind, acquire knowledge, and achieve the good life. Such knowledge leads to apprehension of the Deity and that, Maimonides argued, is the highest possible human achievement. It is actually humanity's purpose. We shall see that for Maimonides the nexus between the infinite God and the finite person is the rational human mind's union with the Active

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[40] Guide III:12, p.446.

Intellect. Divine providence and humanity's ultimate purpose are therefore dependent upon the development of the human intellect.

In presenting his position on Divine providence Maimonides explains the commonly held opinions concerning providence as well as his own. He first discussed an opinion that he correctly attributes to the Epicureans. This is the belief that there is no such thing as Divine providence. Accordingly, everything in existence has occurred by chance, and there is no power watching over the fate of the universe. Maimonides dismissed this view by arguing that Aristotle had already demonstrated that it cannot be true that chance governs all existence. Of course this opinion contradicts the prevailing opinion of Jewish tradition and Maimonides' earlier assertions of the existence of some form of providence.

The second view he discussed is that of the Aristotelians. It is especially important to understand this position because Maimonides depended so greatly upon Aristotelian philosophy. According to Maimonides, Aristotle held that God's providence is partial, extending to the sphere of the moon and not beyond. "He believes that providence corresponds to the nature of what exists."[41] Meaning that God as providential agent provides for the maintenance of the universe. The sphere system is permanent, and the overflow that guarantees this permanence extends (even beyond the moon) to the species on Earth. The world remains in existence, as do the various plants and animal species because of

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[41] Guide III:17, p.465.

God's providence, but how individual things exist or changes occur does not depend upon God's providence. These every day actions and experiences happen by chance e.g. the sinking of a ship is caused by a hurricane, and not as a result of divine intervention.

The next two opinions Maimonides presented are the two prevailing traditions among the Mutkallimun; those of the Ash'ariyya and the Mu'tazila. The Ash'ariyya believed that everything is determined by God in accordance with God's will. Chance has no part in the universe. They submitted that all occurrences from the falling of a leaf to the decision by an individual to sit rather than stand are determined by God. Divine providence rules this system and human beings possess no real freedom of choice or will. The difficulties inherent in this position are obvious, and Maimonides' easily dismisses it.

The Mu'tazila held that human beings have free will and that God is just, acts wisely, and is all knowing. To them, God"s providence watches over all things. God only punishes a person when that person has done wrong. When good people die prematurely, or when children are born with defects, Maimonides explained that the Mu'tazila believe that this occurred for the better. People who suffer seeming injustices from the Almighty are compensated in the next world.

It is important that we look carefully at Maimonides' criticism of the Mu'tazilite position. Maimonides claimed that:

> Incongruities and contradictions follow necessarily also from this opinion...Accordingly they too were

> burdened with incongruities referred to above, and self-contradiction necessarily attached to them. For they believe 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.[42]

Maimonides clearly disdained the self-contradiction of the Mu'tazilite position despite his understanding of their good intentions. Interestingly, the same challenges of contradiction and inadequacy can be applied to the fifth position which is held by what Maimonides calls "our opinion, I mean the opinion of the Law."[43] According to this position, which Maimonides explained is the literal reading of the Law, human beings also have free will, and God has willed that this be so. God is just and thus all calamities that befall human beings are deserved for God rightly rewards and punishes. At this point the only difference between the opinion of Jewish tradition and of the Mutazilites is that the latter believed that God has providence over animals. Nonetheless the contradictions still apply. A child born with a disability or an excellent man dying prematurely is just as difficult to understand in this system as in the Mu'tazilite system.

Maimonides extricated himself from this problem by telling us that he will also give his opinion regarding Divine providence. Thus his opinion which we must presume is going to be rationally based, will differ from what he called "our opinion."

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[42] Guide III:17, p.468-9.

[43] Guide III:17, p.469.

Some scholars have had difficulty with this assertion as we will show later, but the fact that he distinguishes at least between a literal reading of the Law as he explains it, and his own opinion, cannot be denied.

As for his own belief concerning Divine providence, Maimonides explained that he was not relying upon experience as much as what appears to be the clear intention of the Torah. He argued that his opinion is "less disgraceful than the preceding opinions and nearer than they to intellectual reasoning."[44] He claimed that Divine providence is consequent upon divine overflow and:

> the species 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 appraises all its actions from the point of view of reward and punishment."[45]

Divine providence as was stated earlier depends upon a partnership with humanity. Providence overflows from God, and we are capable of receiving it because of our intellectual capacity. God gave us that capacity, but it is up to us to utilize it. Therefore, if a ship is sinking, the death of the people on board does not occur purely by chance. "The fact that the people in the ship went on board...is... due to divine will in accordance with the deserts of those people as determined in His judgments, the

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[44] Guide III:17, p.471.

[45] Guide III:17, p.471-2.

rule of which cannot be attained by our intellects."[48] The difference being that people through the use of their minds can control their lives. God providentially gives them this ability and they can utilize it by determining if the ship is safe or by building a better ship. The awareness is there because the overflow flows towards them. Only sometimes it is cut off and that may be due to punishment as Maimonides alludes. Ultimately, we cannot know how God determines this and our not knowing the Divine process is simply one of our very human limitations. It is something that we will never know.

Divine providence for Maimonides does not extend to individual animals and plants precisely because they do not have the intellectual ability granted to humanity. Here Maimonides agreed with Aristotle for he argued that Divine providence affects the animal world only in the maintenance of the various species. The actions and experiences of individual animals are left to chance. God does not oversee the falling of individual leaves or any action in the animal world.

How Maimonides really differs from Aristotle is not as easy to determine. Maimonides asserted that he unlike Aristotle, believed that Divine providence flows beyond the sphere of the moon to the earth. But in presenting Aristotle's opinion, he argued that Aristotle also believed that some of the overflow continued down to the earth and served to preserve the species. This overflow also affects the species in such a way as to place

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[48] Guida III:17, p.472.

in them "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."[47] One could argue that this faculty is just the mind given to man and Aristotle is therefore saying the same thing as Maimonides. The better argument is that Maimonides distinguished between instinct and intellect. Aristotle may only have been speaking of instinct as a providential gift. Without it a bear would not know to flee from fire nor would salmon go up river to spawn. The intellectual capacity of the human being is far different. We also instinctually remove our hands from a hot flame, but the fact that we can think and consider, build and change, puts us on another level. We can learn about God's world - unite with the Active Intellect - and improve our lives. This gift of mind and the human ability to unite with the Active Intellect is a form of Divine providence for Maimonides. It is different from the notion promulgated by Alexander in the name of Aristotle.

Maimonides cited many proof texts to verify his opinion concerning individual providence. Among them are: "For Thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of man, to give every one according to his ways."(Jer. 32:19) and "He that fashioneth the hearts of them all, that considereth all their works."(Ps. 33:15). The best proofs he submitted were the stories of the patriarchs because they "are an absolute proof of there being an

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[47] Guide III:16, p.463.

individual providence."[48] Interestingly he also reminds us that the prophets are "even sometimes astonished because providence watches over human individuals."[49] That Divine providence should watch over humanity, which is so insignificant compared to the Almighty, is noteworthy. The infinite as creator does act providentially towards the finite, even on the level of the individual. Maimonides conception of such providential action is far different than the traditional Jewish understanding of Divine providence. For Maimonides, God's providence is manifested by giving human beings cognitive ability, by bestowing the means to apprehend the Divine overflow. God does not seem to intervene in the every day life of the individual and give out direct reward or punishment.

How we use the mind affects our ability to enjoy God's providence. Maimonides posited that the more we know, the more we will benefit from God's providence. Knowing involves learning about God and for Maimonides such learning does not take place only through study of the law, but also by means of studying the work of creation. We are to become students of the world, studying science and philosophy in conjunction with study of the sacred texts. We must be willing to do so if we truly wish to reach the highest possible level of knowledge. Maimonides acknowledges that not everyone is capable of doing this. The flashes of cognition are stronger for some than for others with

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[48] Guide III:17, p.472.

[49] Guide III:17, p.472.

Moses being at the highest level possible. But one can be brilliant and still fail to seek the truth. The onus is upon the individual to reach out and find God and learn from God's actions.

It is in nature that we see the result of God's action and by studying nature we can learn even more about God. Knowledge of Maaseh Beresheet which Maimonides calls "natural science," enables us to improve our lives. Through the discovery of truth, we come even closer to finding God. This is man's ultimate perfection. Maimonides concluded:

> His ultimate perfection is to become rational in actu, I mean to have an intellect in actu; this would consist in his knowing everything concerning all the beings that it is within the capacity of man to know in accordance with his ultimate perfection...But once the first perfection has been achieved it is possible to achieve the ultimate, which is indubitably more noble and is the only cause of permanent preservation." [50]

Our ultimate perfection is thus inextricably linked to Divine providence. Our preservation depends upon our using our providential gift of mind to become rational <u>in actu</u>. This argument presented in different ways, is one of the central points of the <u>Guide</u>.

Maimonides has presented us with what would seem to be the ultimate rational argument concerning Divine providence. Intellectual perfection of the individual leads to Divine providence. But this Divine providence is not the kind of providence which we traditionally understand. Rather, by gaining

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[50] <u>Guide</u> III:27, p.511.

knowledge of God, the individual is protected from the dangers of the natural world. With such knowledge humans can build dikes to divert flood waters, create vaccines to stop the spread of disease, and use their minds to discover some of the wisdom of God's universe. The Almighty in such a system does not directly intervene to stop a flood, instead God confers upon us the means to control it and have a role in determining our destiny. There are no miracles in such a system, instead it works according to God's universal law. God's providential gift of reason becomes humanity's means for thriving within this system. It also leads human beings to the apprehension of the Divine. The more we know, the more we are amazed by God's universe and the Divine being itself. This kind of knowing connotes union with the Active Intellect. By knowing, we reach ultimate truth. The human mind becomes the means for reaching the nexus between God and ourselves. By uniting with the Active Intellect, we come to truly know, and this knowledge serves as the greatest possible providential protection. This kind of providence seems to be both particular and general. Individuals are protected by their own knowledge because they can wisely decide whether or not to board an unseaworthy ship. But groups are also protected when societies through the use of wisdom, make intelligent choices. They decide not to go to war against more powerful enemies, or build a wall to keep out raiding hoards.

Maimonides rationalistic approach to Judaism may from a religious perspective seem dry and dull. The concept of uniting

with the Active Intellect, however contains an element of spiritual excitement. Maimonides taught that human beings can strive towards the heavens and reach out towards God to the point of being able to unite with an aspect of the Divine. In a sense God and the individual almost become one (the mind unites with the Divine force) and a consequence of this amazing occurrence is that the human gains providential protection. We must consider what kind of protection this involves. Does this mean that individuals can be constantly protected from catastrophe by uniting with the Active Intellect, or is such union only transitory? Maimonides himself raised this issue in another section of the Guide.

Samuel Ibn Tibbon, the translator of the Guide into Hebrew, in a letter to Maimonides noticed a seeming contradiction in the system. In part III:51, Maimonides continued to explain his view on providence. There he developed his position concerning the various levels of providence available to the individual. The more intelligent and knowledgeable one is the more one is protected by Divine providence. He wrote:

> We have already explained in the chapters concerning providence that providence watches over everyone endowed with intellect proportionately to the measure of his intellect. Thus providence always watches over an individual endowed with perfect apprehension, whose intellect never ceases from being occupied with God.[51]

This seems to be a purely theoretical position. If one can constantly be united with the Active Intellect, constantly

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[51] Guide III:51, p.624.

occupied with God then providence will always watch over you. From a rational perspective, perhaps this is possible. As long as you think and act totally by means of reason then you will not err, but will survive and even thrive. In an article analyzing this section Zevi Diesendruck discusses Samuel Ibn Tibbon's complaint that Maimonides seemed to go too far in the next section of his argument. Maimonides stated in III:51:

> The providence of God, may He be exalted, is constantly watching over those who have obtained this overflow, which is permitted to everyone who makes efforts with a view to obtaining it. If a man's thought is free from distraction, if he apprehends Him, may He be exalted, in the right way and rejoices in what he apprehends, that individual can never be afflicted with evil of any kind. For he is with God and God is with Him.[52]

According to Ibn Tibbon the preceding statement contradicts Maimonides' previous position on providence which was dependent upon reason and God's universal law. That position posits that human beings attain providence through intellectual perfection, but such perfection, Ibn Tibbon argues, leads only to caution and not endless miracles.[53] To Ibn Tibbon, in the later position (III:51), Maimonides seemed to be arguing for endless intervention by God in protection of those who are in a state of union with the Active Intellect. No harm can come to them and so Daniel is saved from the lions den and all such righteous people will always be saved from immediate danger.

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[52] Guide III:51, p.625.

[53] Zevi. Diesendruck, "Samuel and Moses Ibn Tibbon on Providence," as printed in the Hebrew Union College Annual, Vol.XI, David Philipson ed., Cincinnati, 1936, pp.346-7.

Diesendruck noted that Shem Tov Ben Joseph Falaquera responded to Ibn Tibbon by arguing that Maimonides presented two views of providence. In the early sections, his view of providence was a philosophic view, while in III:51 he expressed a religious view of providence. Diesendruck agreed with Falaquera and argued that Maimonides had really then, two theories of providence -religious, and philosophic as opposed to solely a philosophic view.

Samuel Ibn Tibbon raised an interesting point but Falaquera and Diesendruck fall short of an adequate explanation. It does not make sense that a great thinker like Maimonides would have to develop two separate theories of providence. For a man like him are the religious and philosophic realms so separate? This is not a convincing position. Rather, all three thinkers fail to take into account Maimonides' view of evil. They assume that Maimonides meant that such a unique individual would be saved by God from physical harm, and yet Maimonides made no such statement. Instead Maimonides seemed to be attempting to explain why a righteous person, who has providentially avoided danger and possible suffering, suddenly can experience such evil. He argued that providence is not permanent and individuals can lose their providential protection by turning their minds away from God. The intelligent person can make an uninformed decision and suffer the consequences. The process of making that decision implies a turning away. As long as the individual remains correctly focused on God, in tune with the Active Intellect, then that person will

make no such decision, but will remain providentially protected. Ibn Tibbon did not recognize this, but submitted that God according to this passage is supposed to protect such perfect human beings from all possible evils. Surely death is an evil especially if one suffers while approaching death. And yet Maimonides speaks of the death of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam in the very next section. Righteous as they were, they still died. Interestingly, he asserted that because of their great knowledge they "died in the pleasure of this apprehension due to the intensity of passionate love."[54] They did not suffer, but died nonetheless. Perhaps Maimonides himself best resolved this issue by expanding upon his opinion concerning the suffering of the righteous in his discussion of the Job story.

In the Job story we are presented with the classic problem in which a thoroughly righteous individual is afflicted with great suffering apparently due to no fault of his own. Maimonides believed that it was included in the sacred literature as a means for discussing the problem of providence. Each character presents a different view of providence and through their discussions they attempt to develop a reason for Job's suffering.

From a superficial perspective Job at first seems to fit the makeup of an individual who would receive the special providential protection described in III:51. He is thoroughly righteous, keeps the law, constantly worships God even to the point of offering more sacrifices then necessary and has no

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[54] Guide III:51, p.628.

blemishes. Has he not therefore achieved perfection and become deserving of Divine care and protection from all forms of suffering? Apparently not. Maimonides interpretation of this passage is noteworthy because it clears up the seeming contradiction between III:13 and III:51 in the Guide. He states:

> The most marvelous and extraordinary thing about this story is the fact that knowledge is not attributed in it to Job. He is not said to be a wise or a comprehending or an intelligent man. Only moral virtue and righteousness in action are ascribed to him. For if he had been wise, his situation would not have been obscure for him, as will become clear.[55]

Job, Maimonides tells us is lacking in something. He has not attained the level of perfection despite all the good things that were said about him because moral virtue alone is not enough. To truly achieve perfection one also has to be knowledgeable and wise. Job is not wise at this point and therefore cannot truly appreciate his condition. It is for this reason that he is suffering.

Knowledge, as we were told before, leads to apprehension (as far as humanly possible) of the Divine. Such apprehension is the goal of human experience according to Maimonides, and with apprehension comes true happiness. Job, Maimonides taught, did not have true knowledge of God because his acceptance of God was based only upon what he had heard and understood to be the authority of scripture and tradition. True knowledge must ultimately result from philosophic speculation. Job finally achieves this correct level of knowledge at the end of his

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[55] Guide III:22, p.487.

ordeal. Maimonides writes:

> But when he knew God with a certain knowledge, he admitted that true happiness, which is the knowledge of the deity, is guaranteed to all who know Him and that a human being cannot be troubled in it by any of all the misfortunes in question.[58]

Before discovering the truth about God, Job had thought that true happiness resulted from the possession of material goods, family, and a fine reputation. Up to that point he did not realize that he was not truly happy. Only when he comes to know God through speculation does he discover true happiness, because knowledge of the deity is happiness.

With his new knowledge Job no longer suffers because he is impervious to all suffering. This is the intention of Maimonides' discussion on providence in III:51. With true knowledge of the deity the individual achieves a state of happiness so powerful that he or she no longer feels the sufferings of the body or the mind. This does not mean that the individual cannot be afflicted with torture and other forms of evil, but such evil is ineffective. The individual is only conscious of God and not of the petty acts of other humans. The Talmudic description of Rabbi Akiva being burned at the stake exemplifies this principle. As he was being physically destroyed he concentrated on God and prayed, reciting the Shema with his last breath. The Divine did not interceded for him, but according to Maimonides' definition of providence, God did watch over him and he escaped evil because he

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[58] Guide III:23, p.492-3.

knew God and kept his mind focussed on God. True happiness for Akiva derived from his knowledge of God and not from the maintenance of his physical well being.

Evaluated from this perspective, Maimonides' expression of providence in III:51 does not contradict his earlier statements. It is still a rationalistic view of providence. The law of the universe remains constant and God does not interceded for the individual by means of a miracle. Instead knowledge truly becomes a special kind of power. To Maimonides the independent mind, really the superior intellect, cannot be controlled as long as it is focused on God. The abusive forces of an outside power cannot enslave the mind as long as it is united with the Active Intellect. Of course only a very few individuals reach this level of knowledge, but Maimonides posited that all are capable in principle. God's providence is also evident in that God gives all human beings the capacity to achieve this knowledge. The responsibility once again rests with the individual and his/her willingness to try.

But once one knows, once one is united with the Active Intellect, how can God's providence ever be removed? The answer seems to lie in the recognition that one never fully knows God and that indefinite union with the Active Intellect is impossible. God, it seems, can remove himself from such a union just as humans can remove themselves by turning away from God. Maimonides states:

> This removal is followed by a privation of providence, as far as we are concerned. As it says by way of a

> threat: And I will hide My face from them, and they shall be devoured. For a privation of providence leaves one abandoned and a target to all that may happen and come about, so that his ill and weal come about according to chance.[57]

Once the union is broken then the evils of the world can affect the human being.

The Job story also clarifies the problem of privation of providence for Maimonides. It clearly asserts that there are limits to our knowledge. We cannot know everything about God and God's actions. Nor should we assume that God thinks only of us. Human beings are not the center of the universe nor was the universe created for humanity's sake. God's governance and providence is not like our governance or providence. God is always other, and there is only so much that we can comprehend. Our duty though, is to try to comprehend as much as possible by constantly seeking God.

Knowledge Verses Action

Maimonides' conception of providence with its emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge about the Deity calls into question his view of the importance of action in emulation of the Deity. Julius Guttman notes, to Maimonides, ethics and correct action seem to be subservient to knowledge. He writes:

> Divine providence does not, therefore, mean interference with the external course of nature, but is transferred to the inner life of man, where it is founded on the natural connection between the human and the divine spirit...Intellectual and not ethical factors are decisive for the rule of divine

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[57] Guide I:23, p.53.

providence.[58]

If so, a number of questions arise. Can one know God, enjoy Divine providence, and therefore reach true happiness without keeping the law? Is correct action unnecessary and should the individual devote himself solely to the acquisition of knowledge? These questions are considered by many of the scholars of the Guide and their opinions can be categorized as follows.

A number of scholars are of the opinion that Maimonides had antinomian beliefs but was afraid to express them. They argue that he had to fear retribution from the powerful Jewish leadership of his day who were committed to the Halachic system. Maimonides could not dare to publicly submit that knowledge of God superceded action as delineated by Halacha and expect to be accepted as a serious teacher of Judaism. It is for this reason, they believe that the Guide was written in an esoteric fashion.

One of the most interesting proponents of the antinomian position is Alvin Reines. To Reines, the very fact that Maimonides presented his position in an esoteric fashion is proof that it must contradict tradition. He argues that Maimonides was concealing a radically different theory of providence. The first hint of this is found in Maimonides' explication of his theory of cosmology. God as presented does not extend his providence over man by "the very fact of his divine nature."[59] God simply creates

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[58] Julius Guttman, Philosophies of Judaism, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1964, p.171.

[59] Alvin J. Reines, op. cit., p.178.

the first sphere and remains an unmoved mover. God can only be known via the possession of scientific and metaphysical truth. Virtue then, is the realization of intellectual capacity. Those who fail to do this Reines asserts are wicked. Even the most pious who fail to study metaphysics fall into this category. Thus action is clearly subservient to knowledge. "Indeed, all religious activity," he concludes, has intellectual perfection alone for its true end."[80] Those worthy of Divine providence are the intellectual elite and not the pious keepers of the commandments.

Leonard Kravitz also discusses the problem presented by Maimonides' assertion that providence depends upon the acquisition of knowledge. If, as Maimonides submits, providence is graded according to intellectual perfection he argues, then:

> Perfection is attained neither by piety nor by goodness, but only by knowledge. Providence, perfection's product, is acquired, not by the performance of the Mitzvot, but by the action of the intellect...It would follow that the Jew who lacked those...philosophical training, no matter how great his piety or his goodness would be bereft of providence in this world, and eternal life in the world to come.[81]

Those who disagree with the preceding argument do so heartily. Herbert Davidson writes in reference to the Guide, "those who absolutely insist on discovering a non-traditional

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[80] Ibid., p.182.

[81]. Leonard S. Kravitz, "Maimonides and Job: An Inquiry as to the Method of the Moreh," As printed in Hebrew Union College Annual Vol. XXXVIII, ed. Elias L. Epstein, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, 1967, p.154.

philosophical system will be able to withstand any evidence to the contrary."[62] The evidence presented by the scholars in this camp who posit that Halacha was essential to Maimonides' system of thought, depends for the most part on statements from the Mishneh Torah. Isadore Twersky, David Hartman, and Charles Raffel are examples of scholars who support this view. Twersky tries to prove that in the Mishneh Torah Maimonides argued for the unity of the Law and philosophy. Hartman's position is similar to Twersky's. He posits that:

> Maimonides attempted to integrate the philosophic and halachic sensibilities. The halachic imperative 'And you shall love the Lord your God' merged into love based on the philosophic knowledge of God.[63]

From this perspective the acquisition of knowledge about God is one of the commandments. Philosophical rumination becomes an halachic imperative.

Both views are compelling and problematic. As so often is the case when two contradictory arguments are presented, the dialectic, or a compromise between the two positions, seems to be the most satisfying avenue to pursue. Reines ignores the role of halacha in Maimonides' other writings and even in the Guide. There is a role for law in Maimonides' view on providence, an important one at that, but not as important as the pro-

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[62] Herbert Davidson, "Maimonides' Secret Position on Creation," as printed in Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature, Isadore Twersky, ed., Cambridge, 1979, p.16.

[63] David Hartman, Maimonides: Torah and Philosophic Quest, The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1976, p.212.

halachists like Hartman might have us believe. They want to place halacha on the same level as knowledge of the Divine and yet Maimonides does not do this. Raffel weakens the pro-halachic argument by assuming that whenever Maimonides uses the word "we" in reference to a Jewish belief or tradition, that he is including himself as part of that group. Such an assumption should not be made, for Maimonides in a few instances follows a "we" statement with an "I" statement. In his discussions on providence adherence to the law is not directly delineated as an essential element.

The solution to this problem is dependent upon understanding Maimonides' assertion that all are not equal, but that people develop differently and in stages. Adherence to the law is part of the developmental process. Law, he teaches is essential for the well-being of society. Just as people need to have food and water before they can really be students of Torah, so too must they have Torah (halacha) before they can reach the highest levels of metaphysical and scientific understanding. Keeping the law is an essential element along the way. It is expected that one who is knowledgeable will do the good. This is reminiscent of Plato's view of the philosopher-king. To achieve such a high state it is assumed that one must act justly.

Providence for Maimonides is based on actualizing the intellect but such actualization involves the achievement of moral perfection. As one comes to know more, one will strive to act morally and work for the good. You will help yourself and

your society because you will know better. To know God and truly appreciate God's creation, the individual has to understand the working of nature. This involves study and action. Maimonides' providential elite, once they know, will go back into Plato's cave and improve their world. Maimonides' himself is an example of this. All of his writings were intended to help others. The Guide may have been intended for the elite, but the Mishneh Torah was meant to be accessible to all. Throughout his life he refrained from the temptation to devote himself solely to contemplation of God and the lonely yet important pursuit of knowledge. Instead he also was involved in the world, actively teaching, leading the Jewish community, and working to make a living. He can still serve as an example for the philosophers and halachists of our day.

Conclusions

In the Guide of The Perplexed Maimonides offers to the Jewish world a rationalistic restructuring of the concept of Divine providence. He introduces the notion that providence depends upon intellectual inquiry by human beings and their grasp of the knowledge of God. Providence is not a miraculous intervention by the divine into the life of humanity, but is a basic building block in the divine structure of the universe. Providential benefit is readily available to all, but it is primarily dependent upon individual enlightenment. Through knowledge of God, which is knowledge of God's action in the world (only reflected in nature), individuals can attain providential

protection. Rather than only pray that the floods stay away from their village, the providentially oriented person will study the wonder of God's great world and learn the ebb and flow of the rivers. Providential cognition will ensue and the individual will learn to build a flood wall as a means of prevention. This example also exemplifies the problem of understanding whether or not Maimonides distinguished between personal providence and general providence for the community or group. He did not work out in detail how Divine providence affects Israel differently from how it might affect another group or individuals. For Maimonides particular providence and general providence may be interdependent concepts. Groups as well as individuals have the responsibility to pursue knowledge of God. Societies make important decisions that will providentially affect their future. The community builds the flood wall by the river and the society decides to invest in universities for the pursuit of knowledge. The life of the individual and his or her society are intertwined, so too must be their ability to enjoy Divine providence.

By examining the Guide as a whole one can see a progression of the ideas that lead to Maimonides' final explication of his views concerning Divine providence. In the first section of the Guide he established his cosmology. The view of God presented is similar to Aristotle's unmoved mover. A Divine overflow emanates throughout the universe even to the sphere of the earth. God as established is unique and other. The system of the universe that

God has created operates according to natural law. It is rational and there is not room for the miraculous action that traditional views of providence require.

Maimonides' explanation for the existence of what human beings call "evil" in a universe created by a just, omnipotent God, is essential to his conception of providence He ultimately succeeds in discounting the existence of such "evil." Maimonides asserts that most of the evil in the universe is created by human beings. They have free will and cannot blame God for their own inability to improve the human condition. Evils we do to others and evils that we do to ourselves are fully dependent upon human action. God has no role in producing or preventing such evils. The evils that result from bodily disintegration are also not really evils. Instead they are part of the natural workings of the universe. Anything created from matter will decompose, because that is the nature of matter. If we would want it otherwise then we would be opposed to our own creation. Thus, labeling the natural process of privation of matter as "evil" is a misnomer.

If the primary responsibility for evil does not lie with God and God does not intervene and providentially perform miracles, then the traditional conception of providence is not really correct. Divine providence, if it exists, has to manifest itself in some other way. Maimonides attempts to describe that way. The form of providence that he describes is really a new rationalized providence that is dependent upon the pursuit of knowledge of

God. Maimonides teaches that God has already given the human being life, and everything that is necessary to support life, especially that one thing that makes human beings most godlike--the mind. All of this is providential. The correct utilization of these Divine gifts depends upon the human being's willingness to follow reason and acquire knowledge. That human beings can gain knowledge, and come to understand the world, is another source of Divine providence.

Maimonides' parable of the castle found near the end of the Guide (III:51) clarifies his definition of knowledge of God. In the center of the castle is the King (God) and those closest to the center have achieved the highest possible level of human knowledge. Knowledge of God derived solely from study of and observance of the commandments does not get the individual into the kings' chambers nor even access to the inner courts. Only those who have "plunged into speculation concerning the fundamental principles of religion, have entered the antechambers."[84] To be near the inner circle one must also study science and metaphysics after having studied the Law (followers of the Law alone are on a lower level). Thus Maimonides may have established the primacy of philosophical knowledge, but it is only valuable in relation to halacha. In order to reach the highest level in the castle and gain knowledge of God one must master all three areas of study (the Law, science, and

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[84] Guide III:51, p.619.

philosophy). Only when they are integrated is the key finally formed that opens the innermost gate of the castle. Moses becomes the example par excellence of an individual mastering this sort of knowledge. In the parable, he is found to be closest to God, at a level achievable by no other human being. Moses therefore had to possess along with his knowledge of the Law, scientific and metaphysical knowledge. The Moses of the twelfth century did not keep his discoveries to himself either. As a man of action as well as speculation, he prepared the way for his people and guided them down the correct path.

Maimonides' position on Divine providence is ultimately optimistic. Human beings have the capacity to continue traveling down the right path as established by Moses. There may be limits to our knowledge, but there is much that we can do to affect our lives and build an even better world. As Marvin Fox notes, Maimonides' scientific views may have become outdated, but certainly not his views on providence. He still has much to teach us and we unfortunately still have much to learn before we can fashion the providential key of beauty, love, and knowledge which will open heavens' gate.

## Chapter II

### The God Intoxicated Man: Spinoza's Conception of Divine Providence

Four centuries after the death of Maimonides, another Jewish philosopher, Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) developed a philosophical system that attempted via deductive reasoning, to articulate a rationally coherent view of the universe and to show "whether there was anything which would be the true good, capable of communicating itself."[1] Spinoza's philosophic system proved to be so controversial that he had to spend his life in relative seclusion, alienated both from the Jewish community and the dominant Christian society of seventeenth century Holland. Despite rejection during his lifetime, Spinoza's thought survived to influence the great thinkers of the German Enlightenment. His thought was both original and all-encompassing. According to Stuart Hampshire,

> No other modern philosopher of equal stature has made such exalted claims for philosophy, or had such a clear vision of the scope and range of pure philosophical thinking. He conceived it to be the function of the philosopher to render the universe as a whole intelligible, and to explain man's place within the universe;[2]

Although it is questionable whether anyone, including Spinoza,

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[1] Baruch Spinoza, "Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect," as printed in The Collected Works of Spinoza Vol.I, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1985, p.7.

[2] Stuart Hampshire, Spinoza: An Introduction To His Philosophical Thought, Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1987, p.23.

could achieve the lofty goal of creating a complete philosophical system that would explain the functioning of the universe as a whole, his philosophy is nonetheless important for what it did achieve. It includes profound discussions of analyses in metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, political theory, psychology, and religion. His views regarding each of these areas of study, are still interesting and insightful for modern readers concerned with the limits of human reason.

For Jewish thinkers, Spinoza's status as a Jewish philosopher is especially open to question. Julius Guttman argued that "his philosophy stands in profound opposition to the Jewish religion, not only to its traditional dogmatic form, but also to its ultimate convictions."[3] Guttman's position, though not untenable, is perhaps unnecessarily harsh. While Spinoza's God-concept may very well be in opposition to dominant Jewish beliefs (although this too may be challenged), other aspects of his thought both derive from Jewish sources and speak to Jewish sensibilities. As we shall see, his philosophy has much in common with, and may even depend upon, the writings of Maimonides. Alexander Altmann noted that the esteemed Jewish thinker Moses Mendelssohn suggested that Spinoza's purely speculative writings would not have precluded his remaining an orthodox Jew.[4] Indeed,

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[3] Julius Guttman, Philosophies of Judaism, Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1964, p.264.

[4] Alexander Altman, Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study, the University of Alabama Press, University, Alabama, 1973, p.33.

some of his positions that were deemed radical three hundred years ago are consistent with the beliefs of many of today's liberal Jews.

Friedrich Novalis referred to Spinoza as the "God-intoxicated man."[5] The notion of God, despite the charges that Spinoza was an atheist, was central to his metaphysical system. What this seminal thinker had to say concerning Divine providence should prove to be of considerable interest, especially in comparison to the views of Maimonides. Our central question will be, how, if at all, Spinoza's system allows for the manifestation of Divine providence?

Historical Overview

Harry Austryn Wolfson suggested that Spinoza's philosophy served as a bridge between the medieval and modern periods of thought.[6] Spinoza, who was born in 1632 and died in 1677, lived during what may be termed an "in-between time." The foundations for modern science had been laid a hundred years earlier by Copernicus, but the advent of enlightenment in the political realm would not be realized for another century. Spinoza, as an intellectual figure, was in the unenviable position of being ahead of his time. His thought, as we shall see, utilized modern scientific categories that were already current, but the conclusions he drew were too radical for the religious and

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5. Barry Kogan, Spinoza, A Tercentenary Perspective, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, 1979, p.x.

6 Harry Austryn Wolfson, The Philosophy of Spinoza, Meridian Books, New York, 1958, p.vii.

political standards of his day.

Spinoza was born in Amsterdam, his parents having fled there from the continuing Inquisition in Portugal. They were probably attracted to Holland because it was then the leading commercial center of Europe and was religiously tolerant.[7] Spinoza studied in the Sephardic Jewish school in Amsterdam and was supposedly a protege of Saul Levi Morteira, one of the leading rabbis of the community. Apparently, he was not satisfied to focus solely on Rabbinic studies, but was also attracted to secular philosophy and science.

The Sephardic Jewish community of Amsterdam, having just fled an inhospitable political environment, was acutely concerned with protecting its established position in Amsterdam. Jews were active in the general community both socially and economically. Lewis Feuer notes that while, "they could tolerate theological disagreement; they could not tolerate a political and economic radical."[8] To disassociate themselves from people who publicly expressed radical views, the community would excommunicate them if they refused to renounce their aberrant assertions.[9] Spinoza proved to be both a religious and political radical. When Spinoza along with Juan de Prado and Daniel de Ribera, was accused of

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[7] Lewis Samuel Feuer, Spinoza and the Rise of Liberalism, Greenwood Press, Westport, 1983, p.66.

[8] Ibid, p.5.

[9] Seymour Feldman, "Introduction" as it appears in Baruch Spinoza, The Ethics and Selected Letters, ed. Seymour Feldman, Hackett, Indianapolis, 1982, p.3.

"contempt of the law," he refused to recant his supposedly blasphemous statements and was forthwith excommunicated at the young age of twenty-four.[10]

Spinoza lived the rest of his life in two smaller Dutch cities, Rijnsburg and Voorburg. He is often referred to as the first secular Jew because he was disassociated from the Jewish religious establishment, but did not pass through the gate of acceptance into the greater Christian community via conversion.[11] Instead, he chose to live the isolated life of the independent intellectual. Refusing to take a position at a university or even to accept much financial support from his friends, Spinoza supported himself by grinding optical lenses. Beholden to none, he could freely and critically develop his philosophical system.[12] His philosophical positions are for the most part expressed in the following works: The Ethics, The Tractatus Theologico-Politicus, Principles of The Philosophy of Rene Descartes, and his extensive correspondence. The fact that he did not sign most of his works, and published his magnum opus, The Ethics, posthumously indicates that he was concerned with protecting himself from further political and religious persecution. But unlike Maimonides, he had no reason to write

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[10] A. Wolf, The Oldest Biography of Spinoza, Kennikat Press, N.Y., 1970, p.48.

[11] Barry S. Kogan, op. cit., p.ix.

[12] Alasdair MacIntyre, The Encyclopedia of Philosophy Vol.7, ed. Paul Edwards, Macmillian Co. and The Free Press, New York, 1967, p.531.

esoterically and instead produced a body of thought that is straightforward despite its level of difficulty.

Epistemological Concerns

"Men would never be superstitious, if they could govern all their circumstances by set rules, or if they were always favored by fortune."[13] With this sentence Spinoza began the Tractatus Theologico-Politicus. While never asserting that human beings would ever be completely free from external influences, Spinoza did believe that by means of reason human beings could free themselves from superstitious attitudes. He was optimistic in his belief that human beings could focus rigorously on thinking within a framework of pure reason to the exclusion of other influences if they seriously attempted to do so. Perhaps his isolation from the established religious community helped him in his attempt to apply this teaching to himself. Hampshire wrote of him:

> The only instrument which he allowed himself, or thought necessary to his purpose, was his own power of logical reasoning; at no point does he appeal to authority or revelation or common consent; nor does he anywhere rely on literary artifice or try to reinforce rational argument by indirect appeals to emotion.[14]

For Spinoza, the mind could discover most of the secrets of the universe.

The key to finding truth, Spinoza argued, was the

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[13] Baruch Spinoza, A Theologico-Political Treatise, trans. R.H.M. Elwes, Dover publications, New York, 1951, p.3.

[14] Stuart Hampshire, op. cit., p.23.

mathematical method. He wrote:

> Everyone who wishes to be wiser than is common among men agrees that the best and surest Method of seeking and teaching the truth in the Sciences is that of the Mathematicians...[15]

According to Leon Roth, Spinoza appropriated this position from the teachings of Descartes, who had championed the view that mathematics could lead humanity to truth. But Spinoza broke with Descartes' conclusion that mathematics is an insufficient means for attaining ultimate truths about the universe because certain problems surpass human comprehension.[16] Spinoza asserted that unlike other sciences, mathematics which utilizes logic to the exclusion of the senses, can ascertain ultimate truths. God does not have to be incorporated into the metaphysical equation to serve as a solution to those problems that seem impossible to solve. Human reason if given an opportunity, will prevail.

Spinoza's Ethics reflects his commitment to this mode of thinking. It is an attempt to express philosophic concepts in mathematical terms. He presents his arguments in a fashion similar to geometric proofs. He begins with definitions and proceeds to axioms, proofs, and scholia. By writing in such a manner, Spinoza hoped to present his arguments in pristine form, for all to understand.

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[15] Baruch Spinoza, "Descartes' Principles of Philosophy," as it appears in The Collected Works of Spinoza, ed. Edwin Curley, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1985, p.224-5.

[16] Leon Roth, Spinoza, Descartes, and Maimonides, Russel and Russel, N.Y., 1963, p.44.

Metaphysics

In order to determine Spinoza's conception of Divine providence, it is first necessary to understand his metaphysics. The system that Spinoza proposed differed significantly from the Aristotelian metaphysics. As Guttman noted, Spinoza abandoned the "teleological structure of the Aristotelian world view" in favor of an ontological conception.[17] Spinoza did not start with the world and then infer the existence of God, but began at the outset with an account of his understanding of God. This was in keeping with his commitment to reason as a pure source of truth; unlike the teleological principles, ontological proofs depend solely upon logic and conceptual analysis to teach their conclusions.

Spinoza outlined his definition of God and the arguments supporting his radical view in proof form in the first book of The Ethics. He began by stating, "By cause of itself I understand that whose essence involves existence, or that whose nature cannot be conceived except as existing."[18] This is similar to Descartes' formulation of the ontological argument. The "cause of itself" has existence as an attribute. Spinoza then continues by defining finitude. Something is finite when it is limited in scope by another being of similar nature, citing as an example a

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[17] Julius Guttman, op. cit., p.267-8.

[18] Baruch Spinoza, The Ethics ID1 as it appears in The Collected Works of Spinoza, ed. Edwin Curley, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1985, p. 408. All other references to the Ethics will be noted as follows: Ethics ID1, IP1, or IA1 (meaning Part I, Definition, Proposition, or Axiom number 1).

thought limited by another thought. No thought can be infinite if another thought exists. Everything that relates to something similar, is finite as a result of that relation. Next Spinoza stated his definition of substance,

> By substance I understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, i.e., that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed.[19]

Substance is something that seems to be completely independent and self-defining.

Finally, Spinoza defined the word attribute as meaning, "what the intellect perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence."[20]

The preceding definitions were integrated by Spinoza to express his definition of God. He wrote:

> By God I understand a being absolutely infinite, i.e., a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence.[21]

If God is infinite, God is therefore unique. There is nothing limiting God that is of the same nature. Actually, there is nothing limiting God at all, which is why Spinoza used the term "absolute." As a substance, God necessarily exists since "it pertains to the nature of a substance to exist."[22] So God is a necessarily existing substance which is absolutely infinite. In

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19 Ethics ID3, p.408.

20 Ethics ID4, p.408.

21 Ethics ID6, p.409.

22 Ethics IP7, p.412.

fact, God is the only substance, there can be no other. The existence of another substance (and consequently a similar being) would imply that God is finite. Since God as a substance is not finite, there can be no other substance.

With the explanation I have given so far, substance can simply be another word for the infinite, since there is no other thing like it. But as his system unfolds, it becomes clear that Spinoza is going to link extension, which for us, means materiality to the deity. This he does by expanding his definition of "attributes" and introducing the notion of "modes."

Attributes are what the intellect perceives to be the essence of a substance. Since there is only one substance, God or Nature, then attributes pertain to our intellectual understanding of the essence of God. But God as the one substance consists of infinite attributes, "each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence."[23] This is not to imply that God can be divided because God is complex. Instead, Spinoza argues that God is one. He states, "A substance which is absolutely infinite is indivisible."[24] The whole of God is one and cannot be divided. God's attributes are many, but humans are capable of perceiving only two of them - thought and extension. Thought pertains to the intelligible aspects of God, while extension refers to God as an extended thing --that is, the physical world. Spinoza wrote, "The

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[23] Ethics IP11, p.417

[24] Ethics IP13, p.420.

thinking substance and the extended substance are one and the same substance, which is now comprehended under this attribute, now under that."[25] According to Hampshire, Spinoza was attempting to solve Descartes' mind-body problem. Thought and extension are really two expressions of the same substance. Hampshire held that, "Extension and thought are the two all-pervasive characteristics of the self-creating Universe as it actually presents itself to the human intellect."[26] God may have an infinite number of attributes, but we understand
God only through the attributes of thought and extension.

With the explication of the concept of modes, Spinoza's intention becomes even clearer. Extension is an attribute that is perceived by the intellect. Just as Maimonides argued that we can only understand God via the intellect and analysis of the natural world, so Spinoza's notion of thought and extension could be understood. In fact it may be derived from Maimonides. In explaining it, Spinoza mentioned:

> Some of the Hebrews seem to have seen this, as if through a cloud, when they maintained that God, God's intellect, and the things understood by him are one and the same.[27]

W.Z. Harvey and Harry Wolfson both argue that the term "Hebrews" refers directly to Maimonides.

Spinoza's definition of the term "mode" introduces the

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[25] Ethics IIP7, p.451.

[26] Stuart Hampshire, op. cit., p.52.

[27] Ethics IIP7, p.451.

reader to the Spinozistic conception of nature. He wrote:

> By mode I understand the affections of a substance, or that which is in another through which it is also conceived.[28]

We now know that a substance can be affected in various ways. It is dynamic and contains within itself an entity or entities called modes (for the "mode" is that which is in another) that are expressed in an infinite number of ways. However, the modes are not separate parts of the other, for they are conceived through it. This is an important distinction, because Spinoza clearly argued that the substance or "God" is one and indivisible. To be so, it cannot consist of parts.

Finally, in Postulate 15, Spinoza came to the conclusion of this extended argument. He wrote that:

> Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God.[29]

God as the one substance contains everything in existence and everything is dependent upon God. God is the totality and that totality is one and indivisible. God is "Natura Naturans" or active nature and what we understand to be the physical universe is called "Natura Naturata," which is equivalent to "all the modes of God's attributes insofar as they are considered as things which are in God."[30]

Spinoza's metaphysics is a wonderfully unified and logical

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[28] Ethics ID5, p.409.

[29] Ethics IP15, p.420.

[30] Ethics IP29, p.434.

expression of pantheism. If one accepts his definitions, then the rest of his argument logically follows. Once the idea that one infinite substance exists is accepted, then the assertion that no other independent entity can exist, must be considered. This is the argument that Spinoza proposed: God as infinite and eternal being contains everything in existence. Is this idea an anathema to Judaism? Not necessarily. The Lurianic Kabbalah's notion of tzimzum as interpreted by the Habad Hasidim, in which God contracts within himself to allow for the creation of the universe, can be understood as an expression of pantheism. Louis Jacob notes,

> In Hasidic monotheism it is God alone who embraces all and is in all, so that, in fact, from His point of view, he is the all and there is none else...A possible term for the Hasidic view is panentheism--all is in God.[31]

The two views are not as dissimilar as one might suppose.

Spinoza's position, however is somewhat different than that of the Kabbalists; he argued that the deity has as a part of its nature "corporeal or extended substance."[32] His pantheistic explanation depends upon the argument that extension is an attribute of God. If everything is contained in God, and we admit that physical matter exists and is not illusory, then, Spinoza concluded, it must be contained in and therefore related to the deity. God is Nature and Nature is God; the two are one and the

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[31] Louis Jacobs, A Jewish Theology, Behrman House, N.Y., 1973, p.34-35.

[32] Ethics IP15, p.421.

same.

An immediate problem posed by this notion is raised by Spinoza's assertion that this all encompassing substance referred to either as God or Nature is indivisible. We know from experience that a plant can be divided and replanted, producing two plants. If both are in God and were divided, is God then divisible? No, according to Spinoza. The fact the we perceive the universe to be divisible is simply the result of our own limited sense apparatus or imagination. The division of plants as we observe them is not imaginary, but they are part of a greater whole that cannot be divided. If we use only our imaginative perception, then the world looks like it can be divided, that it is finite, and composed of parts. But if we depend upon our intellect, we will conclude that it is one substance, indivisible, unique, and infinite. There cannot be two substances.

Ultimately, for Spinoza, all matter is really one and the same substance, indivisible and eternal. Perhaps a chair may appear to be a separate entity from a cat, but at their most common level, they are two expressions of the same thing--Nature or God. Both the cat and the chair are modes which are contained in God. Spinoza explained:

> From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes, (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect.)[33]

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[33] Ethics IP16, p.424.

Therefore, everything we perceive to exist in the universe, whether from a perspective of intellect or extension, is a mode. This includes all humanity. Modes are dynamic and are constantly changing. This explains the changing universe. Things are born, grow, and die--but the basic matter never disappears. They are all modes, expressions of the one, God or Nature.

The simple amoeba may best exemplify Spinoza's metaphysical system. If we imagine an infinite amoeba which for the sake of argument is indivisible, it is equivalent to Spinoza's definition of God or Nature. The amoeba can be understood to have intellect and is clearly corporeal. It also possesses other attributes that we do not understand. The amoeba is dynamic, and in every place possible, surfaces on the amoeba stretch forward for a moment and then recede back to the same plane. These are the modes--they are all made of the same material, and yet as they stretch, they take different forms or shapes. Eventually they recede back, only to one day stretch forth again in a new form, as they participate in a dynamic, eternal process.

The implications of Spinoza's theory of modes for the existence of Divine providence are not clear. Are we simply mechanical modes, connected to some infinitely large entity that cares little about us? One could argue that Spinoza's philosophy must lead to just this conclusion. God is nature as we know it, and is not concerned with human existence. There is, therefore, no Divine providence. But Divine providence is defined loosely as how God acts in the world. Spinoza's thought does not deny the

existence of a world or universe, but submits that the existing universe is found in God. How the greater being referred to as Nature or God relates to aspects of itself--the modes--is still an important question and falls under the rubric of Divine providence. Can we as modes affect and prolong our existence in our current form? Does God or Nature allow us, or even help us, to do so? The issue of Divine providence remains to be fully discussed.

Divine Freedom

If Divine providence as traditionally understood is to be possible, God must be free to act. Spinoza responds first by defining the word "freedom." He writes:

> That thing is called free which exists from the necessity of its nature alone, and is determined to act by itself alone. But a thing is called necessary , or rather compelled, which is determined by another to exist and to produce an effect in a certain and determinate manner.[34]

From his previous definitions it is clear that the only thing that exists from the necessity of its nature alone is God. God is the only cause of itself. Thus, for Spinoza, freedom is understood in a very broad sense. To be free, a being has to have no other influences determining or controlling its activities. Freedom has less to do with choice and more to do with a lack of encounter with external forces. This is derived from Spinoza's notion (which will be explained below) that the more an object is acted upon by external forces, the less free it is. Since God is

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[34] Ethics ID7, p.409.

the only thing that has "nothing outside him by which he is determined or compelled to act," then "God alone is a free cause."[35]

Spinoza's definition of freedom has its merits. It is not unlike the views of behavioral psychology expressed in the writings of B.F. Skinner, among others. Can one claim to be truly free if one lacks control over one's environment? Does a criminal from the ghetto freely choose to break the law? Skinner argued that "We could solve many of the problems of delinquency and crime if we could change the early environment of the offenders."[36] Spinoza probably would have agreed. Freedom as he defined it cannot exist absolutely for a created being, because from its inception such a being is acted upon by what are interpreted to be external forces or "affects." We will discuss later whether there is a possibility of limited freedom for dependent beings or modes. But it is clear that absolute freedom as defined by Spinoza is impossible for all but God.

Spinoza's God is the only free being, but the common understanding of the term "absolute freedom" does not apply to Spinoza's conception of God. The God of the Torah, who is omnipotent and has freedom of will is not his God. "God," Spinoza

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[35] Ethics IP17, p.425.

[36] B.F. Skinner, Walden Two, Macmillan, N.Y., 1976, p. xi.

writes, "acts from the laws of his nature alone..."[37] We must understand "laws of his nature" as limits to God's ability to act. All created things necessarily follow from God's given nature, and so Spinoza concludes: "Things could have been produced by God in no other way and in no other order than they have been produced."[38] God is omnipotent for Spinoza in the sense that God is unique and has no external forces controlling him. But God is construed by his nature and therefore acts in a predictable way. In fact, Spinoza questioned whether God possesses will as part of his nature.[39] Nonetheless, everything depends upon God for its existence. According to Spinoza, "God is the immanent, not the transitive, cause of all things."[40] Everything is dependent upon God, because everything is in God.

According to Spinoza's understanding, God is not free to act in ways contrary to the Divine nature. All things proceed from God necessarily, in an orderly way. The system of which God or Nature forms the whole is rational and operates predictably. Divine providence, therefore, cannot be manifested in the form of miraculous intervention. God is not watching over the everyday actions of individual human beings nor interfering in human affairs beyond the systematic role that God plays as the ultimate

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[37] Ethics IP17, p.425.

[38] Ethics IP33, p.436.

[39] Ethics, IP17, p.426.

[40] Ethics IP18, p.428.

but immanent natural cause. That human beings believe in miracles, Spinoza argues, is a result of their own misunderstanding. This derives from a common belief:

> men commonly suppose that all natural things act, as men do, on account of an end; indeed, they maintain as certain that God himself directs all things to some certain end, for they say that God has made all things for man, and man that he might worship God.[41]

Such a conclusion, to Spinoza, is absurd. The world was not created for humanity's sake, because it was not created at all; it is eternal. Human beings are not at the center of the universe, but are like anything else except for God: modes, relating to the whole. The universe itself has no final cause, and no particular end. He writes, "Nature has no end set before it, and that all final causes are nothing but human fictions."[42] The cycle of the natural world is just that, a cycle, which, according to Spinoza's conception, will continue, as it has been established, for eternity.

"Of course," Spinoza argues, "all natural events are the works of God, and take place solely by His power."[43] The perception of unusual events in the natural world as being miraculous, however, is a mistake on the part of human beings. God does not alter the natural order of things to bring about either punishment or salvation. Miracles are impossible. That

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[41] Ethics IAppendix, p.439-40.

[42] Ethics IAppendix, p.442.

[43] Baruch Spinoza, A Theologico-Political Treatise, op. cit., p.21.

human beings pray to God for miraculous Divine intervention to help them with their problems is proof, he believes, of their individual greed and self-centeredness as well as the fact that they possess inadequate ideas about the universe. By hoping that God would love them more than the rest of humanity, Spinoza concludes that the kind of God such men believe in must be mad. He states:

> they seem to have shown only that nature and the Gods are as mad as men. See, I ask you, how the matter has turned out in the end! Among so many conveniences in nature they had to find many inconveniences: storms, earthquakes, diseases, etc.[44]

How can God both love humanity and intervene miraculously to save some, while destroying others in natural disasters? Spinoza concludes that the argument that God punishes only those who have done wrong does not bear up under the scrutiny of human experience. The suffering of innocents along with the guilty and the success of people despite their evil actions proves the absurdity of this proposition.[45]

With this denial of the possibility of miraculous intervention, it is clear that Spinoza's system does not allow for the possibility of particular providence. If God is going to care at all for humanity, God is going to care for it as a whole, and that caring or providence must be seen as part of the natural operation of the universe and not as a miraculous intervention by the Divine power. To think otherwise, Spinoza asserts, is to be

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[44] Ethics IAppendix, p.441.

[45] Ethics, IAppendix, p.441-8.

deluded.

Spinoza holds that the common conception of evil existing in the universe results from a similar human misunderstanding. Evil does not exist independently, as common folk believe. It appears as a result of human action and judgement. As we shall see, the essence of human nature is to make judgments about the existing world. All those things that are perceived to be good for the individual in achieving life goals are termed good, while the opposite are called evil. To Spinoza, evil, then, is not an intrinsic element in the universe of God or Nature. He writes

> As far as good and evil are concerned, they also indicate nothing positive in things, considered in themselves, nor are they anything other than modes of thinking, or notions we form because we compare things to one another. For one and the same thing can, at the same time, be good, and bad, and also indifferent.[48]

Evil and goodness, then, exist as relative terms, determined by human judgement. As we shall see in the section concerned with human nature, Spinoza argued that ethics are derived not from an a sense of the absolute, but from the "will to survive," which is the essence of human nature.

Spinoza also addressed the evils of human suffering. As Maimonides argued, so too Spinoza concludes: that the universe, as it exists, exists necessarily and could not be otherwise. All human beings must, like all modes, eventually disintegrate; this is basis of our existence. Spinoza states:

> From this it follows that all particular things are contingent and corruptible. For we can have no adequate

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[48] Ethics IVPreface, p.545.

> knowledge of their duration and that is what we must understand by the contingency of things and the possibility of their corruption.[47]

To argue that God should have created us otherwise is like envisioning the possibility of a "square circle."[48] God creates everything necessarily. Human beings could not have been created in any other way and still be human beings, because God cannot act contrary to his nature. Deterioration is not to be understood as an evil, but as a necessary aspect of human existence.

Spinoza's argument that evil is not intrinsic to the world, but only a human valuation, was challenged by Willem Van Blijenbergh in a letter he sent to the philosopher. Van Blijenbergh used the story of Adam and the forbidden fruit as an example of evil brought into the world by God. He argued that, according to Spinoza's system, only God is absolutely free and therefore Adam how no choice in deciding whether or not to eat the apple. Spinoza's system did not seem to allow for human freedom, therefore, evil exists not as a result of human valuation, but of Divine formulation.

Spinoza's response to Van Blijenbergh included the following remark:

> I cannot grant that sins and evil are something positive, much less that something would exist or happen contrary to God's will. On the contrary, I say

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[47] Ethics IIP31, p.472.

[48] Baruch Spinoza, "Letters: August 1661-August 1663, July 1664-September 1665," Letter 19, as it appears in The Collected Works of Spinoza Vol.I, op. cit., p.359. Further references to Letters will be noted as follows: Letter 19, p.359.

> not only that sin is not something positive, but also that when we say that we sin against god, we are speaking inaccurately, or in a human way, as we do when we say that men anger god.[49]

Here Spinoza clarifies his position regarding evil. Evil in and of itself is not positive, but results not via a direct act of God, but rather as a "privation of a more perfect state" of the human being.[50] This is similar to Maimonides' privation argument in relation to evil.[51] For Spinoza the issue must be related to the reality of human behavior. Human beings judge things to be good or evil and when they identify someone as acting evilly, contrary to perfection:

> we judge him to be deprived of it and to be deviating from his nature...it follows clearly that that privation can be said only in relation to our intellect, not in relation to god's.[52]

Evil exists then as privation, but implied in this argument is the possibility that human beings can move towards perfection and lessen the power of evil in the world. Human beings call those things good that help them reach perfection, and evil is that which prevents them from reaching this goal. God or Nature, as the only absolutely free being, will not intervene to eliminate such imperfection, but it may give human beings the capability to do so. This possibility of a general Divine providence may be found in Spinoza's conception of human nature.

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[49] Letter 19, p.358.

[50] Letter 19, p.359.

[51] Guide III:10, p.439.

[52] Letter 19, p.359.

Human Nature

Spinoza's understanding of the world was dominated by his notion of determinism. It would seem that human beings, as modes dependent upon God, are not free to act. Modes are not causes of themselves. To conclude that Spinoza believed that all human action is therefore predetermined would be incorrect. His notion of determinism is not absolute, but can be referred to as a "soft determinism." That there is a possibility for modes or things to affect their existence is asserted by Spinoza's understanding of the effect of external forces on an object.

As we noted above, all things except for God are affected by external sources. Each thing is constantly encountering other forces or objects that can determine how it will respond. A chair, for example, is constantly in contact with air, moisture, pollution, and gravity, while also having to support the weight and withstand the pressure of its occupants. Its longevity will be determined by these outside forces. The more a thing is acted upon by outside forces, the less free it is. The chair, being a very passive object, cannot really be considered to be free at all. Other modes, though, can influence their duration; as Spinoza argues, the inverse of the above--the less a thing is acted on by outside forces, the more free it is, is true. Animals, as opposed to inanimate objects, can lessen the effects of external forces. The beaver can build a dam, clean itself, save food for winter, and defend itself against foes. Many of the outside forces that would affect the chair do not affect the

beaver.

Human beings, Spinoza argues, are the modes least affected by external forces in the natural world. Clearly, people are able to control their environment up to a point. How they do so will determine the extent of their duration within limits. They can choose various ways to affect their future. Within this system they have a limited freedom of choice. The choices that humans make, though, are determined by one innate characteristic which according to Spinoza is at the essence of human nature. This is the will to survive. He writes:

> Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being...The striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being is nothing but the actual being of the thing.[53]

At the core of every being is this will to survive. How successful people are in surviving is dependent upon their ability to limit the extent to which they are subjected to outside forces. The choice that human beings have, Spinoza concludes, is to act or be acted upon.

The ability to act requires the possession of adequate ideas. The mind, Spinoza taught, balances between being ruled by the intellect and being ruled by the affects or passions. The more the intellect is allowed to rule, the more action the person can take. The intellectually oriented person can rule personal passions and put them to good use. The more the affects rule, then the less active the individual. Dominance of passion

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[53] Ethics IIIP6-P7, p.498-9.

signifies the overabundance of inadequate ideas in the mind. The incapacity to moderate passions, Spinoza argues, ultimately leads to human bondage. For when a person is dominated by inadequate ideas, he is:

> under the control, not of himself, but of fortune, in whose power he so greatly is that often, though he sees the better for himself, he is still forced to follow the worse.[54]

This statement by Spinoza teaches us that the goal for the perfected person cannot be absolute freedom, but the freedom that develops as a result of self-control. If one is able to govern oneself, then one will be able to act more capably and successfully in the greater world. The passion-led person fails to rule himself and therefore has no shield to use as a defense when he encounters the powerful external forces of nature. Instead of being able to take action, he is at the mercy of chance and will most likely suffer the consequences.

The dominance of passion and the possession of inadequate ideas is the reason Spinoza cites for the existence of irrational religion. He writes:

> Anything which excites their (people in general) astonishment they believe to be a portent signifying the anger of the gods or of the Supreme Being, and , mistaking superstition for religion, account it impious not to avert the evil with prayer and sacrifice. Signs and wonders of this sort they conjure up perpetually, till one might think Nature as mad as themselves, they interpret her so fantastically.[55]

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[54] Ethics IVPreface, p.543.

[55] Baruch Spinoza, A Theologico-Political Treatise, op. cit., p.3-4.

Prayer will not avert these evils, Spinoza argues; only possession of adequate ideas will do so. By developing the intellect, human beings may succeed in prevailing over the force of their own passions as well as the external forces of nature. If a rational religion helps in the development of adequate ideas, then it is useful, but religions that emphasize inadequate ideas are self-defeating for the human being.

Divine Providence

Adequate ideas are available to humanity via the exercise of intellect. By controlling their passions, human beings can begin to partially take control over their world. God does not intervene to help when humans face catastrophe nor does God "punish" human beings for their misdeeds. But, here, as with everything else in nature, there are consequences. Nonetheless, Spinoza argues that there is Divine providence. By allowing for the possibility of intellectual development in humanity, God acts providentially. This is a form of general or natural providence available to all human beings. God provides the intellect, but human beings must supply the will to know.

That there is something to know outside of the self is guaranteed by God. The world is not chaotic nor mysterious, rather, the Deity shapes itself in a rational, ordered fashion. Nature can therefore be understood by human beings by means of their intellect. In fact, Spinoza writes:

the decrees and mandates of God, and consequently His

providence, are merely the order of nature.[56]

Order in nature is a sign of Divine providence! Without it, imagine how little we would be able to know. Our superstitions would continue to rule us because there would be no truth on which we could depend. Nature, though, is knowable because it abides by set laws and principles. With the help of mathematics and other sciences, human beings can unlock the secrets of the universe and acquire even more adequate ideas.

The human being's ability to think is another example of Divine Providence. Thought itself is an attribute of God, one that human beings share with the Divine. Obviously human beings also share extension, but what makes them different from other modes is this commonality of mind with the divine. Spinoza even goes so far as to assert that "the human Mind is a part of the infinite intellect of God."[57] This ability to think and to gain knowledge is a divine gift, and use of it makes us even more like the all-knowing substance. With this power of thought human beings can succeed in preserving themselves, and this self preservation is further proof of the existence of Divine providence. Spinoza states:

> Now since the power in nature is identical with the power of God, by which alone all things happen and are determined, it follows that whatsoever man, as a part of nature, provides himself with to aid and preserve his existence, or whatsoever nature affords him without his help, is given to him solely by the Divine Power, acting either through human nature or through external

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[56] Ibid., p.88.

[57] Ethics IIP11, p.456.

circumstance.[58]

All that human beings are capable of doing, through the use of their minds and by the sweat of their brow, is allowed to happen, Spinoza taught, because of the "inward" aid of God. That which we do for ourselves, that comes from us, is a result of Gods inward aid. Those things that we find outside of ourselves: the basic operation of natura naturata, the natural world, which provides human beings with a place to live, fertile ground, rain, and the like, is also a result of Divine providence. Spinoza called this the "external" aid of God.[59] Divine providence is very much a reality for humanity according to Spinoza's understanding of the world. All of existence, both inward and external is God-intoxicated.

By utilizing the resources of the mind as well as the resources supplied by the external world, human beings can create the best forum for human survival: society. Spinoza, despite his own rejection by both Jewish and general society, believed that only in groups can human beings achieve the goal of extending both life and knowledge. The will to survive, he taught, is the essence of man, but such survival depends upon coming together and building up society. Societies allow for the full expression of the self while controlling some of the passions. Good and evil are determined by the rules of society, based upon the will to

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[58] Baruch Spinoza, A Theologico-Political Treatise, op. cit., p.45.

[59] Ibid.

survive. Spinoza writes:

> Nevertheless, human management and watchfulness can greatly assist towards living in security and warding off the injuries of our fellow-men, and even of beasts. Reason and experience show no more certain means of attaining this object than the formation of a society with fixed laws, the occupation of a strip of territory, and the concentration of all forces, as it were, into one body, that is the social body.[80]

Society can be of great help, but it can also hinder if it denies freedom. The human being needs to be free to discover the truth, which Spinoza knew full well from his own experience, This is why he argued for a free society in which there would be separation of church and state. All people should be allowed to pursue religion as they see fit, he asserted. Religion itself, though, should also be separated from the intellectual world. Philosophical truth and religious truth are two different things for Spinoza. Religion helps the individual who cannot reach pristine philosophical knowledge, but it should not be invoked as a means of barring philosophical pursuits. In a truly free state this would not be a possibility.

Once human beings realize that they are modes, that exist only insofar as they are connected to a greater substance, called God or Nature, and that they are limited in their freedom to act, then the quality of human existence will improve. This knowledge, Spinoza taught, will cause people to refrain from blind hatred and envy. It will help them to help others for the sake of the overall good. Governments will work to improve the lives of their

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[80] Ibid., p.46.

citizens by creating ethical laws and free societies that individuals "may do freely the things that are best."[81]

Armed with such knowledge, human beings will also be better able to accept the existence of certain necessary "evils." Modes must eventually go back to the whole of substance; living forever is not a possibility. We must "expect and bear calmly both good fortune and bad."[82] Floods are going to happen and are beyond our control. Rather than pray to the god of rain, Spinoza's philosophy would demand that the community go out and build a flood wall. A clear understanding of reality, instead of a superstitious belief-system, can therefore help the individual to focus on changing those things that can be affected, while living with those things that are permanent and unchanging facets of God-Nature.

By creating an ordered world and granting human beings intellect, God, according to Spinoza, gave human beings the ability to achieve their ultimate happiness. That happiness is knowledge of God. The more we know God, the happier we can be. Knowing God comes from seeking God out in Natura Naturata and applying this knowledge to our lives. This knowledge Spinoza submits,

> teaches that we act only from God's command, that we share in the divine nature, and that we do this the more, the more perfect our actions are, and the more and more we understand God. This doctrine, then in addition to giving us complete peace of mind, also

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[81] Ethics IIApendix, p.490-1.

[82] Ethics IIApendix, p.490.

> teaches us wherein our greatest happiness, or blessedness, consists: viz. in the knowledge of God alone, by which we are led to do only those things which love and morality advise.[83]

Knowledge of God helps humanity to achieve perfection and become as God-like as possible. This possibility exists for humanity because of Divine providence.

Spinoza and Maimonides

It is clear that much of Spinoza's thought is dependent upon Maimonides' philosophical writings. The Jewish teachings that Spinoza learned as a young man did not desert him along with the Jewish community. Despite the radical notion of God as substance, his whole philosophical system is based upon medieval Jewish ideas. Leon Roth has argued that,

> where Spinoza rejected the lead of Descartes, he not only followed that of Maimonides, but based his rejection on Maimonides' arguments, often, indeed, on his very words.[84]

While Spinoza may have followed the teachings of Descartes and other Gentile thinkers, he did not forsake Judaism. Warren Zev Harvey concurs with Roth, stating that:

> the Spinoza who has been sketched...was a Maimonidean in the sense that fundamental elements of Maimonides' philosophy recur as fundamental elements of his philosophy. This is true...with regard to Spinoza's philosophy as a whole, including his speculations about God and the true worship of him.[85]

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[83] Ibid.

[84] Leon Roth, op. cit., p.143.

[85] Warren Zev Harvey, "A Portrait of Maimonides and Spinoza," as it appears in Journal of the History of Philosophy Vol. XIX, Number 2, ed. David Fate Norton, San Diego, April 1981, p.172.

Concerning Divine providence, it is clear that Spinoza and Maimonides have much in common. Spinoza's position that Divine providence ultimately derives from humanity's pursuit of the knowledge of God is practically a restatement of the Maimonidean argument. For both thinkers, God can be known via the study of nature, and the knowledge that is attained from such a search can be used to better the human condition. Roth notes,

> It is from the one Nature that we learn the one God; and the one God can only be interpreted in and through the one Nature. It was this fundamental metaphysical idea which Spinoza used with such consistency and such effect against the whole movement of the Cartesian logic, and it was this same fundamental metaphysical idea which was the mainspring of Maimonides' attack on the Kalam.[88]

This ability exists as a result of Divine providence. God gives humanity the capacity to know all that is possible. The individual learns to limit personal exposure to the negative influences of external forces. The objects of the intellect are the tree of life for both philosophers. It can show humanity the way to a better world and help the individual learn to accept human limitations. The limits that human beings face are real, and they cannot hope to go beyond them in the view of either philosophy. Knowledge of this, according to Spinoza helps the person to bear evil that is beyond human control. Here Maimonides differs. Knowledge of God which leads to love of God can help the individual reach a plane beyond suffering. United with the Active Intellect the person will not suffer the "slings and arrows of

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[88] Leon Roth, op. cit., p. 106.

outrageous fortune." The difference between their two positions is subtle, but real.

Maimonides and Spinoza position regarding miracles is similar. Spinoza denies the existence of miracles, while Maimonides redefines the term in such a way as to make that which seems miraculous to be part of the natural process. They both believe in a rationally-constructed universe. God does not providentially break the laws of nature to help individuals. Evil is also seen by both to be a privation of the good.

Even the God-concepts of Spinoza and Maimonides seem to be interrelated. In the Maimonidean cosmology, God's power or force overflows throughout the universe. Maimonides breaks with Aristotle in arguing that the overflow continues to the final sphere--the earth. Spinoza denies that there is such an overflow because he argues that God, as substance, is in everything. But are the two positions really so different? Maimonides' claims that God is infinite, that God's power reaches out to every point in the world, and that God is intellect, are very close to Spinoza's. The major difference is, of course, Spinoza's argument for material substance in God, which Spinoza believes he must uphold in order to explain the existence of extension. Maimonides ostensibly upholds the traditional Jewish view that God created physical reality, although he does not explain how. And yet his God, in a sense, through the act of overflow, extends throughout the universe. From this perspective the two are not necessarily so much in disagreement. One can see how Spinoza's conception

evolved from Maimonides'. Spinoza's view of Divine providence, though, is less an evolution of the Maimonidean position than a restatement of it.

Conclusions

While preparing to research this chapter, I was informed by any number of interested parties that an attempt to understand Divine providence as an aspect of Spinoza's philosophy would be a futile endeavor. Spinoza the arch-rationalist, they argued, who identified God with Nature and believed that Nature operates in a mechanical fashion, could not allow for the possibility of Divine providence. Although this interpretation of Spinoza's philosophy is certainly possible and perhaps even plausible, I believe that it is also a misreading of his intention.

Spinoza's metaphysics, while based on the view of Nature as operating according to law, is not exclusively mechanistic. The substance that constitutes the whole of existence is dynamic and creative. It has intellect and is constantly reshaping itself through the modes. The system gives life to these modes and causes them to exist within a specific framework. The modes are an extension of the essence of the substance. Divine providence begins, therefore, with the activity of God-Nature as it extends itself. The modes are providentially capable of affecting their duration and seemingly the quality of that duration.

While particular providence is not possible in Spinoza's system -God does not aid particular individuals nor groups such as the Jews who, Spinoza argued, mistakenly believe that they are

chosen--general providence is very much a reality. It is built into the system. According to Spinoza, God or Nature gives humanity the intellectual capacity to gain knowledge of the whole by studying the system of nature. With this knowledge, human modes can lessen the power of external effects and assert some control over their lives. This capacity is a providential gift granted in general to all humanity. Ultimately it is up to human beings to take advantage of it. The path to such knowledge is the study of mathematics and the use of philosophic reason to explain nature and experience.

Only philosophic inquiry is capable of arriving at truth, because it is detached from emotion and the superstition characteristic of irrational religion. The knowledge of truth arrived at through rational analysis does not lead, as one might conclude, to a sterile scientific understanding of the universe, but to blessedness and a love of God. Spinoza was optimistic that with the benefit of this providentially-obtained knowledge, human beings would discover the means to better themselves and construct better societies. People would care for one another, discover ways to improve life, and demand that freedom be the guiding principle of nations. Because of Divine providence, humanity has this freedom to pursue virtue and break away from the power of the external forces. Spinoza wrote at the end of the Ethics,

> Blessedness is not the reward of virtue, but virtue itself;...Blessedness consists in Love of God...Next, the more the Mind enjoys this divine Love, or blessedness, the more it understands i.e. the greater

> the power it has over the affects, and the less it is acted on by evil affects. So because the Mind enjoys this divine Love or blessedness, it has the power of restraining lusts. And because human power to restrain the affects consists only in the intellect, no one enjoys blessedness because he has restrained the affects. Instead, the power to restrain lusts arises from blessedness itself, q.e.d.[87]

The knowledge that leads to blessedness is dependent upon Divine love. Divine providence, in this general form, is clearly an element in Spinoza's philosophy.

Spinoza's incorporation of Maimonidean conceptions into his philosophic system, as shown by both Roth and Harvey, is also demonstrated in his views concerning Divine providence. The similarities between the two are striking and are further proof that Spinoza never altogether abandoned his Jewish forebears. His distaste for petitionary prayer deriving from his disbelief in the possibility of Divine intervention did not make him an atheist. On the contrary, much of his thought is compatible with the beliefs and positions of present day liberal Jewish theology.

Spinoza's attempt to arrive at a completely rational understanding of the universe was a seemingly impossible task. The system he developed is fascinating if not completely convincing. There are weaknesses in it that have to be explained. Why should we accept his definitions at the beginning of the Ethics? Perhaps God is not infinite and eternal. How does one explain suicide if the essence of existence is survival? Are there limits to reason, and is there a spiritual aspect of

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[87] Ethics VP42, p.616.

existence? These are just a few of the possible problems raised by his thought. Nonetheless, his attempt resulted in a fascinating philosophy which helped advance human knowledge. He truly was a bridge between the Medieval period and modernity. Spinoza's views on Divine providence are still worth considering as we continue in the search that he promoted - the search for truth.

## Chapter III

## On The Narrow Ridge:
## Martin Buber's Understanding of Divine Providence

After Spinoza, the goal of separating philosophy from religion, was partially realized. Reason had become sovereign. Truth, it was believed, could only be discovered through rational inquiry and scientific experiment. The possibility of Divine providence was therefore viewed skeptically because it could not fit any neat rational category. Emil Fackenheim notes that revelation, for example, was attacked,

> not merely on a particular claim on behalf of an actual revelation, or even on all such claims. It was directed on the very possibility of revelation; and this was because it seemed radically incompatible not merely with this or that modern principle, but with the one principle basic to all modern thought, namely, the supreme principle of rational inquiry.[1]

In the twentieth century, optimism concerning humanity's rational capabilities reached both its zenith and its nadir. Prior to World War I there seemed to be no limit to the human mind's technical capacity to create marvels that would improve human life. By the end of World War II this optimism was shattered as humanity witnessed the sheer destructive might of unbridled scientific imagination. Reliance upon human reason alone had forced God out of the world of science and philosophy, but the terror of the Holocaust and the atom bomb became even

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[1] Emil Fackenheim, "Martin Buber's Concept of Revelation," as it appears in The Jewish Thought of Emil Fackenheim, ed. Michael Morgan, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1987, p.88.

greater challenges to the possibility of Divine providence.

Martin Buber, whose life spanned this cataclysmic period, devoted his thought, both before and after the two world wars, to restoring a sense of balance between faith and reason as two essential aspects of human existence. He did so by developing his famous philosophy of dialogue, which challenged the value of relying solely upon rational inquiry for the discovery of ultimate truths. He believed that essential knowledge pertaining to the human condition could also be acquired by exploring the sphere of existence that is manifested in dialogue. For Buber, when two individuals or even an individual and an object meet in dialogue, they meet on a spiritual plane and encounter an aspect of the Divine. Nahum Glatzer notes:

> Against impersonal man moving aimlessly in an impersonal universe, namelessly in an anonymous world from which God has withdrawn, Buber affirms the personality of man--and of God. Man, capable of love, "personalizes all that he loves" and discovers the element of personality in the All...Buber, fully aware of the prevailing tendencies in modern science, psychology, and art, dared to reintroduce man's uniqueness--his personality--as a central issue in modern thought.[2]

A major criticism of the Buberian position is that it is not really philosophical, but theological. Buber's critics argue that he abandons the realm of reason when he discusses the spiritual significance of dialogue and the possibility of Divine disclosure. This critique of Buber can also be applied to any existentialist philosopher who asserts that there is another

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[2] Nachum Glatzer ed. The Way of Response: Martin Buber, Schocken Books, N.Y., 1966, p.9-10.

level of reality beyond the rational constructs of human existence. Buber addressed this objection when he wrote:

> I have occasionally described my standpoint to my friends as the "narrow ridge." I wanted by this to express that I did not rest on the broad upland of a system that includes a series of sure statements about the absolute, but on a narrow rocky ridge between the gulfs where there is no sureness of expressible knowledge but the certainty of meeting what remains, undisclosed.[3]

As a philosopher who wanted to explore the significance of the Divine in modern life, Buber believed that he had to walk down this "narrow ridge." As fellow moderns, his view of Divine providence should address our common concerns and questions. Buber's view of Divine providence, particularly his emphasis on the centrality of dialogue between the individual and the Eternal Thou, will be the focus of this chapter.

Historical Overview

Martin Buber was born in 1878 in the vibrant city of Vienna, which was then the heart of central Europe. He lived a long and fruitful life (dying in 1965), having fortunately survived the terror that struck Europe both in 1914 and in 1939. His grandparents, Solomon and Adele Buber, were noted both for their scholarship and wealth. Of his religious background, Joseph Blau wrote:

> His only contacts with traditional Judaism in his childhood came during visits to his grandfather, a distinguished Polish-Jewish scholar, living in an

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[3] Martin Buber, Between Man and Man, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith, Macmillan, N. Y., 1948, p.184. Maurice Friedman also uses the image of "On the Narrow Ridge," as a way of describing Buber's philosophy.

> atmosphere in which the pietism of the Hassidic movement prevailed. In Buber's own home traditional rituals and home ceremonials were not observed...[4]

Buber began his college studies at the University of Vienna in 1898 and after studying at the universities of Leipzig, Berlin, and Zurich, he completed his dissertation in 1904 in Vienna.[5]

Throughout his life Buber was active both intellectually and politically in Jewish circles. At the age of twenty-one he became a delegate to the Zionist Congress, supporting the position of the cultural Zionists. In 1916 he founded the monthly periodical Der Juda which was "for eight years the most important organ of the Jewish renaissance movement in Central Europe."[6] He also devoted much of his time during this period to studies of Hasidism and the translation of the Bible into German in conjunction with his friend Franz Rosenzweig.

From 1925 through 1933, Buber lectured on Jewish religion and ethics at the University of Frankfort. He rose to the rank of professor at the university, but was forced to abandon his position when the Nazis came to power. An important figure in the German Jewish community, he was then appointed to the directorship of the Central Office for Jewish Adult Education,

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[4] Joseph L. Blau, Modern Varieties of Judaism, Columbia University Press, N.Y., 1966, p.164-5.

[5] Haim Gordon, "The Sheltered Aesthete: A New Appraisal of Martin Buber's Life," as it appears in Martin Buber A Centenary Volume, ed. Haim Gordon and Jochanan Bloch, KTAV Publishing House, Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Beersheba, 1984, p.28.

[6] Maurice Friedman, The Encyclopedia Judaica, ed. Cecil Roth, Keter Publishing House, Jerusalem, 1972, p.1430.

which had been created as a means to educate German Jews, who were no longer permitted to study in German universities.[7] In 1938, the Hebrew University in Jerusalem offered him its chair of religious sciences, which he accepted gladly.[8] Like many other famous Jewish thinkers, he barely escaped the death camps because of the invitation of a foreign university.

Buber was a prolific writer. He produced studies of Hasidism, interpretations of the Bible (as well as his translation), and books on Judaism and philosophy, and wrote articles whose subjects spanned a wide range of intellectual endeavor. For our purposes, his most important work, which introduced his philosophy of dialogue, was I and Thou, published in 1923. This was followed by Between Man and Man, Good and Evil, and The Eclipse of God, among other works.

As Buber grew older, his popularity spread, and he became one of the most widely respected spiritual figures in the West. His thought was especially influential in liberal Christian circles but was also popular in the Jewish world. He was accused by traditionalists (e.g. Eliezer Berkovitz) of not being a Jewish thinker because much of his philosophical writing did not specifically address Jews, but was written for all the religiously concerned. Still, his positions were clearly influenced by Jewish tradition and were directed to the Jewish

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[7] Ibid., p.1431.

[8] Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber's Life and Work- The Middle Years 1923-1945, E.P. Dutton, N.Y., 1983, p.251.

community, which embraced him in his lifetime. Today, his views may continue to enrich and once again influence those seeking an equal role for faith and reason in modern life.

Intellectual Influences

Buber is often referred to as a religious existentialist and is credited, along with Franz Rosenzweig, as having developed Jewish existentialism.[9] Influenced by Kierkegaard, Existentialism questions the ability of reason to fully explain reality and criticizes Western philosophy's tendency to overlook the "concrete and personal nature of human existence."[10] Fackenheim explains that religious existentialism reveals the shortcomings inherent in reliance upon the "law--or cause-discovering" kind of knowledge that is gained via rational inquiry as a means of explaining existence. He wrote:

> If the law--or cause-discovering kind of knowledge is phenomenal, existentialism argues, it is because it presupposes the detachment of a knower who makes the world his object...But what he discovers in this way is as a whole, not reality, but merely reality made into an object or objectified. Reality ceases to be an object if we cease to view it as an object; that is, if instead of viewing it in detachment we become engaged with it in personal commitment.[11]

The existentialist position that demands engagement with the world is one of the bases for Buber's philosophy of dialogue. Because of the fine secular education that he had received, he

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[9] Eugene B. Borowitz, Choices in Modern Jewish Thought, Behrman House, N.Y., 1983, p.142.

[10] Robert Seltzer, Jewish People, Jewish Thought, Macmillan Publishing Company, N.Y., 1980, p.740.

[11] Emil Fackenheim, op. cit., p.87.

was especially well grounded in German philosophy and was eventually exposed to existentialist thought. As a youth, he explained in a biographical note, he was enamored with Kant and enthralled by Nietzsche. While studying at the university, the thought of Feuerbach and Kierkegaard also became major personal influences. Of them he wrote, "Yes and No to them had become a part of my existence."[12]

Secular thought was not alone in influencing the development of Buber's philosophy of dialogue. Judaism, especially Hasidism, also informed his philosophic position. He had an excellent Jewish education which began with private tutoring as a child and continued throughout his adult life as he explored nearly all aspects of Jewish studies. The Hasidism to which he had been exposed by his grandfather interested him because of its joyful celebration of life and creation. He wrote:

> When I saw the Hasidim dance with the Torah, I felt 'community.' At that time there rose in me a presentiment of the fact that common reverence and common joy of soul are the foundations of genuine community.[13]

Mysticism also proved to be attractive to him in the early part of his spiritual search. In Berlin, he had written his dissertation on mysticism, and, according to his writings, as a young man he would attempt to lose himself in religious experience to the "otherness" of mystical union. Buber broke with

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[12] Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman, The Philosophy of Martin Buber, Open Court, La Salle, 1967, p.34.

[13] Ibid., p.20.

such mysticism after he realized that his religious "ecstasy" cut him off from the reality of the world. Eugene Borowitz notes that Buber eventually determined that:

> mysticism, far from disclosing reality to us, obscures it. The people who confront us moment by moment and make their demands on us are far more significant than any subjective occurrence might be.[14]

I and Thou

To the mystic, the pinnacle of religious experience is reached upon the achievement of spiritual union with the Divine. Arrival at such union is dependent upon avoiding all earthly distractions, including relations with other human beings. The mystical personality ultimately even attempts to abandon the self in striving to unite with the Divine presence. Concern for others and the self must be sublimated as the mystic manipulates the secret forces that will make accessible the realm of the Divine presence.

The self-centeredness of mysticism conflicts with Judaism's emphasis on the centrality of life in this world and the importance of community. Noting this, Buber once described his own mystical experience in the following manner:

> It could begin with something customary, with consideration of some familiar object, but which then became unexpectedly mysterious and uncanny, finally lighting a way into the lightning-pierced darkness of the mystery itself....Over there now lay the accustomed existence with its affairs, but here illumination and ecstasy and rapture held without time or sequence. [15]

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[14] Eugene B. Borowitz, op. cit., p.25.

[15] Paul Arthur Schilpp, op. cit., p.25.

In the midst of mystical ecstasy the individual becomes totally separated from ordinary existence. The mystic is purposely lost in this otherness as he or she reaches out toward God. After a time Buber concluded that this kind of ecstatic mystical experience was nothing more than a delusion. Why would the God who created the world and encased humanity in matter wish human beings to ignore the beauty of creation and deny the wonder of the body? He determined that the mystical striving for union with the Divine ironically consists of a turning away from God by rejecting God's, handiwork which is infused with Divine spirit and energy. Upon recognizing "the illegitimacy of such a division of the temporal life," Buber rejected mysticism. In later years he referred to this turning point as "a conversion."[16]

At this point Buber began to develop his philosophy of dialogue. As he turned away from the sphere of the mystical, he became cognizant of the power of the Divine operating within the realm of human existence. Awareness of this Divine presence is central to Buber's philosophy. God is not only above and beyond the world, accessible via prayerful supplication, but is an immanent force within the world, giving life and meaning to all existence. The quest for God should therefore begin in this world, with careful appreciation of, and relation to, the beauty of God's creation. Through dialogue with other created beings, the ecstasy that the mystic seeks beyond the world can be found within the world. The intention of Buber's philosophical writing

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[16] Ibid.

is to bring awareness to humanity of this divine dimension of existence and to teach of the centrality of relation.

The philosophy of dialogue begins with an analysis of human perception concerning existence. "To man," Buber writes, "the world is twofold, in accordance with his twofold attitude."[17] This thought is not simply an observation, but an ontological statement. For Buber the world is twofold and man is twofold. Human beings observe the world or, better, participate in the world, from two perspectives. They relate to the world in terms of two primary words: I-It and I-Thou. The "I" of the individual is never separate in human existence, but is always involved in relationship. The character of the relationship determines whether or not it can be understood as falling under the rubric of I-It or I-Thou. "All real living is meeting," Buber said, and how we meet the sensual world around us affects the quality of our lives and our ability to seek out the Divine in existence.[18]

"The primary word I-It," Buber tells us, "can never be spoken with the whole being."[19] I-It represents the human being's attempt to objectify the world. In terms of I-It, all life can be understood as experience. The world from this perspective consists of things that are meant to be utilized for the benefit

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[17] Martin Buber, I and Thou, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith, Charles Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1958, p.3. Further references will be noted as follows: I and Thou, p.3.

[18] I and Thou, p.8.

[19] I and Thou, p.3.

of the "I." Planting seeds for the sake of raising food is an I-It relationship, as is building a house for safety and shelter. Words like "experiencing," "using," "making," and "experimenting" are all I-It verbs. But I-It can also signify a relationship between two people. If we approach another in terms of what they can do for us, if we fail to clearly listen to their needs or wants, then we are dealing with them solely in I-It terms. Clearly I-It relations are necessary for the continuance of human life. We need to experiment in order to learn and create. We need to sometimes look at people in terms of what they can do in order to organize our society. But I-It is not enough for the formation of a fully human "I." There has to be (and is) another level of perception, and that is the I-Thou.

"When Thou is spoken," Buber wrote, "the speaker has no thing; he indeed has nothing. But he takes his stand in relation."[20] To say Thou for Buber is to leave the world of It, to discontinue the objectification of existence in favor of entering into a different relationship with reality. By saying the primary word Thou, the individual is stating his or her willingness at that moment to go beyond the categorization of reality into things that are to be utilized by an "I" and be open to the possibility of dialogue with another as "Thou." From an I-Thou perspective, the I and the Thou stand in relation to each other and disclose themselves to one another. Communication takes place without the need for words because a higher plane of

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[20] I and Thou, p.4.

existence has been achieved. By saying "Thou" to another, "he is Thou and fills the heavens. This does not mean that nothing exists except himself. But all else lives in his light."[21]

Buber taught that I-Thou relations exist in the following three spheres: our life with nature, our life with other human beings, and our life with spiritual beings. We can easily understand how one can have a Thou relationship with another human being. Two lovers silently walking along a beach, oblivious for that moment to everything but each other can be said to be relating in terms of I and Thou. But this relation need not be limited to those who are close. Buber believed that two people passing on the street can look into each other's eyes and relate as I and Thou. A more formidable task is to understand what he meant by I-Thou relations in reference to the other two categories. How do we say Thou to a spiritual being will be discussed below, but from a religious perspective it is not too difficult to imagine praying to God as Thou (The problem lies in waiting for the dialogical response from the deity). The challenge is to accept Buber's assertion that an I-Thou relation can also exist between human beings and nonhuman (animate or inanimate) objects. Aware of this problem, Buber skillfully presents relation to a tree as an example of the extent of the possibility of I-Thou dialogue. "I consider a tree," Buber wrote. One can look at that tree in terms of an It and see in it the possibility of culling lumber, enjoying its shade, or painting

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[21] I and Thou, p.8.

its image onto a canvas. The tree is my object if I consider it in this fashion. However if, "I have both will and grace," then "in considering the tree I become bound up in relation to it. The tree is now no longer It."[22] "I" as individual now encounter the tree itself and the tree in all its greatness and wonder is disclosed to me. The tree becomes "Thou" to my "I."

Buber's purpose in explaining his philosophical notion of the twofold human attitude towards existence is to show us that there is a Thou beyond the It. The world, our world, is much more complex and wonderful than we often realize. By opening ourselves up to dialogue with existence we will see the Thou in all being and come to better appreciate our lives and our world. Maurice Friedman, Buber's disciple, describes the Thou as follows:

> In the meeting with the Thou, man is no longer subject to causality and fate, for both of these are handmaidens of the ordered world of continuity and take their meaning from it. It does not even matter if the person to whom the Thou is said is the It for other I's or is himself unaware of the relations. The I-Thou relation interpenetrates the world of It without being determined by it, for meeting is not in space and time but space and time in meeting.[23]

The realm of the I-Thou relation is significant not only for what it teaches humanity about the world, but also for what it teaches human beings about themselves. It is in relation to the Thou that the individual becomes an "I." Buber stated:

> Through the Thou a man becomes an I. That which confronts him comes and disappears, relational events

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[22] I and Thou, p.7.

[23] Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1976, p.58.

> condense, then are scattered, and in the change consciousness of the unchanging partner, of the I, grows clear and becomes stronger.[24]

The world of I-It is not the world of human self-realization, despite its experiential component. To truly know the I, we must look beyond experience to the essence of existence and relate to other people and other things as Thou. Only in the relation of I-Thou, in that dialogue with essence, does the "I" become human.

Unfortunately, Buber concludes, we cannot remain in the world of Thou. An I-Thou relation is not a permanent construct but has only a short duration. "This is the exalted melancholy of our fate," Buber writes: "every Thou in our world must become an It."[25] The tension of the I-Thou situation cannot be indefinitely maintained, but the warmth and meaning that comes out of it can be integrated into the world of It. By focusing on the beauty of Thou, Buber teaches us, we can improve the world of It, and as a result of genuine dialogue (an I-Thou encounter) meaningful relationship can be achieved. In the realm of Thou, Buber taught:

> Each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them.[26]

The good life, then, for Buber is dynamic. Human beings should move between the world of It and the world of Thou, thereby renewing themselves and animating the world of It with the spirit

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[24] I and Thou, p.28.

[25] I and Thou, p.16.

[26] Martin Buber, Between Man and Man, op. cit., p.19.

found only in the relational Thou. The more we can enter the realm of Thou, then the better is our world of It, for as I's to Thou's we not only truly come to know others, but in the realm of the relational Thou we also encounter God, the Eternal Thou who cannot become an It.

God - The Eternal Thou

Maimonides and Spinoza both presented their God-concepts as part of an organized metaphysical system. As an existentialist, Buber was skeptical of the capacity of such philosophical systems to describe adequately the workings of the Divine. He faulted philosophical systems for limiting God, turning God into an "It" in their attempt to present a logical description of a Divine power that would fit neatly into their systems. For Buber, God is always present as a Thou and never as an It, and for this reason he chose not to present a systematic philosophical view. He was more interested in writing about God in terms of relation to existence and in speaking of this relation "in terms which do not merely identify it with concepts or with feelings, but do justice to its inner nature."[27] Did Buber succeed in presenting a coherent view of God despite his rejection of systematization? Certainly his writing on God is poetic and beautiful, but whether one can conclude, beyond the affirmation of faith, that Buber is correctly describing the inner nature of God's relation to the world is questionable. Yet what Buber has to say is of great

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[27] I and Thou, (Ronald Gregor Smith's Translator's Preface to the Second Edition), p.viii.

value. Charles Hartshorne notes:

> Buber has no metaphysics; Buber is one of the greatest metaphysicians--this, in somewhat paradoxical language is my feeling...He does not, formally speaking, have a metaphysics, a general system of ultimate categories, carefully defined and defended against rival systems...Yet there are some pages in Ich und Du that seem to me among the most inspired ever written on the relations of creation and the creator.[28]

Buber, as a religious existentialist, may have not felt the need to systematically prove the existence of God. Perhaps he realized that he could not do so. Nevertheless, God as Divine presence, is very much a part of Buber's understanding of existential reality.

Human relation to God for Buber grows out of the relation of I to Thou. When we stop relating to existence in terms of It, we get a glimpse of the Eternal Thou. He wrote:

> The extended lines of relations meet in the eternal Thou. Every particular Thou is a glimpse through to the eternal Thou; by means of every particular Thou the primary word addresses the eternal Thou.[29]

Human relation, therefore, is a form of relating to the Divine. God, or part of God, is found in this world, not in the ecstasy of mystical experience. By truly relating or entering into dialogue with another being, then my I enters into relation with the Eternal Thou.

God is real for Buber. God is the Thou who can never become an It. God does not exist as the result of psychological angst resulting from humanity's sense of loneliness and is not a

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[28] Paul Arthur Schilpp, op. cit., p.48.

[29] I and Thou, p.76.

philosophical construct that helps philosophers resolve problems within their systems. The term "God" meant for Buber:

> Not a metaphysical idea, nor a moral idea, nor a projection of a psychic or social image, nor anything at all created by, or developed within, man. I do mean God, whom man, however, possesses only in ideas and images; but these ideas and images are not the work of free creation; they are products of divine-human encounter, of man's attempts to grasp the inexplicable as and when it happens to him.[30]

The real or existing God is difficult for man to describe. Like so many other Jewish thinkers who preceded him, Buber concedes that human language fails to capture the significance of God. Nonetheless human beings must discuss God, limit God to words, and therefore describe God as a person, knowing full well that this does not "reduce God to the realm of the finite or the limited."[31]

The inability to actually describe God stems from the reality of God's otherness. Buber wrote, "Of course God is the 'wholly Other';...Of course He is the Mysterium Tremendum that appears and overthrows."[32] God is other and is transcendent, but God for Buber is also immanent. God is beyond as well as of this world. In the context of a discussion of God's otherness Buber states, "but He is also the wholly Same, the wholly Present...He is also the mystery of the self-evident, nearer to me than my

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[30] Martin Buber, On Judaism, ed. Nachum Glatzer, Schocken Books, N.Y., 1972, p.4.

[31] Pedro C. Sevilla, S.J., God as Person in the Writings of Martin Buber, Ateneo University Publications, Manila, 1970, p.11.

[32] I and Thou, p.79.

I."[33] Despite such nearness, God does not overpower the self. To Buber God comprises, but is not, the universe. God as infinite allows for the separateness of the finite. God encounters the individual, but the individual does not then lose his sense of separateness in relation to God.

As an immanent being, Buber teaches that God is over-against the individual. God is the ever-present, but the individual is not always aware of this presence. "He who truly goes out to meet the world goes out also to God."[34] By being open to the world as Thou, we also meet the eternal Thou. By hallowing our existence, Buber argues, we approach the Face- the eternal Thou. When with our whole being we are able to say "Thou," we enter into the moment of meeting. What is the quality of this meeting? Buber describes it as follows:

> The moment of meeting is not an "experience" that stirs in the receptive soul and grows to perfect blessedness; rather, in that moment something happens to the man. At times it is like a light breath, at times like a wrestling-bout, but always-it happens. The man who emerges from the act of pure relation that so involves his being has now in his being something more that has grown in him, of which he did not know before...[35]

God becomes present to the individual and the individual opens himself up to God.

This description of meeting sounds mystical, but it differs from the mystical union because it takes place in the earthly

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[33] Ibid.

[34] I and Thou, p.95.

[35] I and Thou, p.109.

sphere and does not involve the dissolving of the individual before the eternal presence. Our problem, Buber argues, is that we cannot really describe this meeting. The moment we turn from the meeting itself and begin to analyze it, we leave the presence of the Eternal Thou. Such meeting involves total concentration of the Thou. Any critical analysis of a Thou, seems for Buber to transform the object of the I into an It.. When the I begins to view such meeting as experience, then the meeting stops, and we reenter the world of It.

The possibility of revelation coming out of such meeting will be discussed in the following section. For our present purpose, what is important is that we understand that Buber believes that dialogue with God is not only possible, but essential, and that this dialogue takes place in existential reality. Such dialogue may be termed a religious moment. Robert Seltzer notes:

> In Buber's view, at the heart of all genuine religiosity (which may or may not take place in religious circumstances as conventionally understood) is the opening of everyday reality to dialogic relations with an eternal, ever present, absolute Thou.[38]

God is in the world for Buber, waiting only for humanity to turn and seek out dialogue.

Is Buber a pantheist? Aspects of his God concept do seem similar to Spinoza's perspective. God is a part of every existing

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[38] Robert Seltzer, Introduction to Martin Buber, Eclipse of God, Humanities Press International, Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1988, p.xiv.

thing. Nonetheless God is not the world and the object or individual is not a mode of God. Instead God is over and against everything. Buber writes, "God embraces but is not the universe; just so God embraces but is not my self."[37] This view is similar to the traditional Jewish understanding of God's immanence and transcendence. Buber's important addition to this concept is his introduction of dialogue as an essential element of God's relationship to existence.

Divine Providence

According to Buber, God enters into relation with the objects of creation. What value, though, is this relation? Does the God whom humanity encounters from the midst of the I-Thou relation care for human beings? Does this God act providentially, or is the encounter simply a glimpse of the infinite, an indescribable feeling and nothing more? The reality of relation for Buber, in and of itself, seems to provide proof positive of the efficacy of Divine providence. God does act in the world according to Buber's understanding. The relation of the Eternal Thou to the I is of benefit to the I; it is a form of giving or caring. To become human the I has to enter into relation with the Thou, but to become fully human, to reach one's highest potential, the I must enter into relation with the Eternal Thou. Human beings are therefore dependent upon God. When they seek relation it is because they need it. Charles Hartshorne

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[37] Martin Buber, I and Thou, Walter Kaufmann trans., Charles Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1970, p.143.

emphasized the notion found in Buber that this relationship also implies that God is dependent on human beings. He notes, "The primacy of relatedness is not to be denied even of God."[38] Buber himself stated:

> You know always in your heart that you need God more than everything; but do you not know too that God needs you--in the fullness of His eternity needs you? How would man be, how would you be, if God did not need him, did not need you? You need God, in order to be-and God needs you, for the very meaning of your life.[39]

Divine providence for Buber begins with creation. God is the creator and the world is the created. That we are able to enter into relation with God is because God was gracious enough to create us. Buber writes:

> For he, the real God, is the creator, and all beings stand before him in relation to one another in his creation, becoming useful in living with one another for his creative purpose.[40]

Buber implies that in creation we are both dependent on God and in partnership with God. Human beings continue the work of creation by also creating. They remain dependent upon the Eternal creator for their existence and for the capacity to find meaning in that existence.

God as caring Being is close to the object of creation. Buber describes God as one who "hovers over his creation not as over a chaos, he embraces it. He is the infinite I that makes

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[38] Paul Arthur Schilpp, op. cit., p.50.

[39] I and Thou, p.82.

[40] Martin Buber, Between Man and Man, op. cit., p.52.

every It into his Thou."[41] By entering into relation with the human I, God shows just how important this relationship is. In the I-Thou relation, God providentially grants revelation to the human being. There God discloses Divine communication; an aspect of God becomes open to the human I. Such revelation does not occur as a matter of course. Human beings must seek out the Divine, they must be aware of God and turn to God, but turning does not guarantee that God will enter into relation. There is no magic involved here for Buber. Human beings cannot manipulate the Eternal Thou. All they can do is stand ready, listening, and if God wishes, then God will enter into relation and revelation will occur. The process is continuous and is not limited to any certain period of history. That God freely enters into this kind of relation is a sign for Buber of Divine providence.

What is the quality of this revelation? Is it God giving clear and precise instruction to humanity? No, Buber responds; Divine revelation contains no words! Buber writes, "Man receives, and he receives not a specific 'content' but a Presence, a Presence as power."[42] The I at that moment feels the indescribable presence of the Eternal and then he understands. The I emerges from this meeting intact and then interprets its significance. The record of this interpretation we later call revelation. Our purpose is to transmit the significance of the meeting to other human beings. In so doing, we bring God further

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[41] Ibid., p.56.

[42] I and Thou, p.110.

into our world. Buber writes:

> The revelation that then makes its appearance seizes in the totality of its constitution the whole elemental stuff that is thus prepared, melts it down, and produces in it a form that is a new form of God in the world.[43]

The encounter with the Eternal Thou is for Buber a providential moment. God uses it to help humanity. The knowledge we appropriate from the moment helps us work towards the good. Buber notes:

> God's speech to men penetrates what happens in the life of each one of us, and all that happens in the world around us, biographical and historical, and makes it for you and me into instruction, message, demand.[42]

The demand made depends upon the situation. For this reason Buber did not believe in a set system of unchanging commandments. Moses may have received the Torah on Mount Sinai, but all of its laws were not intended to be set for eternity. Halachah according to Buber should therefore be flexible. In a different situation, to a different person, the address may be different. This stance concerning Halachah made Buber unpopular with Jewish traditionalists.

One of the many problems that arise from Buber's attitude towards revelation is the possibility of misinterpretation. How does the individual distinguish between what he perceives to be God's word and delusion? Buber responds that it is up to the individual to act responsibly. He writes:

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[43] I and Thou, p.117.

[42] I and Thou, p.138.

> God tenders me the situation to which I have to answer; but I have not to expect that he should tender me anything of my answer. Certainly in my answering I am given into the power of his grace, but I cannot measure heaven's share in it, and even the most blissful sense of grace can deceive.[43]

The human being is therefore never sure of his or her situation. This is the reality of existence. We have to make sense of our world and work to achieve the good. God gives the command, but we have to rely upon our conscience to ensure that we are hearing correctly.[44]

Divine providence is then very much present in Buber's thought. God's providence is both general and particular. As creator God "tenders the situation" of existence to all beings. We are not told that God acts as guarantor of the species in terms of natural providence as other philosophers held, but we can assume that the creator God cares for the objects of creation. Particular providence is evident in God's relation to individuals. God enters into relation not necessarily with a group, but with individual "I's." Divine revelation is waiting to be communicated to any human being who will listen.

Does the God who is present to all, hovering over the object of creation, act to save those who are suffering via miraculous intervention? Buber's response to this question may be found in his analysis of the role of evil in human existence.

Evil

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[43] Martin Buber, Between Man and Man, op. cit., p.69.

[44] Ibid.

Concerning Buber's view of the problem of evil, Maurice Friedman writes,

> Buber's philosophy of dialogue is the source ultimately both for his answer to the question of what man is and the problem of evil. It is entering into relation that makes man really man; it is the failure to enter into relation that in the last analysis constitutes evil.[45]

If read without care, one could conclude from Friedman's statement that the responsibility for the existence of evil lies with human beings, but as we shall see, the decision whether or not to enter into relation also rests with God. As creator and independent actor, God, for Buber, is also responsible for the existence of evil.

The development of Buber's position concerning theodicy can be divided into two periods: pre-Holocaust and post-Holocaust. Prior to the Holocaust, Buber emphasized the centrality of human freedom. As free beings, humans are responsible for their actions. They have the capacity to pick and choose and can follow the way of the good or the way of evil. To Buber this freedom is limited by the existential situation. Human beings find themselves placed into certain situations not of their choice. We enter into a world formed by someone else, and the "we" that is entering into relation was also formed by this other power. The reality of the world and its limits result from the creative decision of the Divine Being. God is responsible for matter, and matter in and of itself is not evil. Buber stated, "The primary

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[45] Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue, op. cit., p.101.

word I-It is not evil--as matter is not of evil."[46] Here Buber seems to be echoing the positions of both Maimonides and Spinoza. The reality of the human situation with its natural limitations both of the human body and the planet, must be accepted as a given. That there is dynamism in the natural world is not evil, but necessary. Human beings enter into this situation and must accept it for what it is--reality. Miracles are not part of that situation for Buber. All creation is Divine and therefore all creation can be termed miraculous. The miracles mentioned in the Bible are actually human interpretations of "an occurrence experienced as a 'wonder,' that is, as an event which cannot be grasped except as an act of God."[47] Buber states,

> Miracle is not something "supernatural" or "superhistorical," but an incident, an event which can be fully included in the objective, scientific nexus of nature and history; the vital meaning of which, however, for the person to whom it occurs, destroys the security of the whole nexus of knowledge for him, and explodes the fixity of experience named "Nature" and "History."[48]

Such experience is mysterious -- God does enter into the situation, but such entering as accounted for by the Bible may be another way of expressing the I-Eternal Thou relation. That relation is very much a part of the existential situation.

Once in the situation, the human being is primarily free to

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[46] I and Thou, p.46.

[47] Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue, op. cit., p.234.

[48] Martin Buber, Moses, Humanities Press International, Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, 1988, p.78.

act, but the capacity to act is limited by the spheres of existence. If the individual remains in the world of It, then he or she relinquishes some freedom of action. "Causality has an unlimited reign in the world of It."[49] With entrance into relation in the sphere of Thou, the individual gains freedom. Freedom for Buber is the ability to decide. He writes, "Only he who knows relation and knows about the presence of the Thou is capable of decision."[50] In a Thou relation the individual becomes fully human and is capable of directing all energy into decision. In the sphere of Thou one can try to be free. Emphasis must be placed on trying, though, because even in the sphere of Thou, the individual does not entirely escape the forces of causality.

To Buber, all human beings have a destiny that is beyond their complete control. Human freedom is the ability to somewhat affect that destiny by living as much as possible in relation and gaining the power to make decisions. It is up to the individual to enter into a Thou relationship with existence and ultimately to seek out the eternal Thou. God will act providentially in relation by giving the individual the capacity to freely choose. Buber concluded:

> He who forgets all that is caused and makes decision out of the depths, who rids himself of property and raiment and naked approaches the Face, is a free man, and destiny confronts him as a counterpart of his freedom. It is not his boundary, but his fulfillment; freedom and destiny are linked together in meaning. And in this meaning destiny, with eyes a moment ago so

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[49] I and Thou, p.51.

[50] I and Thou, p.51.

> severe now filled with light, looks out like grace itself.[51]

Despite the human being's freedom to choose, evil cannot be avoided. It is integrated into reality. Buber asks, "How can an evil will exist, when God exists?"[52] No one knows the answer to this question, he tells us. And yet He acknowledges that "the finger of God" is partially responsible. He is indebted to Jewish tradition when he explains that all human beings are given by God both a yetzer tov (good inclination) and a yetzer ra (evil inclination). Which one holds sway is determined by the individual. If the evil inclination dominates then suffering will surely follow. All is not lost, though, because the individual can turn from evil ways and enter into relation with God. Friedman explains:

> Man's turning from evil and taking the direction toward God is the beginning of his own redemption and that of the world. God 'wishes to redeem us -- but only by our own acceptance of His redemption with the turning of the whole being.'[53]

Humans can then utilize evil for the good by turning from it. God wants the individual to do teshuvah (turning) and to then use the evil inclination, as Jewish tradition teaches, as a means of achieving the good, e.g., procreation.

Allowing the evil inclination to govern the soul is one

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[51] I and Thou, p.53.

[52] Martin Buber, Good and Evil, Charles Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1953, p.60.

[53] Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber: Life of Dialogue, op. cit., p.133.

example of evil caused by human beings. Another is exemplified by the Iranian Avestic myth concerning the origin of evil. According to Buber's interpretation of this myth, evil comes into being when misdirected humans determine that they are self-willed creatures. God has no role in their world. To Buber, any attempt to remove God from the world, to pretend that there is no Eternal Thou with whom to relate, is a manifestation of radical evil. This human self-centeredness is another kind of humanly caused evil.

Eclipse of God

After the Holocaust Buber added to his view of theodicy a concept he referred to as "The eclipse of God." This notion seems to be an extension of his understanding of evil as reflected by the Avestic myth. The human responsibility for the incursion of such an awful kind of evil as occurred during the Holocaust can be explained in terms of the relational construct. Instead of pursuing relation with each other as Thous and seeking out the Eternal Thou, Buber argues that humanity has let the power of It control the world. In place of the primary word I-Thou, only I-It is spoken. Modern society has made a god of the It world as it worships machines, industry, possessions --all aspects of human creation. Focusing only on It, human beings have in a sense pushed God out of their world. Buber writes:

> In our age the I-It relation, gigantically swollen, has usurped, practically uncontested, the mastery and the rule...This selfhood that has become omnipotent, with all the it around it, can naturally acknowledge neither

God nor any genuine absolute.[54]

The It, by taking over the world, then causes the light from heaven, the light of God to be blocked. This is the eclipse of God. God is not dead, Buber argues, as modern philosophy in the form of Nietzsche and Sartre submits. Instead, we have shut ourselves away from God. The expression "eclipse" is of course a metaphor. God is still extant, but a shadow caused by human action is blocking the flow of Divine light. The Divine-human relation has been temporarily severed by humanity.

Interestingly, because of the horrible destructive might of the Holocaust (and perhaps because of his commitment to mutuality in relation), Buber cannot fully blame the break in the Divine-human relation on humanity. God is also partially responsible, because for some inexplicable reason God has chosen to become silent and distant. After the Holocaust, Buber emphasizes the notion that God is also a self-concealing entity. He writes:

> God does not let Himself be conjured, but he also will not compel. He is of Himself, and He allows that which exists to be of itself...Through...giving and denying, man, the whole man with the decision of his whole being, may have an immeasurable part in the actual revelation or hiddenness of the divine.[55]

Human beings can attempt to bring God back into relation, but God can also decide to remain hidden.

Buber asks: Is it right for God to become hidden? He states, "How is a life with God still possible in a time in which there

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[54] Martin Buber, Eclipse of God, Humanities Press International, Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, 1988, p.129.

[55] Ibid., pp.75-6.

is an Auschwitz? The estrangement has become too cruel, the hiddenness too deep."[56] How can we even seek out relation, he asks, with such a God, who remained silent in the face of utter destruction? Buber concludes that the answer may be contained in the Biblical account of Job. He argues that like the victims of the Holocaust, Job's suffering was not just. The verbal answer that Job receives from God is insufficient, for no answer could be sufficient. Buber concludes, "The true answer that Job receives is God's appearance only."[57] Once again, God is no longer hidden from Job. The relation is renewed and Job has the pleasure of hearing God's address. This is the best that Job, and we who are like Job, can hope for--renewed presence of the Almighty.

After the Holocaust, Buber calls upon human beings to patiently:

> Await his voice, whether it comes out of the storm or out of a stillness that follows it. Though His coming appearance resemble no earlier one, we shall recognize again our cruel and merciful Lord.[58]

God is thus also free, to choose between the path of mercy and the path of cruelty. God may not actively do evil, but by hiding from or leaving the relational situation even if human beings have already abandoned it, God allows evil to persist.

Ultimately, for Buber, human beings live in tension between

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[56] Martin Buber, On Judaism, op. cit., p.224.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid., p.225.

freedom and destiny. This is our existential reality. Our responsibility is to seek out the good, to determine that we are going to be as free as possible by entering into relation with the Eternal Thou. If that Thou happens to be hidden, then humanity's best hope is to wait patiently for the eclipse to pass and then to enjoy the divine light as it once again warmly shines upon the world.

Buber, Maimonides, and Spinoza

In his writings Buber has little to say about Maimonides perhaps because his approach to the philosophical project differed so greatly from the rational systematic position of the Rambam. Rivka Horowitz makes the interesting observation that Buber differs:

> from Maimonides and other rationalistic thinkers, who hold that the knowledge of creation leads to the creator...Buber does not establish a contact between God and the world.[58]

Horowitz is correct in asserting that Buber places less emphasis than Maimonides on the pursuit of knowledge as a means of coming to know God. He also differs from Spinoza in this regard. For Buber a sterile, scientific approach to nature does not lead to a better understanding of God. And yet Horowitz's conclusion that Buber does not establish a connection between God and the world is misleading. Buber's God is immanent and transcendent. God is very much a part of the existential situation, but true knowledge of God only comes out of relation between I and Thou. Buber wants

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[58] Haim Gordon and Jochannan Bloch, op. cit., p.131.

the God seeker to live in the world of It and the world of Thou. The scientist should first look objectively at the tree for scientific knowledge and then enter into relation with the tree in order to appreciate the wholeness of life and on the edge of that relation encounter the Eternal Thou. Buber's position therefore need not contradict the Maimonidean emphasis on exploration of the natural world; it instead adds to and enriches it. Perhaps his scientific motto would have echoed that of Albert Einstein, who stated, "Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind." For Buber the two are inseparable; to truly know, human beings have to both study and love the world.

Buber called Spinoza "the greatest philosophical genius Judaism has given to the world."[80] He was especially impressed with Spinoza's placement of God at the center of his philosophical system. Buber finds a commonality with Spinoza concerning his concept of God. To Spinoza, God is substance; the Divine exists as the universe (actually as all of the universe). God is also real in the Buberian approach, and so Buber was appreciative of Spinoza's refusal to relegate God to a humanly-inspired concept.

Malcolm Diamond notes that Buber disagreed with Spinoza's conclusion that the battle against anthropomorphism must lead to the conclusion that God could not be open to human address. Diamond quotes Buber as saying:

Spinoza's fundamental mistake was that he imagined the

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[80] Martin Buber, On Judaism, op. cit., p.157.

> teaching of Israel to mean that God is a person; and he turned against this as a lessening of the Godhead. But the truth of the teaching lies in its insistence that God is also a person; and that stands over and against all impersonal, unapproachable 'purity' on the part of God as a heightening of the Godhead.[61]

Buber's God is not a physical person, but can and must be addressed as a person.

According to Buber, Spinoza correctly recognizes God's existence and even acknowledges that God loves the object of the Divine creation. Spinoza failed though, because:

> He recognized only the supreme aspect of the relation, but not its core, the dialogue between God and man--the divine voice speaking in what befalls man, and man answering in what he does or forbears to do.[62]

Buber then can also be understood as going beyond Spinoza's conception of God. Relation with the Divine Presence is at the core of Buber's thought, and dialogue with the Eternal Thou, which Spinoza did not understand, is for Buber not only possible, but necessary.

Conclusions

Buber is a fascinating thinker to study not only for his insightful teachings and poetic writing style, but also because he lived in the contemporary period and witnessed the cataclysmic events of the twentieth century. Buber therefore speaks our language; his existential situation was similar to our own. The angst we feel at not hearing God in dialogue was addressed by

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[61] Malcolm L. Diamond, Martin Buber, Jewish Existentialist, Oxford University Press, N.Y., 1960, p.45.

[62] Martin Buber, Eclipse of God, op. cit., p.17.

him, and his words of cautious hope may help us to patiently listen in silence a little longer.

A difficulty in analyzing his conception of Divine providence stems from the fact that he did not develop a philosophical system. His views on Divine providence are not clearly delineated, and yet, as this chapter has shown, one can delineate a Buberian position. In terms of general providence God is viewed as the creator of the existential situation. God formed the world and all that is in it. Buber, unlike Maimonides, does not assert that God in a sense serves as a guarantor of the system.[63] We do not know if God will protect the existence of the various species or will ensure the continued stability of the universe. Instead God gives us the situation, and that in itself is a miracle (indeed, all creation is a miracle). How one lives in the existential situation is ultimately determined by the individual. By entering into relation with others, by forming community, the human situation can be improved, but the choice to do so is ours.

Buber's philosophy of dialogue also allows for the possibility of particular providence. Individuals as well as groups have the opportunity to enter into relation with the Eternal Thou. God is potentially present for the human being

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[63] Moses Maimonides, The Guide of the Perplexed, op. cit., III:17, p. 473. There Maimonides states that his position concerning general providence is similar to that of Aristotle who held that the spheres, plant and animal species were all protected by God in the sense that their existence as a species was guaranteed.

(except in times of hiding) if the human is present for God. The I-Eternal Thou relation providentially aids human existence. It opens up another dimension of reality for the individual, allowing him or her to reach fulfillment. It is only in the I-Thou relation, Buber argues, that human beings become fully human. That God creates the opportunity for such fulfillment by means of relation can be understood as a manifestation of Divine providence.

A problem with the Buberian position is its reliance upon the mysterious. We cannot know what exactly happens in an I-Thou relation, and Buber does not succeed in describing it (in fact he claims that it is simply not possible). Is the theory of the I-Eternal Thou relation simply a religious delusion, based on subjective emotion, or does it point to an encounter that is real? Because Buber cannot adequately address this question, he is accused of leaving the realm of philosophy. Unlike that of Maimonides and Spinoza, his approach does not fully rely upon the use of pure reason.

The portrayal of humanity "walking on a narrow ridge" aptly describes the Buberian philosophic position. Perhaps Buber was correct in arguing that in talking about God in the modern period we have to walk along this narrow ridge. The terror of the twentieth century has shown that reason is limited in its ability to answer all questions and show the way to the good. In our existential situation we may have to reach beyond the narrow confines of a philosophy that limits reality according to the

descriptive capacity of human reason.

Buber adds to our understanding of Divine providence the notion that it may exist in the form of a Divine grace that allows the individual to become fully human. Like Maimonides and Spinoza, he concludes that ultimately the responsibility for fulfilling our potential, for becoming fully human, rests with humanity. Buber's teaching that we cannot permit the abandonment of the world to the forces of It, but should reach out to God and each other by seeking out the Thou of relation, exemplifies his confidence in humanity's ability to redeem evil and set the world aright. With patience, he believed, we will once again hear the voice of the Eternal Thou. As we work to better the world, we can hope along with Buber that God's hiding is not a permanent punishment, but a temporary aspect of our existential reality.

## CONCLUSION

> But You, O Lord, are enthroned forever, Your throne endures through the ages. Why have you forgotten us so utterly, forsaken us for all time? Take us back, O Lord, to Yourself, and let us come back; renew our days as of old!
> (Lamentations 5:19-21)

This melancholy appeal which closes the Book of Lamentations, ancient though it is, succinctly addresses the sense of frustration and hope felt by the modern person who longs to believe in the possibility of Divine providence. God, it would seem, has abandoned the world, forcing us to face alone the travails of evil and suffering that we encounter. The philosophical approaches presented in this thesis differ with such a conclusion. God, they posit, has not abandoned us, we have simply misunderstood God.

A consequence of modernity's fascination with the future, is the unfortunate tendency to forget the teachings of the past, or worse, to ignore the fact that there was a past in which others dealt with the same issues, agonized over the same problems, and attempted to develop intellectual frameworks that would help make sense of the human situation. As we begin to develop new perspectives on the possibility of Divine providence, it is far better for us to consider the teachings of the past and build upon them, than to begin completely anew. Taken together the perspectives of Maimonides, Spinoza, and Buber bridge eight hundred years of philosophical reflection. In all that time none of them claimed to have witnessed any sort of miraculous

intervention comparable to the miracles described in the Bible; none of them demanded that we depend chiefly, as Judah Halevi did, upon the claims of a reliable tradition. On the contrary, they found themselves in a situation in many ways similar to ours and they utilized the same tools that we depend upon to seek solutions to our dilemma: their minds and their ability to speculate and reason. Because of the many commonalities between our situation and theirs, we should be interested in the conclusion that these philosophers reached, namely, that Divine providence does exist in the world. Their methods and their views should prove helpful as we continue our own investigation.

Within a system that reflects the pervading influence of Aristotelianism, Maimonides argued in favor of the efficacy of Divine providence. A rationalist, so committed to the radical incorporeality of the godhead that he condemned the usage of anthropomorphic language, Maimonides nonetheless attempted to describe how God acts in (or better affects) the world. He asserted that the power of God, who may exist as unmoved mover at the outermost sphere of the universe, emanates throughout the universe. This power seems to be a force that reaches down to the lowest sphere, the earth. Maimonides does not explain how this emanating power operates, it is wrapped in mystery, but the force itself, is derived from God.

By means of this emanation, Maimonides argued that God acts providentially. He asserted that Divine providence is manifested in both general and particular forms. The existence of a world

filled with all that is necessary to support life, the fact that living beings possess instincts as well as physical capabilities that aid them i.e. senses, and the human capacity to reason and govern, are all examples of general providence. Every being is potentially capable of enjoying these aspects of Divine beneficence.

Particular providence, according to Maimonides, is available only to human beings because of their rational capacity. Through the development of the intellect, human beings can affect their existence. With knowledge, they can strive to unite with the Active Intellect and gain providential protection. God will not miraculously intervene to help alleviate their troubles, but will give them the ability to do so themselves. An individual who studies nature (and therefore comes to know more about God) will be able to affect his or her own situation and may utilize that knowledge to help others. The discovery of the "miracle" drug Penicillin exemplifies this form of providence. The mold from which it is derived probably existed for hundreds if not thousands of years, but discovery of its medicinal qualities depended upon painful research on the part of a few highly educated, aware, people.

Maimonides taught that evil is an unfortunate aspect of existence. Much of what we refer to as evil, he argued is a result of our own actions. God should not be faulted for the evil that we do to others as well as to ourselves. Other evils are primarily derivative of the human situation. The suffering that

human beings experience as a result of natural disaster, or disease, is the price paid for life. We are created from matter and matter must eventually disintegrate. For Maimonides then, the existence of evil does not preclude the possibility of Divine providence.

Despite the limitations of their situation, Maimonides asserted, human beings are free to act. God has providentially granted them the ability to affect their lives for the better by seeking to learn as much as possible about God and the world. For Maimonides, Divine providence is built into the system of existence. It is up to humanity to attempt to take advantage of God's providential bounty.

Spinoza's position on Divine providence varies little from the Maimonidean conception although it is more restrictive. Committed to pushing reason to its limits in his struggle to make sense of existence, Spinoza could not accept the possibility of particular providence. God, if God acts providentially at all, must treat all existing things similarly. It is irrational according to Spinoza, to posit that God saves one thing while at the same time allowing another to perish. Therefore, Spinoza asserted that general providence is the only possible form of Divine providence.

To Spinoza, God is the only free being because God is the only "cause of itself." Actually God is the only existent being. All other things proceed from God and are really extensions of God. These extensions or modes take on a semi-independent

existence. Each mode is dynamic and can affect its duration. Eventually it will be reabsorbed into the greater whole of God or Nature, but until then it lives and is capable of limited self-control.

The capacity of the individual mode to affect the quality and duration of its existence is for Spinoza a manifestation of Divine providence. Human beings, by developing their minds and coming to know their world (just as Maimonides asserted) can acquire adequate ideas and learn to improve their lives. With adequate ideas one can develop self control, learn to limit the effects of external forces, and create societies that will work for the benefit of human existence. Spinoza taught that nearly all human beings are capable of this kind of development. He called the acquisition of this kind of knowledge, "the blessedness of God."

His position on evil is very similar to Maimonides' view. Evil exists primarily as a result of human action. Other perceived evils are a consequence of existence. Everything exists as it does necessarily. Human beings for example, could be formed no other way, but must eventually disintegrate and take on a new form.

Ultimately for Spinoza, human potential is a sign of Divine providence. God is the basis of all existence because everything is in God. But everything is not controlled by God; nature is not mechanistic. God gives life to the modes and instills them with dynamism. God also providentially grants intellect to the human

being. Utilization of this God given ability, Spinoza concluded, can lead to blessedness and love of God.

Buber, as an existentialist, has a view of Divine providence that differs from that of Maimonides and Spinoza. For Buber, dependence upon reason is limiting when one is attempting to explain the workings of the universe. Interpretation of experience, including subjective emotional responses and interaction with other beings is also important as one struggles to make sense of existence. The requirement that every aspect of our understanding of existence meet the test of strict logic and reason is unrealistic. Not all experience can be fit into rational categories. Human beings possess personality, emotion, and even an inexplicable spiritual sense that should be accounted for in a philosophical system that pretends to be complete.

For Buber Divine providence is therefore not represented as the capacity to utilize the intellect as presented in the thought of Maimonides and Spinoza, but as the capacity to enter into relation with Divine. Buber restores the sense of personal contact between God and humanity to the concept of providence. God acted providentially by creating the universe, but God's providential activity did not stop their. God for the most part remains near to the earth and desires to enter into relation with human beings. For such relation to occur, the human must turn to God and be open to the possibility of living in the presence of the Eternal Thou.

Buber teaches that the I-Thou relation between human beings

and God proves to be providential in two ways. By entering into relation with a human being, God as Thou, helps the human to fully become an "I." This implies that a human being who never enters into such a relation, never fully develops as a person. God's presence, and willingness to enter into relation with humanity is therefore from a human perspective an important form of Divine providence. In relation, God also acts providentially by granting revelation to human beings. According to Buber, Torah, as well as all revealed literature derives from the I-Thou relation. While the literal words may not have been revealed at that moment, the person walks away from the relation with the sense of what needs to be communicated to others. God stimulates the individual while in relation, and the revelation is transmitted as a consequence of this Divine-human interaction.

For Buber, Divine providence is primarily particular. The individual enters into personal relation with God. General providence is also accepted by Buber, though discussion of it is not his main concern. God is depicted by Buber as creator of the world and we must assume that God gives all individuals the capacity to enter into relation.

Evil to Buber, exists as a result of both human reaction and Divine causation. All of the evils that we do to each other are of course our own responsibility. By focusing too much on the world of "It" human beings can push the "Thou" (God) out of their world. This results in an "eclipse" of God. But God, according to Buber, is also responsible for having created evil. God is

responsible for the good inclination and the evil inclination and God is seen by Buber as sometimes acting cruelly. God, he posits, at times abandons the human situation (i.e. the Holocaust) allowing human beings to suffer at the hands of others. Buber is not able to explain the reason for this Divinely caused eclipse of God. Nonetheless when this occurs, he argues, we must wait and hope for the return of the Divine presence. Humanity, for Buber, requires relation with God and the Divine providence that follows as a consequence of such relation.

The views of these three thinkers are most definitely not categorically irreconcilable. Progress may be made in our religious search by combining aspects of their positions. In the final years of the twentieth century, it may be possible to be both rationally inclined and spiritually open. By utilizing the gift of reason, we should continue in our struggle to improve the world. The systematic approaches of Maimonides and Spinoza applied to Buber's thought could enhance it. Buber asked after the Holocaust, "Where was God," but the more correct question is "Where was humanity?"

The emphasis that Buber placed on personal relation with God and particular providence, could be a meaningful element of a new conception of Divine providence. Reason alone does not succeed in describing all facets of existential reality. Human beings sense a spiritual aspect of existence, another, perhaps higher plane to strive toward. Even Maimonides presented the possibility of union with the Active Intellect, and Spinoza argued that we are really

one with God or Nature. That God can be present to us, and in that presence allow us to become fully human as Buber taught, rational as well as emotional, is an important assertion. The belief in such presence does not deny the centrality of reason, but helps direct it toward the good. The Divine presence may well be a significant dimension of our reality.

The quality of the Divine presence is barely touched upon by Buber. he concludes that one cannot really describe it. Buber, as well as Maimonides and Spinoza, dispels the commonly held notion that God is pristine "goodness," and acts only in a kindly fashion. To our three thinkers, God is not a purely benevolent being, but a power that fills the universe. Buber refers to God as "cruel and merciful," and his description does not vary greatly from the biblical perspective. In the Bible God can both demand that human beings act justly and threaten to completely wipe out the human race, Divine providence assumes the possibility of Divine power, but that power, according to these thinkers, does not include responsibility on the part of God to serve unalterably as Divine saviour. God, they teach, has providentially given us the capacity to develop on our own. If we fail in our task, God will not intervene. Perhaps a god constructed according to the human definition of "good" would do so, but the God of the philosophers is not a parent to the object of creation.

Maimonides, Spinoza, and Buber each posited that God grants humanity a certain level of freedom. Real freedom depends upon

the capacity to make choices. By providing human beings with intellect and the ability to acquire knowledge, God gives human beings the chance to choose life and by providentially allowing us to see the Thou in existence as opposed to the It, God gives us the desire to do so. The more we know, the better we are able to work to insure our survival and the survival of the world. The Biblical story of Adam and Eve emphasizes this concept. God lets Adam and Eve eat from the tree of knowledge because they must ultimately determine their future. To these thinkers Divine providence did not stop at the borders of the garden but continues to affect our lives today. We retain the capacity to think, choose, and ultimately to dwell in the Divine presence. Because of Divine providence we are still able, despite the vicissitudes of modern existence, to become fully human. The hope is that we will only try.

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