

The Book of Job as a Biblical "Guide of the Perplexed"

Raphael Jospe

Maimonides (Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, 1135–1204, known in Hebrew as Rambam) treats the biblical book of Job in two chapters (3:22–23) of his monumental *Guide of the Perplexed* (Arabic *Dalalat al-Ḥa'irin*; Hebrew *Moreh ha-Nevukhim*).¹ These two chapters form a subsection of a larger literary unit dealing with the theme of divine knowledge and providence (*Guide of the Perplexed* 3:16–24).² Scholars have devoted much attention to two separate subjects in Maimonides' *Guide*: first, his theory of providence in general and his interpretation of Job in particular, and second, his definition in the introduction to the *Guide* of the "perplexed" person for whom the *Guide* was written. After surveying these two seemingly unrelated subjects, I shall propose that they are not, in fact, unrelated. To the contrary, a study of Maimonides' careful use of terminology will show that the biblical character Job is, in his view, essentially the kind of "perplexed" person for whom he wrote the *Guide* and that the book of Job is, therefore, a sort of biblical "Guide of the Perplexed."

Maimonides' Theory of Providence

Divine Knowledge and Providence

In *Guide of the Perplexed* 3:16, Maimonides discusses the success of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous, which lead people to question God's knowledge of affairs in this world. The "philosophers" (meaning, in Maimonides' frame of reference, Aristotle, the ancient commentators on Aristotle, and the medieval Arabic Aristotelians)³ maintain that either God does not know of these injustices (because he is ignorant of the affairs of this world) or he does know of them. If God knows of them, then either he is responsible for these injustices, or he is impotent to do anything about them, or he has the power to do something but fails to do it. Given the absurdity of all three of these possibilities, which impute injustice or impotence to God (assuming that he actually knows what happens in this world), the philosophers conclude that God does not and cannot possess knowledge of this world. God cannot know the particulars of this world because particulars are apprehended sensibly (and God, having no body, has no bodily senses); because there is an infinity of particulars (and the infinite, by definition, cannot be known); and because particulars are produced in time, and, as they change, there would be a corresponding change in God's knowledge of them (and God is not subject to change). Instead of imputing injustice or impotence to God, the philosophers thus impute ignorance to God and thereby compound the problem they sought to resolve.⁴

In the next chapter (*Guide of the Perplexed* 3:17), Maimonides outlines five views regarding providence. The first view is that of Epicurus, who denied divine providence and believed that everything occurs by chance. The view of Epicurus was disproved, Maimonides argues, by Aristotle, who demonstrated the existence of natural order. The second view on providence is that of Aristotle, who maintained (in Maimonides' understanding) that God's governance extends to the heavenly spheres (which, accordingly, are incorruptible and exist eternally) and to the earthly sublunar sphere, but on earth only to the species (which, accordingly, are also permanent) and not to particular individuals, which exist by chance. The third view is that of the "orthodox" Ash'ariyyah school of the Kalam (Islamic theology),⁵ which affirms absolute determinism. Everything is determined by God's will, governance, and omniscience. Accordingly, this school denies the existence of natural order, chance, and human free will. The fourth view is that of the more moderate Mu'tazilah school of the Kalam, which affirms limited human free will, together with divine knowledge and wisdom. People are, therefore, justly rewarded or punished

in this world or in the world to come for their actions. The fifth view on providence is that of the Torah, which teaches that people and animals have free will, that freedom was established by God at the creation of the world itself, and that there is, therefore, just reward and punishment.

Maimonides then proposes what is, in effect, a synthesis of the second and fifth views, those of Aristotle and of the Torah. Providence, he affirms, applies in the sublunar realm only to species and not to individuals (as Aristotle believed), except for individual humans:

I believe that in this lower world, i.e., the sublunar [realm], divine providence applies only to individuals of the human species. Only in this species are all the affairs of individuals, and the good and evil that befall them, in accordance with what they deserve. ... But as for all the other animals, and all the more, plants and other things, my opinion is that of Aristotle ... that all of them are, in my view, due to pure chance, as Aristotle thought. (*Guide of the Perplexed* 3:17)⁶

Providence attaches to individual humans and not to animals or plants because “providence follows the divine [intellectual] emanation” and is proportionate to the intellectual development of the individual. To the extent that the individual human develops his or her intellectual faculty, he or she transcends his or her individual bodily limitations and participates in universal knowledge and reason. To this extent, he or she thus benefits from divine providence. Intellectual apprehension also provides (as Maimonides postulates elsewhere) a basis for immortality: the body and the lower functions of the soul that enliven the bodily organs perish, but the intellect survives in proportion to its actualization in knowledge.⁷ The individual human being, by virtue of intellectual apprehension, thus acquires aspects of universality and permanence, which make providence possible on the level of the particular individual. Providence can attach, therefore, to individual humans but not to individual animals or plants.

Maimonides thus bridges the moral requirement, imposed by the Torah, that each individual be both responsible and accountable for his or her behavior in a providential sense, and the philosophic requirement, imposed by Aristotle, that providence can apply only to things that are universal and permanent.

The Book of Job

In the *Guide of the Perplexed* 3:22–23, Maimonides analyzes the book of Job, which, in his view, is a parable (Arabic *mathal*; Hebrew *mashal*)⁸ explaining diverse views on providence. The lesson of this biblical parable, as Maimonides understands it, is that Job erred not morally but intellectually.⁹ In addition, the positions represented by Job and his three associates Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, as well as Elihu, correspond to four of the five views on providence discussed above (in *Guide of the Perplexed* 3:17). Only the view of Epicurus, denying providence and affirming that everything happens by chance, is not represented in the book of Job because all the book’s characters agree that God knows and ultimately is the direct or indirect cause of what happens to Job.

Regarding the first point—that Job erred intellectually and not morally—Maimonides points out that Job is described in the beginning of the book as being moral and righteous in his behavior but is not described as “wise,” “understanding,” or “intelligent” (Hebrew *akham*, *mevin*, or *maskil*). Had Job been wise, his situation would not have caused him to have serious doubts regarding divine justice. This is the reason Satan is permitted to “touch” Job’s body, family, and possessions but not his “soul” (*nefesh*) (Job 2:6). For Maimonides, the “soul” means the intellect. Job’s error was intellectual, not moral, and therefore Job had to be able, on his own at the end of the book, to arrive at a proper theoretical understanding of divine justice. We shall return later to this fundamental lesson of the book.

Regarding the second point, all five protagonists in the story (Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Elihu) are in agreement about the facts: Job was innocent and righteous, God knew what was happening to Job and, despite Job's innocence, caused him to suffer. They agree about the facts but differ as to their interpretation. Therefore, the book has no place for the Epicurean view—denying providence and affirming only chance—which is inconsistent with these basic facts.

Maimonides then correlates the various philosophical positions regarding providence, which he discussed previously, with the views of the protagonists of the biblical story. For Maimonides, each philosophical position is reflected in a key verse in the speeches of each of these characters in the book of Job.

First, Job's own position is identified by Maimonides with Aristotle's affirmation of only general providence attaching to the species and denial that divine providence extends to individual humans. Job concludes that there is no difference in God's eyes between the righteous and the wicked: "It is all one; therefore, I have said: He destroys the innocent and the wicked" (Job 9:22).

Second, Maimonides identifies the position of Eliphaz with the view of the Torah, that man has free will and is, therefore, justly rewarded and punished for his actions. Job, according to Eliphaz, deserved his punishment, on account of his sins: "Is not your evil great, and your transgressions without end?" (Job 22:5).

Third, Bildad represents the view of the Mu'tazilah school of the Kalam, which affirms that people are justly punished and that God can compensate for people's unwarranted suffering in this world with reward in the world to come: "If you are pure and upright, [God] will arise for you and reward the habitation of your righteousness. Although your beginning was small, your end will increase greatly" (Job 8:6–7).

The fourth position is that of Zophar, who, Maimonides proposes, represents the view of the Ash'ariyyah school of the Kalam—that everything is determined exclusively by God's will, and we should neither question it nor seek reasons for what he wills: "But would that God would speak and open his lips against you; and tell you the secrets of wisdom. ... Can you find out the range of God? Can you find out the purpose of the Almighty?" (Job 11:5–7).

The fifth view is that of Elihu, who reviews the points raised by Job's three associates but adds to them the notion of an intercessor angel (Job 33:23), symbolizing the prophetic understanding that Job attains at the end of the book, finally resolving his doubts.¹⁰ Only then does Job truly comprehend the intellectual error that led him to question God's justice.

Job's Intellectual Error

Job's intellectual error, which he recognized only as a result of the prophetic experience of God's addressing him "out of the storm" (Job 38:1), was his failure to understand that just as the divine creation of nature in no way resembles artificial human production, so there is no similarity between the divine providential governance of the cosmos and human governance over those things that are in our power. The purpose of the book, accordingly, is to teach us that terms like *governance* and *providence* are properly applied to God only equivocally. The person who understands this theoretical truth will be able to bear his material misfortunes lightly.

In Maimonides' words:

The notion of his providence is not the same as our notion of providence, nor is the notion of his governance of his creatures the same as our governance of whatever we govern. [The two notions]

cannot be included in the same definition, *as every perplexed person* thinks, and they have nothing in common except their name. Similarly, our action does not resemble his action, and cannot be included in the same definition. Just as natural actions differ from artificial actions, so do the divine governance of, and the divine providence over, and the divine purpose for those natural things differ from our governance of, our providence over, and our purpose for whatever we govern, provide for, and intend. This is the intention of the whole book of Job; I mean to establish this foundation of belief, and to alert [us] to what should be inferred from natural subjects, so that you not err and seek in your imagination that his knowledge is like our knowledge, or that his purpose and providence and governance are like our purpose and providence and governance. When a person knows this, it will be easy for him to bear all his suffering lightly, and his suffering will not cause him any more doubts about God and whether [God] does or does not know, whether he exercises providence or neglect. Rather, he will increase his love, as it says at the end of this prophecy: “Therefore I abhor and repent, on account [of my being] dust and ashes.” (Job 42:6; *Guide of the Perplexed* 3:23)¹¹

Job thus realizes, because of the prophetic revelation he receives in the storm, that he has erred intellectually, although he has not sinned practically. He was righteous, but not wise. On account of his suffering, he had doubted God’s providence and governance of the world. This doubt resulted from his fundamental misunderstanding and fallacious belief that divine governance and providence are analogous to human governance and providence. Only now has he come to understand that governance and providence can only be attributed equivocally to God. It is only, then, at the end of the story that Job attains this theoretical realization of his intellectual error. Previously, Job suffered from the intellectual fallacy of thinking that the two notions—divine and human governance and providence—can be “included in the same definition, *as every perplexed person* thinks.” Now Job comes to know God “with a certain knowledge,” whereas he previously had only known God based on “tradition” (Arabic *taqlīd*; Hebrew *qabbalah*).¹² Therefore, Job now, at the end, understands that the knowledge of God constitutes ultimate human happiness and that material misfortunes should not dominate his concern, while previously, in his ignorance, Job had imagined that bodily health, wealth, and children are the ultimate goal (Arabic *ghāyah*; Hebrew *takhlit*). “Therefore [Job] was *perplexed by such perplexities* and said the things that he said.”¹³ Now that he finally has a proper perspective, based on his correct understanding of the equivocal nature of divine governance and providence and of the true purpose of life, Job is no longer perplexed.

Who Is the Perplexed Person?

The *Guide of the Perplexed* was written in the form of a letter from Maimonides to a favored disciple, Joseph ben Judah.¹⁴ In his introduction to the book, Maimonides gives as his first purpose to “explain” terms in scripture that cause “great pain and perplexity.” Such equivocal, metaphorical, or ambiguous terms, when taken literally, contradict reason and therefore perplex the religious person who believes in scripture but has also been exposed to philosophy. The second purpose of the book, similarly, is to explain “obscure parables” in scripture that, when read literally rather than figuratively, similarly cause “great perplexity.”

Who is the person who suffers from such “great perplexity”? Maimonides describes him thus:

The purpose of this treatise is to arouse a religious person, whose soul has become accustomed to affirming the truth of our Torah, who is perfect in his religion and moral qualities, who has studied the sciences of the philosophers and knows their subjects, whom the human intellect has attracted to dwell in its realm. He is distressed by the literalist understanding of the Torah and [by] what he is unable to comprehend of these equivocal, metaphorical, or ambiguous terms, and so he remains perplexed and confused. If he follows his intellect and discards what he knows of these terms, he will then think that he has discarded the foundations of the Torah. Or, if he remains with what he understood of them and does

not follow his intellect and turns his back on it and moves away from it, he would cause a loss to himself and damage to his religion ... and he will not stop suffering from heartache and great perplexity. This treatise has a second purpose, which is to explain very obscure parables appearing in the books of the prophets, but it was not made explicit that they are parables. So it would appear to an ignorant or foolish person that they have only an external meaning and have no inner meaning. When one who knows the truth looks at them and takes them literally, he also experiences a great perplexity. But when we explain that parable or call his attention to its being a parable, he will find the correct way and be saved from this perplexity. That is why I call this treatise: the *Guide of the Perplexed*. ... In this treatise I address a person who has philosophized, as I have mentioned, who knows the true sciences, and who [also] believes in the subjects of religion and is perplexed about their meaning, because of the ambiguous terms and parables.¹⁵

The Book of Job as a Biblical “Guide of the Perplexed”

When we compare Maimonides’ description of his purposes in writing the book and of the characteristics of the perplexed person in the introduction to the *Guide of the Perplexed* with his description of the purposes of the book of Job and of the character of Job in *Guide of the Perplexed* 3:22–23, we find remarkable parallelisms, both terminological and substantive, between these two seemingly unrelated passages.¹⁶

Parallelisms	Purpose of the <i>Guide</i> and Character of the Perplexed Person (<i>Guide</i> , introduction)	Purpose of the Book of Job and Character of Job (<i>Guide</i> 3:22–23)
1. Affirmation of the truth of the Torah	A religious person, whose soul as become accustomed to affirming the truth of our Torah,	When the story of Job was postulated, or when it occurred, what was agreed among the five, that is, Job and his associates, was [the opinion of the Torah on providence, namely,] that whatever happened to Job was known to God, and that God had caused these troubles. . . . ¹⁷ [Job] knew God only on the basis of tradition (<i>taqlid</i> ; qabbalah), in the manner of the masses who [observe] the Torah.
2. Perfect in religion	who is perfect in his religion	careful to shun sin
3. Perfect in moral qualities	and moral qualities	righteous, perfect, and just in his actions . . . Moral virtue and righteousness in actions are attributed to him.
4. Does not understand equivocal nature of terms	He is distressed by the literalist understanding of the Torah and [by] what he is unable to comprehend of these equivocal, metaphorical, or ambiguous terms	Job was not described as [possessing] knowledge; it did not say that he was a wise, understanding, or intelligent person. . . . [Job] said everything that he did because he had no knowledge, and knew God only on the basis of tradition, in the manner of the masses who [observe] the Torah. . . . The notion of his providence is not the same as our notion of providence nor is the notion of his governance the same as our governance of whatever we govern. [The two notions] cannot be included in the same definition, as every perplexed person thinks, and they have nothing in common except their name.
5. Therefore, perplexed about the Torah or God	And so he remains perplexed and confused. . . . who believes in the subjects of religion and is perplexed about their meaning, because of the ambiguous terms and parables.	Know and consider how the story was postulated, which has perplexed people and led them [believe] the opinions we explained above, regarding God’s providence over what he created. . . . Therefore [Job] was perplexed by such perplexities and said the things that he said.
6. Purpose of the book: to remove perplexity	The first purpose of this treatise is to explain the meanings of terms appearing in the books of prophecy. . . . The purpose of this treatise . . . is the true knowledge of the Torah. . . . When we explain that parable or call his attention to its being a parable, he will find the correct	[The two notions] cannot be included in the same definition, as every perplexed person thinks, and they have nothing in common except their name. . . . This is the intention of the whole book of Job; I mean to establish this foundation of belief and to alert [us] to what should be inferred from natural subjects, so that you not err and seek in your imagination that his knowledge is like our knowledge, or that his purpose and providence and governance are like our purpose and providence and governance.

	way and be saved from this perplexity.	
7. Understanding parables correctly	to explain very obscure parables appearing in the books of the prophets, but it was not made explicit that they are parables.	The wonderful and marvelous story of Job . . . is a parable explaining people's opinions on providence. . . . In general, "whether he existed or did not exist," in such cases, which always exist, all people who examine <i>have become perplexed</i> ..

Finally, Maimonides' treatment of the book of Job as a parable (with all due credit to the talmudic interpretation of Job to that effect) is also strikingly similar to his discussion of parables in the introduction to the *Guide of the Perplexed*. In the introduction, Maimonides proposes that when he has explained the general meaning of a parable, the reader should not search for further details, which tend to divert one's attention from the parable's intention. Indeed, it should generally suffice merely to point out that the parable is a parable, at which point its inner meaning will usually become evident.

Maimonides' treatment of the book of Job accords with these guidelines. He begins his discussion (in *Guide of the Perplexed* 3:22) with the statement that the book is a parable and was thus understood by talmudic rabbis. Even those rabbis who did assume that Job was a historical figure rather than the subject of a fictional parable certainly considered the dialogues of God and Satan to be a parable, not fact. Maimonides thus fulfills his first point regarding the treatment of parables: their status as parables must be made explicit. He then fulfills his next point regarding parables: one should not go into excessive details, which merely confuse the reader and conceal the lesson of the parable. Rather, where the mere fact of the story's being a parable does not make the parable's lesson self-evident, one needs to explicate and emphasize the general lesson of the parable, bringing out its inner meaning without confusing matters by delving into irrelevant details. This Maimonides does masterfully by cutting through the lengthy drama of the book and briefly and succinctly identifying each of its five major protagonists with a different philosophical or religious stance.

In conclusion, our comparison of Maimonides' language in the introduction to the *Guide of the Perplexed* and his discussion of the book of Job in *Guide of the Perplexed* 3:22–23 brings out the striking similarity of ideas and terminology. As Maimonides explicitly stressed in the introduction, he did not write the book loosely, nor use terms haphazardly.¹⁸ His repeated use of the term *perplexed* or *perplexity* in the discussion of Job cannot, therefore, be accidental or coincidental. Point for point, Job fits Maimonides' description of the perplexed student in the introduction. Admittedly, Job is not described by Maimonides as having studied philosophy, as was the perplexed student.¹⁹ On the other hand, Job's own position—that providence does not extend to individuals (based on Job 9:22)—is equated by Maimonides with the Aristotelian denial of individual providence. All the other positions (of Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Elihu) are identified not with the philosophic opinion but with various religious views (the views of the Torah, the Mu'tazilah Kalam, the Ash'ariyyah Kalam, and Elihu's introduction of the angel, representing prophetic revelation). Job himself thus represents, in Maimonides' reconstruction of the biblical drama, the philosophic stance of Aristotle.

Job, like Maimonides' student, is perplexed because of his failure to understand the equivocal nature of biblical "God language," specifically the equivocal nature of God's providence, purpose, and governance. It is only when Job makes the spiritual transition from blind belief, based on tradition, to a rational knowledge of God that he can correct his intellectual error and his perplexity can be resolved.

The perplexed student of the *Guide of the Perplexed* experiences a three-stage intellectual and spiritual "pilgrim's progress." In the first stage he is a simple religious Jew, without any exposure to philosophy and science. His blind religious belief is based on tradition. He is not yet the student in whom Maimonides is interested and whom he warmly wishes to encourage. He is not (yet) perplexed but merely ignorant of philosophy and science. It is only in

the second stage that the student becomes perplexed by the apparent contradictions between faith and reason because of his exposure to philosophy. It is the student at this stage for whom Maimonides wrote the *Guide of the Perplexed*. The *Guide* is intended, as its name makes explicitly clear, to lead the perplexed student to the third stage—namely, to a more mature and sophisticated understanding of the equivocal nature of biblical terminology. This is the ultimate level of the student’s development, which Maimonides calls “the true knowledge of the Torah.”

These three stages are all to be found in Maimonides’ *Job*. In the first stage, at the very beginning of the book “when the story of Job was postulated,” Job was a simple, pious person whose belief was blind and based on tradition: “[Job] knew God only on the basis of tradition, in the manner of the masses who [observe] the Torah.” At that early point, the position of Job was the same as the position of Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Elihu. All five affirmed the “opinion of the Torah,” or in other words, “that whatever happened to Job was known to God and that God had caused these troubles.” In the second stage, much later in the book, Job has progressed from this simple, blind belief in the religious position to a more sophisticated, although also ultimately erroneous, philosophical position—namely, that of Aristotle—when he concluded that there is no individual human providence: “It is all one; therefore, I have said: He destroys the innocent and the wicked” (Job 9:22). Thus, of the five stated positions, only Job’s position is philosophical.²⁰ Some of the others may also have made some progress; Bildad and Zophar have progressed from blind traditional faith to somewhat more sophisticated Kalam positions, but those positions are (in Maimonides’ negative assessment of the Kalam)²¹ far from philosophical in their method and far from true in their conclusions. Only Job, then, has progressed from philosophical ignorance (the first stage) to philosophical perplexity (the second stage), whereas the other four protagonists in the story have all failed to make any true spiritual progress and remain unperplexed in their ignorant Kalam certitude or blind religious faith. At the end of the book, Job finally comes to the third stage, “the true knowledge of the Torah,” when he understands the equivocal nature of God’s providence, purpose, and governance, at which point, like Maimonides’ student, Job can “find the correct way and be saved from this perplexity.”

Taking it one step further, just as Job fits Maimonides’ description of the perplexed student for whom he wrote the *Guide*, so does the purpose of the book of Job (as Maimonides understands it) thus fit his description of the purpose of the *Guide of the Perplexed*. The purpose of both books is to resolve the perplexity of one who doubts religious teaching on philosophical grounds by correcting the intellectual error of equating divine actions with human actions. The biblical book of Job, like the *Guide of the Perplexed*, leads a person to knowledge of God by emphasizing how little we actually know and how completely equivocal the terms describing God’s actions are. As Maimonides thus understands the book of Job, it is, essentially, a biblical “Guide of the Perplexed.”

Notes

1. The Judeo-Arabic edition of the book—the form in which the text was originally written—was published by Isaac Joel (Jerusalem, 1931), based on the mid-nineteenth-century edition of Salomon Munk. The standard medieval Hebrew translation is that of Samuel ibn Tibbon, of which the best edition is that of Yehudah ibn Shmuel (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1987), based on his earlier annotated editions. Two contemporary Hebrew translations exist. Yosef Kafih published a parallel Judeo-Arabic and Hebrew edition (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1972), and Michael Schwarz an annotated Hebrew edition (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1996). The best complete English translation is that of Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963). An annotated edition of Michael Friedlander’s English translation (London: Trübner, 1881) was published by Hebrew Publishing Company (New York, 1881), and a paperback edition without the notes was issued by Dover (New York, 1956). Selections were also translated by Lenn E. Goodman in *Rambam: Readings in the Philosophy of Moses Maimonides* (New York: Viking, 1976).

2. The first to raise questions about Maimonides’ theory of providence was Samuel ibn Tibbon, medieval Hebrew translator of the *Guide of the Perplexed*. Cf. Zvi Diesendruck, “Samuel and Moses ibn Tibbon on Maimonides’ Theory of Providence,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 11 (1936): 341–65. Cf. Robert Eisen, “Samuel ibn Tibbon on

the Book of Job,” *AJS Review* 24/2 (1999): 263–300. The recent scholarly literature in English on Maimonides includes Martin D. Yaffe, “Providence in Medieval Aristotelianism: Moses Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas on the Book of Job,” *Hebrew Studies* 20–21 (1979–80): 62–74; Jacob Levinger, “Maimonides’ Exegesis of the Book of Job,” in *Creative Biblical Exegesis: Christian and Jewish Hermeneutics through the Centuries*, ed. Benjamin Uffenheimer and Henning G. Reventlow (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1988), 81–88; Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, “Medieval Biblical Commentary and Philosophical Inquiry as Exemplified in the Thought of Moses Maimonides and St. Thomas Aquinas,” in *Moses Maimonides and His Time*, ed. Eric L. Ormsby (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1989), 101–20.

3. See the discussion of these sources in Shlomo Pines’s introduction to his English translation of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, “The Philosophic Sources of the *Guide of the Perplexed*.”

4. In *Guide of the Perplexed* 3:19–21, Maimonides refutes the philosophic arguments against God’s knowledge of sensible particulars. Our doubts regarding God’s knowledge arise from our own ignorance. God knows sensible particulars from the aspect of being their creator. Human knowledge is consequent on reality, but reality is consequent on God’s knowledge of it as its creator. The error of the philosophers’ arguments against divine knowledge of particulars arises in the fallacy that human knowledge (which follows from created reality) and divine knowledge (which establishes created reality) are in some respect synonymous. For Maimonides, the term *knowledge* is thus applied to God and to humans purely equivocally. God, in knowing himself, knows what derives from his acts—namely, existing things. Any apparent contradictions, such as those suggested by the philosophers, arise from the fallacious analogy of divine and human knowledge.

5. The most important general studies of the Kalam are those of Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), and *Repercussions of the Kalam in Jewish Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).

6. My translation; cf. Kafih ed., 513–14, and Pines trans., 471.

7. Maimonides discusses intellectual immortality in his commentary to the Mishnah, *Peraq Heleq* (M *Sanhedrin* 10). Arnold Wolf’s English translation of this passage was published in Isadore Twersky, ed., *A Maimonides Reader* (New York: Behrman House, 1972), 401–23.

8. Maimonides cites the talmudic statement that “Job never existed, but was a parable” (TB *Bava Batra* 15a).

9. Yaffe, “Providence in Medieval Aristotelianism,” 62, points out what he calls “the very symmetry of Maimonides’ and Aquinas’ differences of interpretation. Whereas Maimonides argues that God’s answer to Job’s question about divine providence implies that Job himself, though perfectly just, remains unwise, Aquinas argues, on the contrary, that Job, though perfectly wise, is unjust.”

10. Levinger, “Maimonides’ Exegesis of the Book of Job,” 84, identifies Elihu’s view with Maimonides’ own “secret” (that is, esoteric) position. Yaffe, “Providence in Medieval Aristotelianism,” 62, also maintains that Maimonides (and Aquinas) wrote esoterically about Job but does not make this identification. Dobbs-Weinstein, “Medieval Biblical Commentary,” 116, is of the opinion that Maimonides and Aquinas “both clearly differentiate their views from Elihu’s and Job’s.”

11. My translation, emphasis added; cf. Kafih ed., 541; Pines trans., 496.

12. On *taqlid* and other terms for different types of tradition, see my articles “Sa’adiah Ga’on and Moses Mendelssohn: Pioneers of Jewish Philosophy,” in *Paradigms in Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Raphael Jospe (Madison, Wis.: Associated University Presses, 1997), 37–59; “Sa’adiah Ga’on’s ‘Reliable Tradition’: Who Are the ‘Community of the Monotheists?’” (in Hebrew), *Da’at: A Journal of Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah* 41 (summer 1998): 5–18.

13. My translation, emphasis added; cf. Kafih ed., 537; Pines trans., 493.

14. Maimonides’ disciple is usually identified as Joseph ben Judah ibn ‘Aqnin (ca. 1150–1220), a Spanish philosopher and poet. That identification is highly suspect. The disciple is more likely Joseph ben Judah ibn Shim

15. *Guide of the Perplexed*, introduction, my translation; cf. Kafih ed., 3–5; Pines trans., 5–6.

16. My translations.

17. In other words, at the beginning of the story, Job and his associates affirm the position of the Torah. During the course of the story, as a result of Job’s suffering, they all come to different conclusions and represent the various points of view discussed above, at which time Job adopts the Aristotelian view negating individual, personal providence.

18. See Leo Strauss, “How to Begin to Study *The Guide of the Perplexed*,” introductory essay to the Shlomo Pines translation of the *Guide*, xi–lvi. For a different perspective on Maimonides’ literary approach and the structure of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, see Raphael Jospe, “Gan ‘Eden Peraqav Shel ha-Moreh (On the Number and Division of Chapters in the *Guide of the Perplexed*),” in *Shlomo Pines Jubilee Volume* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1988), 387–97.

19. Eisen, “Samuel ibn Tibbon,” 293–94, points out “a philosophical problem in Maimonides’ reading of Job. Maimonides sees Job as a figure who initially has only moral perfection, but by the end of the story achieves intellectual perfection as well. The question that seems to have been in [Samuel] ibn Tibbon’s mind is how Job in fact achieved this latter perfection. Maimonides consistently depicts the process of philosophical education as a long and laborious one; and yet there is no indication on Maimonides’ part as to how and when Job went through this process. In fact, if we take the story at face value, it would seem implausible that Job would have become intellectually perfect after a few—albeit lengthy—conversations with his friends. ... Ibn Tibbon was moved by these considerations to posit a reading that is much more realistic from a philosophical standpoint: Job simply did not achieve intellectual perfection, but only an appreciation of its value as a prerequisite for immortality. He therefore did not experience prophecy.”

20. Yaffe, “Providence in Medieval Aristotelianism,” 65–66, recognizes that Maimonides’ Job “stands in need of a quest for wisdom, i.e., ... must become a philosopher” but does not make the explicit connection between Job and Maimonides’ perplexed student.

21. Maimonides discusses and criticizes the Kalam in *Guide of the Perplexed* 1:71–76. Before Maimonides, Judah ha-Levi had also discussed the principles of the Kalam in *Kuzari* 5:15–18.