

31. The Guide of the Perplexed

Book I

Chapter 51

Many things obviously and manifestly exist. Some of these are primary intellectual concepts and sensory impressions, others, things close to these in character. Even if left to his own devices, a man would not need anyone to point these out to him. Such are the existence of movement and man's freedom to act, the phenomena of generation and corruption, and the nature of things apparent to the senses, such as the heat of fire and coolness of water, and many suchlike things.

Since some strange views have been put forward, by error or with some ulterior motive, views which contradict the nature of existing things by denying what is perceived by the senses or implying the existence of the non-existent, philosophers have been compelled to assert the truth of the manifest or to deny the existence of things wrongly imagined. Thus we find Aristotle asserting the existence of movement because it had been denied, or producing evidence against the existence of atoms because it had been asserted.

Our denial of essential attributes in God belongs to this type of argument. It is really a primary intellectual concept, namely, that the attribute is something different from the essence of that to which it is attributed; that it is a state of the essence and therefore an accident. If the attribute is itself the essence of the thing to which it is attributed, then the attribute is either a mere verbal repetition, as would be saying 'man is man,' or an explanation of a term, as saying 'man is a reasoning animal.' For 'reasoning animal' is the essence and nature of 'man.' The proposition does not contain a third term except 'animal' and 'reason-

ing,' i.e. 'man,' who is completely described only by the combination of the two terms.¹ The function of this description² is to explain the term, no more, as if one said 'the thing which is called man is the thing which is compounded of life and reason.'

It is thus evident that an attribute must be one of two things. Either it is the essence of the thing to which it is attributed, and thus an explanation of a term. This kind of attribute we reject with reference to God, not for this reason but for another one, which we shall explain later on. Or the attribute is different from the thing to which it is attributed, and thus an idea added to that thing. Consequently that attribute is an accident of that essence. By protesting that the attributes of God are not accidents, we cannot alter the fact that they are. Every new idea added to the essence is accessory to it, not completing its inherent character; that is exactly what 'accident' means.

Furthermore, if the attributes are many, then many things must have existed eternally. Belief in Unity cannot mean essentially anything but the belief in one single homogeneous uncompounded essence; not in a plurality of ideas but in a single idea. Whichever way you look at it, and however you examine it, you must find it to be one, not dividing itself in any manner or for any reason into two ideas. No plurality must be discoverable in it either in fact or in thought, as will be proved in the course of this treatise.

Chapter 52

Whenever anything has an attribute affirmed of it, and we say of it: it is so-and-so, that attribute must fall under one of five headings:

Firstly, the thing may be described by its definition; thus man can be described as a reasoning animal. An

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1. Or: no third term is available for the definition of man, except 'animal' and 'reasoning.'

2. Arabic has the same word for 'attribute' and 'description.'

attribute of this type indicates what the thing is (its quiddity). We have proved that this is nothing but an explanation of the name. This type of attribute is generally agreed to be inadmissible in the case of God, since there are no pre-existing causes that could be causes of His existence so that He might be defined by means of them. For this reason all thinkers who use their terms precisely are entirely agreed that God cannot be defined.

Secondly, something may be described by a part of its definition. Thus man may be described as 'animal' or as 'reasoning.' The point about such attributes is their inherent mutual connection with the things to which they are attributed. If we say 'every man has reason' that can mean nothing else but that every being that proves to be human will also prove to be gifted with reason. This type of attribute is universally regarded as inadmissible with regard to God, for if there were such a thing as a part of His quiddity, His quiddity would be compound. This is just as absurd with reference to God as the assertion disposed of in the last paragraph.

Thirdly, something may be described by means of a thing outside its nature and essence, something not required for the complete establishment of its essence. That thing would therefore be a quality adherent to it. Quality, i.e. the category, is an accident. If an attribute of this type were to be ascribed to God, He would be subject to accidents. Merely to mention this is enough to show how far removed from His nature and essence it is to consider him as possessing qualities.

Well may one wonder that those who ascribe attributes to God find it possible to deny that He can be compared or has qualities. They say 'God cannot be qualified.' What can that mean except that He has no qualities? Yet whenever one asserts the essential attachment of any attribute to an essence, it must either constitute that essence, and thus be the essence itself, or, be a quality of that essence.

These three classes of attributes, viz. those describing what the thing is, those describing part of what it is, and those describing a quality of what it is, have thus been demonstrated to be inadmissible with reference to God, because they all imply compositeness. This, as we shall prove later, cannot be admitted with reference to God.

The fourth class of attributes is that which describes a thing in relation to something else, such as time, place or other individual. Thus you may describe Zayd as the father of A, or as the partner of B, or as living in C, or as one who lived in year X. This type of attribute does not imply plurality or change in the substance of the thing described, because it is all the same Zayd who is the father of Bakr and the partner of Umar or the employer of so-and-so, or the friend of someone else, or who lives in a certain house or was born in a certain year. These relations are not his substance or have anything to do with his substance, as would have been the case with qualities.

At first glance it seems as if this type of attribute could be applied to God. On closer consideration, however, they prove to be inadmissible. It is obvious that God cannot stand in any relation to time and place. Time is an accident pursuant to motion, namely when the latter is considered from the point of view of sequence and thus becomes measurable, as is explained in works devoted to this subject. Motion is a thing that attaches to bodies. God is not a body, and therefore there can be no relation between Him and time. Similarly no relation is possible between Him and space. The question to be discussed is whether there is any relation, in the proper sense, between Him and any thing created by Him, so that this might be applied as an attribute.

It is obvious at the first glance that there is no correlation between Him and any of His creatures, since an essential feature of correlation is the mutuality through equality of the two related terms. God, however, *must* exist, and everything else *may* exist, as we shall explain later, and therefore correlation is unthinkable. One might think that some other type of relation is possible between the two, but this is not so. One cannot imagine any relation between intellect and a colour, though both have the same kind of existence according to our system. How then can we imagine a relation between a thing and Him who shares no common trait with anything outside Him at all, for the term 'existence' is only applied to Him as well as to creatures by way of homonymy and in no other way. There is, therefore, no possible true relation between Him and anything He has created, because relation can at any time be only between two things of the

same immediate species, but if they are merely of the same class no relation can exist between them. We cannot say ‘this red colour is stronger, or weaker, than, or equal to, that green colour,’ though both of them belong to the same class, that of colours. If the two terms belong to different classes, no relation at all is possible between them, even according to the primitive standards of popular thinking. It makes no difference if the two classes are under the same category. For instance, there is no thinkable relation between a hundred cubits and the pungency of pepper; the first is a quantity and the second is a quality. There is also no thinkable relation between knowledge and sweetness, or kindness and bitter taste, though all these are in the category of quality. How then could there be any relation between God and any creature, when there is that immense difference in the nature of existence, greater than which no difference can ever be.

If any relation could be imagined, then it would follow that the accident of relation could attach to God. Though it is not an accident attaching to His essence, it is still an accident of sorts. In that case we should be forced to admit that God has attributes, though we should narrow these down to relations. Still, these are the kind of attributes that could most easily be granted in reference to God, since they would not imply a plurality of pre-existent things nor any change in His substance consequent on change of the things with which He would stand in relation.

The fifth class of positive attributes is to describe a thing by its action. By ‘its action’ I do not mean the capacity of habitual professional activity, as in the terms ‘carpenter’ or ‘blacksmith’; these are of the category of quality, as we have mentioned before. By ‘action’ I mean the action that the thing has carried out, as when one says: Zayd is the one who has made this door, or built a certain wall, or woven this garment. This kind of attribute is far from contact with the essence of the thing to which it relates. It is therefore quite permissible to apply this type of attribute to God, especially as we know (as will be explained later on) that these different actions do not emanate from different elements within the essence of the agent, but all the different actions of God are from His essence, not from anything added to it, as we have explained before.

To resume the argument of this chapter: God is One in every respect without plurality and without additions to His essence. The many different attributes found in the books as indicating Him are due to the manifold character of His actions, not to a plurality in His essence. Some of them have the purpose of indicating His perfection, according to what we consider perfection, as we have explained before.

Chapter 57

More Advanced Observations on the Subject of Attributes

It is obvious that existence is an accident affecting that which exists. It is, therefore, a concept superadded to the essence of that which exists. This is an incontrovertible fact. Whenever the existence of a thing is due to a cause, its existence is a concept superadded to its essence. But whatever possesses an existence not due to any cause—and such is God alone, for this is what we mean when we say that God exists necessarily—the existence of such a thing is its essence and character and its essence is its existence. Such a thing is not subject to the accident of existing, so that its existence should be a concept superadded to its essence. He exists necessarily and perpetually, not because existence came to Him from without or affected Him as an accident. He therefore exists without existence, and similarly lives without life, is powerful without power, and knows without knowledge. All these derive from a single concept without any multiplicity, as we shall explain later on.

It must also be clearly realized that unity and multiplicity are accidents affecting the thing which exists insofar as it is many or one. This is proved in the *Metaphysics* [5.6, 10.2]. As number is not the thing counted, so unity is not the thing which is one. All these are accidents of the class of discrete quantity which affect the numerable things in existence, because they are subject to such accidents. As for that which exists necessarily and is truly simple without being in any way liable to compositeness, as it is absurd to think of it as affected by the accident of plurality, so it is absurd to think of it as affected by the accident of unity. I mean to say by this that His unity is not a concept superadded to His essence, but He is one without unity.

These subtle concepts, which almost pass the comprehension of our minds, are not readily expressed by words. Words are altogether one of the main causes of error, because whatever language we employ, we find the restrictions it imposes on our expression extremely disturbing. We cannot even picture this concept except by using imprecise language. When we desire to indicate that the Divinity is not plural, all we are able to say is that He is one, although both, 'one' as well as 'many,' are terms of quantity. We must therefore compress our meaning and guide the mind to the proper understanding of our intention by saying 'one, but not by unity.' It is just the same when we use the word 'ancient'³ to indicate that He did not come into being. The lack of precision in our use of 'ancient' is obvious, since one can only apply the term to something affected by time, which is an accident supervening to movement, which implies a body. Furthermore it belongs to the class of relative terms. When you use 'ancient' of the accident of time, it is like saying 'long' and 'short' with regard to the accident of one-dimensional extension. One cannot really employ the terms 'ancient' and 'come into being' of anything to which the accident of time does not apply, any more than one can say of sweetness that it is either crooked or straight, or of a sound that it is salty or unseasoned. Such things are evident to one who has some practice in assessing the true meaning of ideas and expresses them with full rational comprehension, if he isolates them properly and does not employ the vague sense suggested by the words in common usage.⁴

Wherever you find the words 'first' and 'last' employed in Scripture in speaking of God [e.g. Isa. 44:6], this is to be taken in the same way as the passages where He is described as having eyes or ears. The meaning of those terms is that God is not affected by change and in no way ever acquires new properties, not that He falls under the category of time, so that some analogy might result between Him and things subject to time, and it can be said of Him that He is

first and last. All these terms are 'according to the parlance of men' [Berakhoth 31b]. So, too, when we say one we mean thereby that He has no peer, not that His essence is affected by the concept of unity.

Chapter 58 More Difficult than the Preceding Ones

You must understand that the description of God by means of negative terms is the only sound description which contains no element of loose terminology, and implies altogether in no circumstances a lack of perfection in God. His description by positive terms, on the other hand, comports polytheism and a lack of perfection in God in the way we have demonstrated.

First I must explain how negative terms can in a manner be attributes, and in what way they differ from positive attributes. Then I shall show how it is that we have no way of describing Him except by negative terms and no others. An attribute is not something specifying the thing described in such a way that it cannot share the attribute with anything else. On the contrary, an attribute may describe something even if it shares that attribute with other things and is not peculiar to it. For instance, if you see a man from a distance and ask: what is that which is visible? the reply may be: some living being. This is without any doubt a correct description of the thing seen, though it does not set it aside as a peculiar thing from all others. Some specification does, however, result, namely, that the thing seen is not an object of the vegetable or mineral class. In the same manner also, if there is a man in a certain house, and you know that there is some object in it, but not what it is, you may ask: what is in this house? and may receive the reply: there isn't a vegetable or mineral object in it. Then you obtain some specification and know that a living being is in the house, though you do not know what kind of living being it is. From this point of view the negative attributes have something in common with positive attributes, because they must necessarily produce some specification, even though this specification means merely the removal of the negated items from among those that we had before imagined un-negated. The difference between negative and positive attributes is in this, that positive attributes, even when they do not

3. Used in philosophical Arabic for 'uncreated.'

4. Other reading: taking them in their absolute sense, not with the connotation of comprehensiveness suggested by the words.

specify, indicate some part of the totality of the thing which we desire to know. This may be either a part of its substance or one of its accidents. The negative attributes do not in any manner tell us anything about the essence of the thing which we wish to know as it is, except incidentally, as in our example.

After these prefatory remarks I state that it has been proved that God exists by necessity and that He is non-composite, as we shall prove, and we can apprehend only that He is, not what He is. It is therefore meaningless that He should have any positive attribute, since the fact that He is is not something outside of what He is, so that the attribute might indicate one of these two. Much less can what He is be of a composite character, so that the attribute could indicate one of the parts. Even less can He be substrate to accidents, so that the attribute could indicate these. Thus there is no scope for any positive attributes in any way whatsoever.

It is the negative attributes which we must employ to guide our mind to that which we ought to believe concerning God, because from them no plurality can result in any way. They can guide the mind to the utmost limit of what man can apprehend of God. For instance, it has been proved to us that something must exist apart from those objects which our senses apprehend and which our reason can encompass with its knowledge. We say about this thing that it exists, meaning that it is absurd to say that He does not exist. Then we apprehend that its existence is not like the existence of, say, the elements, which are lifeless bodies, and consequently say that He lives, meaning that God is not subject to death. Then we apprehend that this being is also not like the existence of heaven, which is a living body, and consequently we say that He is not a body. Then we apprehend that this being is not like the existence of an Intelligence, which is neither a body nor subject to death, but is due to a cause, and consequently say that God is eternal, meaning that there is no cause which called Him into being. Then we apprehend that the existence of this Being, which is its essence, is not only sufficient for that Being itself to exist, but many existences emanate from it. It is, however, not like the emanation of heat from the fire or the automatic connection between light and the sun, but it is an emanation which He per-

petually keeps going, giving it a constant flow arranged according to a wise plan, as we shall show. We shall say on account of these arrangements that He is omnipotent, omniscient, and possessed of will. By these attributes we mean to say that He is neither powerless nor ignorant nor distracted or disinterested. When we say He is not powerless, we mean that His existence is sufficient to bring into existence things other than Himself. When we say He is not ignorant, we mean that He apprehends, i.e. lives, for whatever apprehends lives. When we say He is not distracted or disinterested, we mean that all those existing things run along an ordered and planned course, not without supervision and coming into being just by chance, just like anything which a person possessed of will plans with purpose and will. Then we apprehend that there is no other being like this one. When we, therefore, say He is One, we mean thereby to deny any plurality.

Thus it becomes clear that every attribute with which we describe Him is either an attribute of action or has the purport of negating its own absence⁵ if our intention thereby is to apprehend His essence rather than His works. These negative terms are also not used absolutely of God, but only in the manner mentioned before, that one denies of a thing something that by the nature of things could not exist in it, as when we say of a wall that it does not see.

You know well, dear reader, that the heaven is a moving body, and that we have measured it in yards and feet and have complete data on the extent of its parts and of most of its movements, and yet our minds are completely unable to apprehend what it is, although we know that it must necessarily possess matter and form, but not matter of the kind that is with us. For this reason we can only describe it by indefinite nouns,⁶ not by definite positive terms. We say that the heaven is not light and not heavy, does not suffer action and is therefore not receptive to impressions, it has no taste or smell, and similar negative terms. All this is because we are ignorant of that kind of matter. What will be the position then of our minds when they

5. Read perhaps *salabu şifatin 'adimaha*, the negation of an attribute he does not have.

6. I.e., *nomina infinita*, nouns incorporating a negative.

endeavour to apprehend that which is free from matter, non-composite to the utmost degree, of necessary existence, has no cause and is not attained by anything additional to its perfect essence—the meaning of its perfection being the denial of all shortcomings, as explained before? We can only apprehend that He is; that there exists a Being unlike any other being which He brought into existence, having nothing whatsoever in common with them, who has no plurality in Him, and is not powerless to bring into existence things other than He himself, and that His relation to the world is that of the captain to the ship. This also is not a true relation, and not even remotely resembles the real one, but it serves to guide the mind to the idea that God governs the universe, meaning that He supports it and keeps its order as it should be. This point will be explained in a more concrete manner.

Praise be to Him who is such that when our minds try to visualize His essence, their power of apprehending becomes imbecility; when they study the connection between His works and His will, their knowledge becomes ignorance; and when our tongues desire to declare His greatness by descriptive terms, all eloquence becomes impotence and imbecility.

Chapter 69

As is commonly known, the philosophers refer to God as the First Cause.⁷ Those known as *Mutakallimūn* anxiously avoid this nomenclature, and call Him the Doer. They think it makes a great difference whether we call Him Cause or call Him Doer. Their argument is: if we call Him a cause, there must necessarily be something caused. This leads us to admit that the world is uncreated and necessarily co-existent with God. If we call Him Doer, we need not envisage the co-existence of that which is affected by his doing, because the Doer may exist long before that which he does. What is more, they cannot picture the Doer being a Doer except by assuming that he exists before that which he does.

This argument shows that they do not realize the distinction between that which is potential and that which

is actual. It must be clearly understood that there is no difference between the terms Cause and Doer in this respect. If you call a thing Cause when the act of causation is still a potentiality, it precedes the effect in time. When it is actually a cause its effect necessarily exists by virtue of its existence as a cause in actuality. Similarly, if you call the Doer so when the act of doing is actuality, then the thing done must necessarily co-exist with him. Before the builder builds the house he is not a builder in actuality, only potentially, just as the building materials are only potentially a house before the house is built. As soon as he starts building he becomes a builder in actuality, and the existence of a building becomes a necessary implication. Thus we have gained nothing by substituting the term Doer for the term Cause. What we intend to prove by this discussion is the equivalence of the two terms. We call Him Doer, though His handiwork may not exist, because there is nothing to restrain Him from doing whenever He wishes. We can also call Him Cause in exactly the same sense, although the effect may not exist. The reason why the philosophers do prefer the name Cause over the name Doer must not be sought in their well-known belief that the world is uncreated, but in certain other ideas, which I shall briefly set out here.

In the *Physics* [2.3 and 2.7] it is proved that everything that has a cause is caused by some thing, and that causes fall into four classes: matter, form, maker, and purpose. Some are immediate causes, others indirect, but every one of these four is called cause. They hold the view—which I do not contradict—that God is Maker, Form, and Purpose. They refer to God as Cause in order to imply these three causes, meaning that He is the Maker of the world, its Form, and its Purpose.

In this chapter I intend to demonstrate what we mean by saying of God that He is the Maker, the Form of the world, and at the same time its Purpose. There is no need for you to worry at this stage about the question whether God brought the world into being or whether it is necessarily co-existent with Him, as the Philosophers maintain, because that matter will be discussed at length in a suitable manner. Here we are concerned only with God as efficient cause of the individual acts happening in the world, in the same way as He is the efficient cause of the world as a whole.

7. Both Arabic and Hebrew possess two synonyms for 'cause,' which are often, as here, used side by side.

It is explained in the *Physics* [2.3] that we must in each case seek a further cause to every cause belonging to one of the four kinds just enumerated. To any thing which comes into being one can find these four proximate causes, to these further causes, and to those again further causes, until one arrives at the ultimate causes. Thus something is caused and its efficient cause is such-and-such. This efficient cause in turn has an efficient cause and so on until one comes to a first mover, who is the true efficient cause of all these intervening items. E.g., A is moved by B, B is moved by C, C is moved by D, D is moved by E, and so on *ad infinitum*. But let us stop, for the sake of illustration, at E: there can be no doubt that it is E which moves A, B, C, and D. One would be correct in saying of the motion of A that it is due to E.

It is in this sense that every action in the existing world can be attributed to God, whichever more proximate agency be directly responsible for it. We shall deal with this later in more detail. He therefore is the ultimate cause in so far as He is an efficient cause.

In the same manner we find, when we follow up the natural forms which came into being and cease to exist, that each must necessarily have been preceded by another form which prepared that matter for receiving this form. The earlier form was again preceded by another form, until we come to the ultimate form which is prerequisite to the existence of the intervening forms, which in their turn are the cause of the latest form. That ultimate form in the whole of the existing world is God. It must not be thought that when we say of God that He is the ultimate form of all existing things, we are thereby referring to that Ultimate Form of which Aristotle says in his *Metaphysics* that it neither came into being nor ceased to be [7.8]. The form which is mentioned there is physical, not a separate intellect. When we say of God that He is the ultimate form of the world we do not mean it in the way that the form bound up with matter is the form of that matter, as if God were the form of a physical body. This is not at all what we want to say, but as every existing thing possessing a form is what it is only by virtue of its form, and when that form ceases to exist the thing itself ceases to exist, so, exactly the same as this relation, is the relation of God to all the last principles of the existing world.

By virtue of the existence of the Creator everything exists. God assists its continued existence by means of the function which, for want of a better name, is called⁸ emanation, as we shall expound in later chapters of this treatise. If one could imagine the Creator not to exist, then the whole existing world would not exist, and the very essence of the last principles would cease to be, as well as the ultimate effects and all intervening links. It results that God is to the world in the same relation as form to a thing possessing form, whereby it is what it is. Through the form its true character and essence is established. That is the relation of God to the world. From this point of view it can be said that He is the ultimate form, and that He is the form of forms, i.e. that from which the existence and permanence of every form in the world is ultimately derived. The subsistence of forms is due to Him, just as things possessing forms acquire permanence through their forms. Because of this function He is called in our language *hey-ha-olamim*, which means 'Life of the World,' as will be proved later on.

The same considerations apply to final causes, or purposes. If a thing has a purpose, you may seek a purpose for that purpose. Thus one can say, for example, that the material cause of a throne is wood, its effective cause the joiner, its formal cause squareness of a certain type, and its final cause that one should sit on it. Now you may ask what is the final cause or purpose of sitting on the throne, and you will be told: so that he who sits on it is raised above the ground. Then you may go on asking what is the purpose of being raised above the ground. You will then receive the reply: so that he who sits upon it gains in importance in the eye of the beholder. If you then asked further what is the purpose of his gaining importance in the eye of those who see him, you will be informed: so that he may be feared and respected. Ask then what is the purpose of his being feared, and the reply will be: so that his commands will be carried out efficiently. Ask further what is the purpose of his commands being carried out efficiently, and you will be told: so as to prevent men from harming each other. Then you want to know

8. Literally: is called by metonymy, or by a name other than its real name.

what is the purpose of that, and it will be answered: so that they continue in an orderly existence. In this way each purpose requires a further purpose, until the matter ends with the absolute will of God, according to the opinion of some—as will be explained later—so that the last answer would be: thus God wills it. According to another opinion, which will also be explained later, the matter will end with the decree of His wisdom, so that the last answer would be: thus His wisdom decrees. Thus the consistent investigation of every purpose will lead us to His will or His wisdom—according to which opinion we accept. Both of these have proved, according to our system, to be identical with His essence. Neither His will or intention nor His wisdom are things in any way separable from His essence, i.e. different from His essence. God is, therefore, the ultimate purpose of everything. Moreover, the purpose of all things is to resemble as far as possible His perfection, and that is what we mean by His will, i.e. His essence, as will be shown later. For this reason we say of Him that He is the Purpose of Purposes.

I have now made clear why one says of God that He is Maker, Form, and Purpose, and that this is why the Philosophers call Him Cause, and not merely Maker. I must add, however, that one of those *Mutakallimūn* thinkers was foolish and impertinent enough to maintain that, if one assumed the Creator to be non-existent, there would be no logical compulsion to assume also the non-existence of the thing which He had brought into being, namely the world, because there was no need for the work to perish if its maker went out of existence after having made it. This would be quite correct if God were nothing but a Maker, and the thing He made did not require His support for its continued existence. When the joiner dies, the chest he has made does not cease to exist, since he has no influence on its continued existence. Since God, however, is also the form of the world, as we have explained before, and supports its continued existence and permanence, it is absurd to believe that the supporter could disappear and yet the thing he supports continue to exist although it has no existence except by virtue of the support it receives. This is all that need be said concerning the errors of the theory that God is only Maker, and not also Purpose and Form.

Book II

Chapter 13

The views of people with regard to the problem whether the world is without beginning or created—having regard only to the opinion of those who believe that a God exists⁹—are of three kinds:

The first view, which is the one held by those who believe in the Law of Moses, is that the whole world—I mean everything that exists, apart from God Himself—was brought into existence by God after having been completely and absolutely devoid of existence. They hold that only God alone existed and nothing beside Him, neither angel nor sphere nor anything that is within the sphere. Then He brought into existence all existing things, as they are, by His will and volition, and not from anything. Time itself, according to them, is one of the things created, since time is consequent upon movement and movement is an accident of that which moves; the thing that moves, and upon the movement of which time is consequent, was created and came into being, not having existed before.

When we say that God *was* before the world was created, where the word ‘was’ implies time; and likewise all the associations in our mind when we think of the infinite duration of His existence before the creation of the world—all this is assumed time or imagined time, not true time. There can be no doubt that time is an accident. In our system it is just one of the created accidents such as blackness and whiteness. It does not belong to the class of qualities, though, but is an inherent accident of movement, as will be clear to anyone who has understood what Aristotle said in explanation of the true nature of time.

We shall here discuss a subject which is not strictly part of the matter with which we are dealing, but has some bearing on it. The analysis of the concept of time has presented difficulties to most thinkers, so much so that they became bewildered as to whether it had any real existence or not, as happened to Galen and others. The reason for this is that it is an accident of an

9. Reading *ilāhan maujūdun*.

accident. Those accidents that have a primary existence in bodies, such as colours and tastes, can be understood without further ado, and their purport can easily be realized. Those accidents, however, that have accidents as their substrate, such as brilliancy in colours and curvedness and roundness in lines, are very hard to grasp. This is especially so when on top of this the substrate accident is not permanently in one state but changes from one state to another. Then the concept becomes even more difficult to grasp. With time the two things come together. It is an accident pursuant to motion, which itself is an accident of the thing that moves. Motion is not like blackness or whiteness which are permanent states, but it is the very nature and essence of motion that it does not persist in one state even for a single moment. This is one of the reasons why the nature of time is so difficult to investigate.

What I want to make clear is that time in our system is a created thing that has come into being like all other accidents as well as the substances which are the substrates of these accidents. Therefore the creation of the world by God cannot have taken place in a temporal beginning, as time itself was one of the things created. You must give very careful consideration to this matter, so as to be ready to deal with the objections which are impossible to avoid for anyone who is not aware of this point. If you admit the possibility of time having existed before the world, you will be led into accepting the belief that the world is uncreated, for time is an accident and must needs have a substrate. Thus something would of necessity have existed before this present world existed. That, however, is just the view from which we try to get away.

This then, is the first view. It is, without any doubt, the one on which the Law of Moses is based. It comes in importance immediately after the dogma of the unity of God—make no mistake about that. It was our father Abraham himself who first proclaimed this view, having arrived at it by speculation. For this reason he would call upon *the name of the Lord the God of the World* [Gen. 21:33],¹⁰ after he had put this view

clearly into words by speaking of *the Maker*¹¹ of *heaven and earth* [Gen. 14:22].

The second view is the one held by all the philosophers of whom we have heard or which we have read. They say that it is absurd to believe that God should bring forth something from nothing. In their opinion it is also not possible for a thing to pass away into nothing. This means it is not possible for a thing possessing matter and form to come into being after this matter had been completely devoid of existence. To describe God as having the power to accomplish this is in their opinion the same as to describe him as having the power to unite two opposites¹² at the same time, or to create His own equal or to become a body or to create a rectangle with the diagonal equal to its side, and similar impossibilities.

We can deduce from their arguments that they mean: just as there is no lack of power imputed to God in the fact that God does not create impossibilities—because the impossible has a permanent character which is not produced by anyone and can therefore not be changed—so there is no lack of power imputed to God if He is not thought to be able to bring forth something from nothing, since this belongs to the category of impossibilities. They therefore hold that there is some matter in existence, having no beginning just as God has no beginning, that God does not exist without it, nor it without God. They do not hold that its existence is of the same rank as the existence of God, but they think Him to be the cause of its existence. It would be to Him in the relation of, say, the clay to the potter or the iron to the ironworker. This is the matter from which He creates whatever He wills, forming it one time into heaven and earth and another time into something else. Those who follow this opinion believe that the heaven, too, has come into being and is liable to perish, but that it did not come into being from nothing and will not perish into nothing. As the individual living beings come into being and perish out of existing matter and into existing matter, so the heaven comes into being and perishes, and its coming into being and ceasing to be takes place in the same way as that of other existing things.

10. The rendering with 'world' (a meaning which *olam* never has in biblical Hebrew) appears also in Targum and Talmud (Sotah 10b). A.V. (with all versions): 'the everlasting God.'

11. A.V. 'possessor.'

12. Tibbon adds: in one object.

The people of this class are divided into various sects, the number and opinions of which it would be useless to mention in this treatise. The general and fundamental tenet of this sect, however, is as I have described it to you. It is also the belief of Plato. We find that Aristotle reports of him in the *Physics* [8.1, 251a17] that he, Plato, believed that the heaven had come into being and was liable to perish. You can find this opinion clearly expressed in the *Timaeus* [38 b–c]. However, Plato did not hold the same belief as we (Jews), as some people think who cannot analyse opinions and do not think precisely, and therefore imagine that our view is the same as his. This is not so. We believe that the heaven came into being, not out of another thing, but out of absolute non-existence. He believes it to have been brought into existence¹³ and being out of another thing. This, then, is the second view.

The third view is that of Aristotle, of his followers and commentators. He says the same as the followers of the sect just mentioned, namely that a thing composed of matter can never be brought forth out of no matter. He goes beyond this, however, and says that the heaven does not fall under the laws of generation and corruption in any way. To put his view briefly, he claims that this universe as a whole, such as it is, never ceased and never will cease to be as it is. The one permanent thing which is not subject to generation and corruption, namely heaven, will always be so. Time and motion are eternal and continuous, having neither come into being nor being liable to cease. Things that come into being and perish, namely those beneath the lunar sphere, will not cease to be so. That means that primary matter essentially neither comes into being nor perishes, but the forms follow each other in it: it divests itself of one form and clothes itself in another. This whole order both in the higher and the lower regions cannot be upset or stopped, or any innovation made in it other than those implied in its own nature, nor does anything ever happen within it that is in any way contrary to the laws of nature. He also says—though not in so many words, but it can be

deduced from his opinions—that he considers it impossible that God should in any way change His will or exercise any fresh volition. True, all this universe as it is was brought into being by God's will, but not made out of non-existence. Just as it is impossible that God should cease to be or that His essence should change, so he thinks it impossible that He should change His will or exercise any new volition. The conclusion is thus forced upon us that this universe, just as it is now, has been so forever and will be so in the most distant future.

This is a brief but adequate presentation of the various views.¹⁴ They are the views of those who accept the existence of God in this world as proven. Others know nothing of the existence of God, but pretend that things come into being and perish by purely accidental aggregation and separation, and that there is no one to guide and arrange their existence. Such are, according to Alexander, Epicurus and his school, among others. There is no point for us in expounding the views of those sects since the existence of God is definitely proven, and it is useless to discuss the views of people who base themselves on a proposition the opposite of which is evident. It is also useless for us to undertake an investigation into the truth of the views of the second school of thought, who believe heaven to be created but transitory, since they accept the idea of something uncreated. In our opinion there is no difference between one who holds that heaven must necessarily have originated out of something else, or will perish and pass into something else, and the belief of Aristotle that it neither came into being nor is liable to perish. The aim of everyone who follows the Law of Moses and Abraham, or any similar outlook, is to believe that there is nothing whatsoever uncreated and co-existent with God, and that the production of existent things from non-existence on the part of God is not impossible, but—according to some thinkers—even necessary. Now that we have established the various views I shall proceed to explain and summarize the arguments of Aristotle for his view and the reasons that led him to it.

13. Reading *mûjada*. Other reading: to have existed (potentially).

14. Other reading: an account of those views and their essential meaning.

Chapter 16

In this chapter I shall explain what my own view on this problem is, leaving for later the arguments for what I am trying to prove. I should like to add that I am not satisfied with the arguments that have been produced by those *Mutakallimūn* who claim to have proved that the world was created. I do not deceive myself by calling sophistic arguments proofs. If a man claims to have produced proof regarding some problem by means of sophistic arguments, this does not strengthen my faith in that thesis, but weakens it and provokes opposition to it, because when the inadequacy of the arguments becomes apparent, one's mind becomes unwilling to admit the truth of the statement for which these arguments are adduced. It would in such a case have been better had the matter for which no proof is available remained open, or had one of the two contradictory opinions concerning it been accepted by dint of tradition. I have expounded the methods the *Mutakallimūn* employ to establish that the world is created, and have pointed out the weak spots in their arguments. Similarly I consider all the arguments of Aristotle and his school for the eternity of the world not as decisive proofs, but as assertions open to grave doubts, as you will learn later on.

What I want to say is that there is no inherent improbability in the belief that the world was created, which belief I have shown to be the intent of our Law. All the philosophical arguments from which it appears that the matter is otherwise—as we have mentioned—can be shown to be invalid and without convincing force. Once this point is conceded to me, and thus the problem whether the world is created or not is completely open, I accept the traditional solution of it as it is given by prophecy. Prophecy provides an answer to problems which speculation is unable to solve. We shall later show that prophecy need not be rejected even according to the view of those who believe in an uncreated world.

When I have demonstrated the possibility of our proposed view, I shall proceed to show its superiority over other views by speculative argument, too—I mean the superiority of the view that the world is created over the view that it is eternal—and shall demonstrate that though we may not get rid of some discomfort in

admitting that it is created, we experience much greater discomfort in admitting that it is eternal. I shall now proceed to develop the methods by which the arguments of all those who argue for the eternity of the world can be invalidated.

Chapter 25

It should be clearly understood that our reason for rejecting the eternity of the world is not to be sought in any text of the Torah which says that the world is created. The passages which indicate that the world is created are no more numerous than those that indicate that God is a body. The method of allegorical interpretation is no less possible or permissible in the matter of the world being created than in any other. We would have been able to explain it allegorically just as we did when we denied corporeality. Perhaps it would have been even much easier. We would in any case not have lacked the capacity to explain those texts allegorically and establish the eternity of the world just as we explained those other texts allegorically and denied that God was a body. If we have not done this and do not believe in it, this is for two reasons: one is that it is conclusively proved that God is not a body. We must of necessity explain allegorically all those passages the literal sense of which is contradicted by evidential proof, so that we are conscious that they must be allegorically interpreted. The eternity of the world is not conclusively proved. It is therefore wrong to reject the texts and interpret them allegorically because of preference for a view the opposite of which might be shown to be preferable for a variety of reasons. This is one reason; the other is that our belief that God is not a body does not destroy in our eyes any of the ordinances of our Law or belie the statements of any prophet. There is nothing contrary to Scripture in it, except that the ignorant think it is. As we have explained, there is no contradiction, but this is the real intention of the text. If, on the other hand, we believed in the eternity of the world according to the principles laid down by Aristotle—that the world exists by necessity, that the nature of no thing ever changes and that nothing ever deviates from its customary behaviour—this would destroy the Law from its very foundation and belie automatically every miracle, and make void

all hopes and fears the Law seeks to inspire, unless, of course, one chooses to interpret the miracles as well allegorically, as did the *Batiniyya* sect among the Moslems. In this way we would end up in some kind of idle prattling.

Again if we believe in the eternity of the world according to the second theory we have expounded, that of Plato, namely, that the heavens themselves are transitory, such a view would not upset the ordinances of the Law, nor would its consequence be the belying of miracles, which, on the contrary, would be possible. The various passages could be interpreted in accordance with it. One might even discover many equivocal passages in the text of the Torah and elsewhere with which it could be connected and which might even be considered to argue for it. However, there is no cogent incentive for us to do so unless that theory were proved. Since it is not proved, we shall neither allow ourselves to be beguiled by this theory nor pay the slightest attention to that other theory, but shall take the texts in their literal meaning. We say, therefore, that the Law intimates to us a thing which we have no power fully to apprehend. The miracles bear witness that our claim is true.

It must be clearly understood that once we believe in the world being created, all miracles become possible and the Law itself becomes possible, and any question that might be asked in this connection is automatically void, even such questions as the following: why did God accord a revelation to this one and none to others? Why did God prescribe this Law to a certain nation and not to others? Why did He give the Law at the time He gave it and not before or after? Why did He ordain these positive and those negative commandments? Why did He distinguish any particular prophet by those miracles that are mentioned, and no others took place? What did God intend by this act of lawgiving, and why did He not implant these commandments and prohibitions in our nature, if that was His purpose? To all these questions answer can be made by saying: thus He wanted, or: thus His wisdom decreed it. Just as He brought the world into existence when He willed and in this form, without our being able to analyse His will in this connection or the principles by which His wisdom selected these particular forms or that time, so we do not know His will or the

motives of His wisdom in determining all the things concerning which we have just asked. If one says that the world necessarily had to be as it is, all these questions must be asked, and cannot be disposed of except by reprehensible replies which both contradict, and make nonsense of, the literal sense of all those Scriptural passages concerning which no sensible person can doubt that they are to be taken in their literal sense.

This, then, is our reason for recoiling from that theory. This is why people of worth have spent their lives, and others will go on spending their lives, in speculating on this problem. For if it were proved that the world is created—even in the manner this is stated by Plato—all the objections of the philosophers to us would fall to the ground. If, on the other hand, they would succeed in providing a proof for its eternity according to Aristotle's view, the Law in its entirety would fall to the ground and other manners of thinking would take its place, for I have made clear to you that the whole of it hangs on this one point. Give it, therefore, your most earnest consideration.

Chapter 32

The opinions of men about prophecy are like their opinions about the eternity—or otherwise—of the world. I mean to say, just as those who acknowledge the existence of God hold three different opinions on the eternity or otherwise of the world, as we have explained, so there exist three different views about prophecy. I shall not detain myself with the view of Epicurus, for he does not believe in the existence of God, leave alone the existence of prophecy. I only intend to mention the views of those who believe in God.

The first view is that of the ignorant mass,¹⁵ as far as they believe in prophecy. Some of the common people of our own faith also believe in this view, which is that God chooses any man He wants, turns him into a prophet and sends him forth. It does not make any difference in their opinion whether that person is a learned man or an ignoramus, old or young. They make it, however, a prerequisite that he should also

15. Or: heathen; perhaps: barbarians (Plessner)

possess a certain degree of goodness and righteousness of character, for so far people have never said yet that God might make a prophet out of a wicked man, unless He first makes him good, in accordance with this view.

The second view is that of the philosophers. It says that prophecy is a kind of perfection in human nature. This perfection cannot be attained by a person except after training which brings the potential faculties of the species into actuality; that is if there is no temperamental obstacle to this or some external reason to prevent it. It is in this respect like every other perfection which can exist in any species. Such a perfection will not actually be found in its full extent in every individual of that species, but inevitably and necessarily only in some individuals. If that perfection is such as to require an agent to bring it out, such an agent must first be there.

According to this view it is impossible for an ignorant person to become a prophet. Also a man cannot go to bed as an ordinary person and wake up as prophet, as if he had found something, but the process takes place in the following way. If a man is virtuous and perfect in both his logical and moral qualities, if his imaginative faculty is as perfect as can be, and he undertakes the preparation of which you will hear, he must necessarily become a prophet, since that perfection is natural to us. According to this view it is not possible that a man should be fit for prophecy and prepare himself for it and yet not become a prophet, any more than that a healthy man should eat wholesome food without it forming sound blood, or similar cases.

The third view is that of our faith, in fact a principle of our religion. This is exactly the same as the philosophical view, except in one respect: we believe that a person who is fit for prophecy and has prepared himself for it may yet not become a prophet. That depends on the divine will, and is in my opinion like all other miracles and runs according to their pattern. The natural thing is that everyone who is fit by reason of his natural disposition and trained by reason of his education should become a prophet. One who is prevented from it is like one who is prevented from moving his hand like Jeroboam [1 Kings 13:4] or from using his sight, like the army of the king of Syria when he wanted to get at Elisha [2 Kings 6:18]. That our

dogma demands by necessity proper preparation and perfection in moral and logical qualities, is proved by the saying ‘prophecy only dwells upon him who is wise, strong, and rich’ (Shabbath 92a).¹⁶ We have explained this in our commentary on the Mishnah and in our greater work (*Mishneh Torah*, Yesode Hatorah vii), where we stated that the ‘sons of the prophets’ were those constantly occupied with such preparation. That he who has prepared himself may sometimes not become a prophet is proved by the story of Baruch ben Neriah. He was a disciple of Jeremiah, and the latter trained him, taught him, and prepared him, and he ardently desired to become a prophet, but he was not allowed to become one, as he says: *I have laboured in my sighing and I find no rest* [Jer. 45:3]. Through Jeremiah the answer was given to him: *thus shalt thou say unto him, the Lord saith thus, etc. And seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not* [Jer. 4:5]. It is indeed possible to say that this was a declaration that prophecy was too great for Baruch. It might also be said, with reference to the verse: *her prophets also find no vision from the Lord* [Lam. 2:9], that this was by reason of their being in exile, as we shall explain later. However, we find many passages, both in the Bible and in the words of the Sages, all of which consistently support this view: that God makes prophet whomever He wants and whenever He wants, but only a wholly perfect and virtuous person. As for an ignorant vulgar person, it is in our opinion utterly impossible that God should make him a prophet, any more than it would be possible that He would make a prophet out of an ass or a frog.

This, then, is our dogma: nothing can be done without training and perfection. It is this which provides the possibility of which divine power can take advantage. Do not be misled by the passage: *Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee* [Jer. 1:5]. This applies to every prophet, who requires some natural preparedness in his essential natural disposition, as will be shown later. As to the phrase: *I am a child* [Jer. 1:6], you know that the Hebrew language calls

16. In the Talmud: ‘the divine presence . . .’ (Cf. also Nedarim 38a.)

Joseph a child at a time when he was thirty years old¹⁷ and calls Joshua a child at a time when he was nearly sixty; cf. the verse, referring to the story of the golden calf: *but his servant Joshua the son of Nun, a child, departed not out of the tabernacle* [Ex. 33:11]. Moses was at the time eighty-one and lived to 120. Joshua lived for fourteen years after his death and reached the age of 110. This proves that Joshua was at the time at least fifty-seven years old, and yet He called him a child.

Neither should you allow yourself to be misguided by the phrase in the Divine Promises: *I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy* [Joel 3:1]. The verse itself explains in what that prophecy was to consist, by saying *your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions*. Everyone who gives information on divine secrets, be it by clairvoyance or guesswork, or by true dreams, is also called a prophet. This is why the prophets of Baal and Asherah can be called prophets. Compare also the passage: *If there arise among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams* [Deut. 13:2]. In the events before Mount Sinai, where all of them witnessed the mighty fire and heard the terrible and frightening voices in a miraculous manner, the rank of prophecy was only attained by those who were fit for it, and that in different degrees, as is proved by the verse: *Come up unto the Lord, thou and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel* [Ex. 24:1]. Moses himself was in the highest rank, for it is said: *And Moses alone shall come near the Lord, but they shall not come nigh* [Ex. 24:2]. Aaron was beneath him, Nadab and Abihu beneath Aaron, and the seventy elders beneath Nadab and Abihu, while the rest of the people were inferior to them in proportion to their degrees of perfection. The Sages express this by saying: 'Moses had a partition to himself and Aaron had a partition to himself' (Mechilta on Exodus 19:24).

Chapter 36

It must be understood that the true character of prophecy is that of an emanation flowing from God by

means of the Active Intelligence first upon the rational faculty and thence upon the imaginative faculty. This is the highest rank attainable by man and the utmost degree of perfection which can be found in his species. That state is the highest degree of perfection of the imaginative faculty. Such a process can by no means take place in every man. It cannot be achieved by perfection in the speculative sciences or by improvement of character to the highest possible pitch of goodness and nobility, unless there is added to these the perfection of the imaginative faculty in the very core of one's natural disposition to the highest possible degree.

You are aware, of course, that the perfection of these physical faculties, to which the imaginative faculty belongs, is consequent upon the organ which carries that faculty having the best possible constitution and proportions and the purest substance possible. In such matters as these it is impossible to make up for any deficiencies or faults by any kind of physical training. When the constitutional disposition of an organ is bad, then the most one can hope of any regime designed to cure it is to preserve it in a healthy state, not to restore it to its most perfect state. If its defect is due to its proportions or its position or its substance—I mean the substance of the matter that makes it up—there is no cure for it.

You know all this, and there is no need to explain it at length. You are also, no doubt, acquainted with the activities of the imaginative faculty, such as retaining and combining the impressions of the senses (the sensibilia), and its natural propensity to imitation, as well as the fact that its greatest and noblest activity takes place just when the senses are at rest and do not function. Then some kind of emanation flows upon it, according to its preparation; this is the cause of true dreams, and at the same time the cause of prophecy. The difference is only one of degree, not of kind. You probably know the dictum of the Sages which implies this similarity: 'dream is one sixtieth of prophecy' (Berakhoth 57b). No proportion could have thus been expressed between things different in kind. It would hardly make sense to say: the perfection of man is so many times that of a horse. The same thought is repeated in Bereshith Rabba (xvii, 5), where we find: 'the windfall of prophecy is dream.' This is an excellent comparison. The windfall is just the same as the

17. Gen. 41:12. According to the Rabbis, Joseph was eighteen years old when in Potiphar's house and spent twelve years in prison.

fruit except that it has fallen off unripe and before its proper time. In the same way the activity of the imaginative faculty in the state of slumber is just the same as in the state of prophecy, except that it is incomplete and does not reach the final stage.

But why are we telling you about the sayings of the Rabbis and neglect the verse of the Torah: *If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known to him in a vision and speak to him in a dream* [Num. 12:6]? Here God informs us of the true nature of prophecy. He tells us that it is an accomplishment that comes in a dream or a vision. The word *vision* (*mar'eh*) is derived from *videre* (*ra'ah*) 'to see.' It means that the action of the imaginative faculty becomes so perfect that you can see a thing as if it were outside you, and that the thing which is produced by it appears as if it had come to it by way of external sensation. In these two classes, vision and dream, are all the stages of prophecy, as we shall explain later.

It is well known that the matter with which a man is intensely occupied in his waking time and while in full possession of his senses and in which he is interested and to which he is drawn, will be the one on which the imaginative faculty will act during sleep, when the [Active] Intelligence emanates upon it according to its preparedness. It would be superfluous to give instances of this or talk about it at length, since it is an obvious thing which everyone knows. It is practically the same as the perception of the senses, about which no man of sound intellect holds any divergent opinion.

Having made these introductory remarks, I want you to imagine a human individual, the substance of whose brain by its essential natural disposition is perfectly balanced as regards purity of matter, the mixture proper to each part, proportion, and position, and who is not hampered by any defects of mixture in any other organ. Let such a man study and be educated until his potential abilities become realized in actuality and he attains a perfectly accomplished human reason, as well as a pure and balanced human character, and all his desires are concentrated upon seeking the knowledge of the secrets of this universe and the understanding of its causes. His thoughts are constantly directed towards noble subjects and his chief interest is the knowledge of God and the understanding of His

actions, and what beliefs he should hold about them. He has given up all thought and desire for the animalic things, I mean the enjoyment of eating, drinking, and carnal intercourse, and with them the sense of touch, which Aristotle discusses in the *Ethics* [3.10] and of which he says that it is something for us to be ashamed of. How well said, and how true that it is a disgrace! We possess it in so far as we are mere animals, like the beasts. There is nothing in it of the concept of humanity. In the other sensual pleasures, such as smell, hearing, and sight, though they are physical, man can occasionally experience an enjoyment in so far as he is a human being, as Aristotle shows.

Our discussion has led us into things which do not belong, strictly speaking, to our subject. It requires them, though, since most of the thoughts of the outstanding men of learning are concerned with the pleasures of that sense [of touch] and they long for them. At the same time they wonder how it is that they do not prophesy, since after all prophecy is something natural.

It is also required of such a person that his thought of, and desire for, sham ambitions should have ceased. I mean by that the search for power or honour among the vulgar crowd and courting their respect and partisanship for the sheer lust of it. He must regard all men according to their circumstances. Seen from this point of view they are either like cattle or like wild beasts of prey, about whom the perfect and unworldly person only thinks, if he thinks of them at all, either to escape harm from them, if he happens to have any commerce with them, or else to get some benefit from them if he needs this for some of his purposes. If a person is of that type, there is little doubt that when his imaginative faculty, being of the utmost perfection, is active, and inspiration flows upon it from the Intellect, according to its speculative accomplishments, he will perceive nothing but very wonderful metaphysical matters, and will see nothing but God and His angels. He will not become aware of, or obtain any knowledge of, any matters but such as are true opinions or general rules of conduct for beneficial relations among men.

We have thus enumerated three points: the perfection of the rational faculty through education, perfection of the imaginative faculty through natural

disposition, and perfection of character through stopping to think of all corporeal pleasures and dispelling one's desire for foolish and wicked honours. It is obvious that perfect individuals will differ greatly with regard to these three. According to the differences in each of these three matters will be the different degrees of all prophets. You know that every faculty of the body sometimes is blunted and weakened and disturbed, and at other times is sound. This imaginative faculty is certainly a faculty of the body. For this reason you find that the prophecy of prophets stops in times of grief or anger and the like. You are no doubt acquainted with the saying: 'Prophecy does not dwell upon a person either in sadness or in indolence' (Shabbath 30b), and with the fact that no revelation came to our father Jacob throughout the period of his grief because his imaginative faculty was occupied with the loss of Joseph (Pirke R. Eliezer 38). You also know that Moses did not receive revelations as he used to from after the affair with the spies until the whole generation of the wilderness had gone (Taanith 30b, Pesachin 69b), because he suffered so deeply from their violent allegations¹⁸—and this in spite of the fact that the imaginative faculty played no role in his prophecy, but the flow of inspiration from the Intellect took place without its mediation. We have mentioned repeatedly that he did not prophesy in metaphors like other prophets. In the same way you will find that other prophets prophesied for a while and then prophecy was taken from them, as it could not continue owing to some incident that interfered with it. This was no doubt the immediate essential cause for the cessation of prophecy during the exile. What 'sadness' or 'indolence' can be worse for a man in any situation than being a slave subjected to wicked idolaters who combined the lack of true reason with full possession of all bestial lusts, *while there is no might in thy hand* [Deut. 28:32]. This is exactly what we were foretold. This is what he meant by saying: *they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it* [Amos 8:12], and *her king and her princes are among the gentiles, the instruction of the law is no more, her prophets also find no vision from the Lord* [Lam. 2:9].

18. Or: from their enormous sin.

This is quite true and the reason for it is obvious: the instrument had become impaired. For this reason, too, prophecy will come back to us in its normal form in the days of the Messiah—may He reveal Himself speedily!—as we have been promised

Chapter 37

It is worth taking some trouble to get quite clear about the exact manner in which we are subject to this divine emanation¹⁹ which reaches us and by which we achieve reason and our minds are differentiated. A person may obtain some of it, just enough to make him accomplished, but no more. The quantity that reaches another person may be big enough to overflow after having made him accomplished, so as to work for the accomplishment of others. It is with this as with all things in the world: some are so perfect as to guide others, and others get just enough perfection to be guided by others,²⁰ as we have explained before.

After these introductory remarks, it must be understood that there are several possibilities: the stream of emanation from the Intellect may flow only upon the rational faculty, without anything flowing from it upon the imaginative faculty. The reason for this may be either because the quantity of the flow is too small or because of some defect in the natural disposition of the imaginative faculty, so that it cannot receive the emanation of the Intellect. Such people form the class of scholars of a speculative bent. The inspiration may flow upon both faculties, the rational and the imaginative, as I and other philosophers have explained, and the imaginative faculty be of the utmost natural perfection. That is the class of prophets. The emanation may also flow only upon the imaginative faculty, the defect of the rational faculty being due either to its natural disposition or to lack of training. That class comprises administrators of states, lawgivers, soothsayers, augurs, and prophetic dreamers, as well as those that perform wonders by strange tricks and secret skills, although they are not possessed of any real knowledge. All these belong to this third class.

19. For Maimonides' opinion of the term, see p. 370.

20. Other reading: to guide himself, but not others.

Here it is necessary to insist upon the fact that some men of that third-named class have, on occasion, experienced wonderful imaginations and dreams and trances in a waking state, which resemble the prophetic vision so much that they themselves think that they are prophets. They are so impressed by what they perceive in those imaginations that they think they have obtained wisdom without study. They put forward horribly confused ideas on important speculative matters, and mix up in the most astonishing way true ideas and illusions. All this is due to the power of their imagination and weakness of their reason, in which nothing ever happens, I mean, which never becomes actual.

There are, of course, in each of these three classes great differences of degree. Both the two first classes are, as we have explained, divisible into two groups, because the emanation that reaches each class may either be of a quantity sufficient to make that man alone accomplished or be more than is needed for his personal perfection so that he can use it to perfect others. In the first class, the scholars, the emanation flowing upon the rational faculty may be sufficient to make that person able to investigate and understand, to know and to discern, without his making any move to teach others or to write; for he feels no desire for it nor is he able to do it. On the other hand the flow may be so powerful as to force him to write or teach.

The same applies to the second class. Some may receive just enough revelation so as to perfect themselves, and no more, others so much that they feel an urge to preach to people and teach them and to pass on to them some of their own perfection. You will see that but for that excess of perfection the sciences would not have been laid down in books, nor would any prophets have preached to men the knowledge of truth.

No scholar ever would write a book for himself in order to teach himself what he knows already. The nature of that Intellect is such that it flows continually and overflows from one recipient of the emanation to another successively, until it reaches an individual from whom the flow cannot pass on to another, but is just sufficient to effect his perfection.

The nature of this situation compels him who has received such an excessive quantity of emanation to preach to men, willy-nilly, whether they accept his

teaching or not, and even if he suffers bodily harm. This goes so far that we find some prophets preached until they were killed, because that divine inspiration moved them and did not allow them to stop or tarry, though they were greatly afflicted. For this reason we find Jeremiah admitting openly that because of the contempt he suffered from those evildoers and unbelievers of his own time, he would have been glad to hide his prophecy²¹ and not to preach to them the truth which they rejected; but he was unable to do so. He says: *because the word of the Lord is made a reproach unto me and a derision, all the day. Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But there was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I weary myself to hold it in, but cannot* [Jer. 20:8–9]. This is the meaning of the other prophet's saying: *the Lord God hath spoken; who can but prophesy?* [Amos 3:8]. Keep this well in mind.

Chapter 38

It must be fully realized that there is necessarily in every human being some aggressive faculty. But for it, he would not be moved in his mind to repel that which harms him. I hold that this faculty takes the same place among psychological forces as the power of repulsion among natural forces. The force of this aggressive faculty varies like that of other faculties. You may find some man who will attack a lion and another who will run away from a mouse, one who will attack an army and fight them, and another who will tremble and fear when a woman shouts at him. There certainly must be some temperamental disposition rooted in one's nature, which can be increased by methods designed to make actual that which is potential and by a certain mental attitude. Similarly it can be diminished by lack of occasion and by a different mental attitude. You can observe the differences in degree of this faculty in boys right from their childhood.

In the same way this faculty of divination is found in all human beings, only in different degrees. It works in particular in matters in which a man is intensely interested and round which his mind turns, so much so that you may feel in your own mind that a certain per-

21. Other reading: to put a stop to his prophesying.

son has done or said a certain thing in a certain affair, and it really turns out to be so. You will find some people possessing a very powerful and sure gift of surmise and divination, so strong that they hardly ever imagine a thing to take place but that it takes place wholly or partly as they imagined it. There are many causes for such an event, dependent on a variety of circumstances before, after, and during the event, but owing to these powers of divination the brain reviews all these premises and draws conclusions from them in the shortest possible time so that it might be thought to have been done in no time. By means of this faculty some men can give warning of important impending events.

These two faculties, the aggressive and the divinatory, must of course be very strong in prophets. When the Intellect inspires them, these two faculties become very much intensified until they produce the well-known results: a single man with his stick approaches a powerful king in order to free a people from slavery; and this man is neither frightened nor apprehensive, because he has been told: *I will be with thee* [Ex. 3:12]. They possess this quality, too, in different degrees, but all must have it, as was said to Jeremiah: *Be not afraid of them . . . be not dismayed of them . . . for behold I have made thee this day a fortified city* [Jer. 1:8, 17, 18], and to Ezekiel: *be not afraid of them, nor of their words* [Ezek. 2:6]. Thus you will find all of them to be men of a strongly aggressive spirit and endowed with ample gifts of divination so that they can tell of impending events in the shortest possible time. In this respect, too, they differed, as you are no doubt aware.

It must be fully understood that true prophets without any doubt attain to speculative perceptions of such a kind that no man by mere speculation could have perceived the causes that necessarily led to that conclusion. Similarly they announce events that no man could have foretold by mere common surmise and intuition. The reason is that same emanation, which flows upon the imaginative faculty until it perfects the latter to such an extent that it functions so as to foretell future events, and perceives them as if they were events perceived by the senses and had reached the imaginative faculty through the senses—that same emanation also perfects the functions of the rational faculty so that it functions in such a way as to know

things as they truly are, and obtains that perception as if it had deduced them from speculative premises. This is the truth which everyone believes who wishes to be just, for each of these things bears out the correctness of all the others.

It stands to reason that all this applies especially to the rational faculty. After all, this faculty is the one which is the recipient of the emanation from the Active Intelligence and which is brought into actuality by it, and only from the rational faculty does the emanation pass on to the imaginative faculty. How then can it be explained that the perfection of the imaginative faculty reaches such a pitch that it apprehends things that have not been communicated to it through the senses, if the rational faculty were not to gain similar advantages in being able to apprehend things it could not have apprehended through reflection and logical deduction from premises? This is the true meaning of prophecy, and those the features which distinguish prophetic teaching.

Chapter 39

Having thus spoken of the nature of prophecy, and having discovered its true character and made clear at the same time that the prophethood of our teacher Moses was different from that of all others, let us state that this conclusion in itself is sufficient ground for proclaiming the validity of the Law.²² Nothing like the mission of Moses to us ever took place in any society known to us from Adam until Moses, nor has any similar mission ever been accorded after him to any of our prophets. It is, indeed, the foundation of our Law that no other will ever take place. Therefore, according to our opinion, there never was nor ever will be more than one Law, namely that of Moses.

The evidence for this, as put down in the Bible and later writings is that none of the prophets that preceded Moses, such as the patriarchs, Sem, Eber, Noah, Methuselah, and Enoch, ever said to a group of people: 'God sent me to you and commanded me to tell you this and that; He forbids you to do thus and thus and commands you to do thus and thus.' Neither the text

22. Or: that his perception was sufficient to cause him to proclaim the Law.

of the Torah nor any reliable tradition ever said such a thing. What happened is that these men received revelations from God in the way we have explained before, and those whose share of the divine emanation was strong, like Abraham, gathered people around them and preached to them by way of instruction and communication of the truth they had apprehended. Thus Abraham would instruct people and explain to them with speculative proofs that there was one God in the world, who had created all other things, and it was not right to worship images, or any created thing. He would enjoin people to keep to this and would attract them by well-chosen words and kindness; but he never said: ‘God has sent me to you and has enjoined on me certain positive and negative commandments.’ Indeed when he was commanded to circumcise himself, his sons, and those attached to him, he did circumcise them, but did not call upon people in general to do so, after the manner of prophetic preaching. This can be seen from the very words of Scripture: *For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment* [Gen. 18:19]. From this it is obvious that he did so only by way of moral persuasion. The same applies to Isaac, Jacob, Levi, Kohath, and Amram, who were preaching to people in this manner. The Sages say of the prophets who preceded him: ‘the law court of Eber, the law court of Methuselah, the homiletic teaching of Methuselah.’²³ All of these — may peace be upon them — were prophets who taught people in the manner of instructors, teachers, and moral guides, not by saying: ‘God said to me, speak to the sons of so-and-so.’

This was the state of affairs before Moses. As for Moses himself, you well know what was said to him, what he said, and that all the congregation said of him: *we have seen this day that God doth talk with man, and he liveth* [Deut. 5:24²⁴]. To come to the prophets that arose after Moses, you are aware of all their stories as told, and know that their position was that of warners to the people, whom they called to the Law of Moses. They threatened those that turned away from it and

made promises to those that were steadfast in observing it. We further believe that this will always be so, as it is said: *It is not in heaven that thou shouldst say, Who shall go up for us to heaven and bring it unto us*, etc. [Deut. 30:12], and *those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever* [Deut. 29:29²⁵].

This is just as it ought to be. If a thing is as perfect as it can possibly be within its own species, then anything existing within that species cannot but fall short of that degree of perfection, either by excess or deficiency. For instance, if a thing possesses the most perfectly balanced mixture possible within that species, then every mixture deviating from this perfect balance will have either too much or too little. This is the case with this Law, in view of its perfect balance which is clearly stated in the words *equitable laws and statutes* [Deut. 4:8]. You know, of course, that equitable (*tzad-diq*) is the same as well-balanced. It consists of acts of worship not implying any burden or exaggeration, such as monasticism²⁶ or itinerant dervish life and the like, nor a lack of religious duties which leads to gluttony or indulgence and ultimately to a decline of man from his moral and intellectual perfection, as happened with the religions of the nations of antiquity.²⁷ When we shall, later in this treatise, discuss the reasons for the laws, you will obtain a sufficient idea of its equability and wisdom. This is why it is said of it: *the statutes of the Lord are perfect* [Ps. 19:8].

Only this Law do we call a divine law. The other systems of political constitution, such as the laws of the Greeks and the puerilities of the Sabians and others, are all the work of human planners, not of prophets, as I have repeatedly explained.

Chapter 40

It has, I think, been made perfectly clear that man is by nature sociable. His nature is to live in a community; he is not in this respect like other animals, for whom life in a community is not a necessity. This is due to the high degree of compositeness in this species. As you know, man is the most composite being, and

23. Cf. Bereshith Rabba xliii.

24. In Heb. 21.

25. In Heb. 28.

26. Other reading: as that of the Brahmins.

27. Other reading: of the heathen.

therefore there are great differences between human individuals. You will hardly ever find two persons alike in any class of moral characteristics any more than you will find them alike in their external appearance. The reason for this is the difference of mixture. Both the substances and the accidents pursuant to the form differ. Every natural form is associated with certain accidents peculiar to it and pursuant to it, which are distinct from the accidents pursuant to the substance. Nothing like this immense range of individual differences is to be found in any species of animal. The differences between the individuals of any species of living beings are small, except in man. You will find that any two of us are so different as if they were of different species in every feature of character. The harshness of one person may reach such a limit that he will kill his youngest son in anger, while another feels sorry for killing a gnat or other insect and becomes depressed over it. The same applies to most other features.

Seeing that the nature of man brings with it such enormous differences between individuals and at the same time requires life in society, it would be impossible for any society to come about except through a leader who co-ordinates their actions, supplements what is imperfect and restrains exaggeration, and lays down standards for their activities and behaviour so that they can always act according to the same standard. Thus the natural differences will be masked by the large degree of conventional co-ordination, and the community will be well-ordered. For this reason I say that the Law, though it is not part of nature, yet is closely interwoven with nature. It is part of the wisdom of God in maintaining this human species—since He willed its existence—that He made it part of their nature that some individuals possess the faculty of leadership.

To some of these leaders the content of their mission is directly communicated. These are the prophet and the lawgiver. Others have power only to enforce in practice what the former two have laid down,²⁸ to follow it up and to bring it into actuality. They are the ruler who adopts the laws and the pretender to prophethood who adopts the religious law of the prophet, either in its entirety or in part. He may choose

the latter course either because it is easier for him, or in order to make people believe that these things came to him in a revelation and that he is not a mere follower of someone else. They do this out of jealousy, for there are men who are attracted by certain accomplishments and experience a desire and longing for them; they wish people to imagine that they possess that accomplishment, though they themselves know that they have nothing of it. For instance, you often find people claiming other people's poems or plagiarising them. The same happens in some scientific publications and with many details of various sciences when an envious and lazy person gets hold of a new idea of someone else's and claims that he thought of it first.

The same thing happens also with the accomplishment of prophecy. We find that some people claimed prophethood and said things which had never been revealed by God at all, such as Zedekiah, the son of Chenaanah.²⁹ Others, we find, claimed prophethood and said things which God most certainly had said—I mean to say, these things had been revealed, but not to them, as in the case of Hananiah, the son of Azzur³⁰—and they appropriated them and used them for their own aggrandisement.

All these things are obvious and easy to distinguish. I am only explaining them to remove any doubts in your mind and to provide you with a standard by which you can differentiate between systems of law based on human agreement, those based on divine Law, and lastly those promulgated by men who have taken some prophetic utterances, and by way of plagiarism claim them as their own. In those cases where the originators of laws have clearly stated that they had made them up from their own minds, no further arguments are needed in face of this admission by the party itself, which dispenses with all need for evidence. What I want to discuss are those systems of law concerning which it is claimed that they are of prophetic origin. Of these some are prophetic, i.e. divine, others are human laws (*nomoi*), others again stolen. You may find that the whole purpose of a system of law and the

28. Other reading: what the prophet has proclaimed.

29. 1 Kings 22:11.

30. Jer. 28.

intention of its administrator who directs its functions, is solely to order the affairs of the state and to free it from injustice and dissension, but there is in it no striving for speculative accomplishments or any attention to the development of the rational faculty. Such a system does not care about people's opinions, be they true or faulty, but its only aim is to regulate the relations of people amongst each other, in some way or other, and to provide for them some imaginary³¹ happiness according to the views of that administrator. You will, of course, realize that that law is of human origin, and that its originator is, as we have shown, of the third class, namely of those perfected only in their imaginative faculty.

Then you may find another system of law, all of whose ordinances have regard to the proper management of physical matters as described above, but also to the establishment of proper beliefs, and which makes it its business to implant true ideas about God and the angels in the first instance, and which aims to make man wise, knowledgeable, and mentally active, so that he obtains a true idea of the whole universe. You will know that this ordinance is from God and this law is divine.

It remains for you to discover whether the alleged originator is that accomplished person to whom it was revealed or an individual who merely appropriated those ideas and pretended they were his own. The method for examining this is to investigate the character of that person, to follow up his actions, and to study his life. Your most important indication is the rejection and contempt of bodily pleasures, for that is the first stage of achievement of scholars, how much more so of prophets. This applies specially to the senses, which, as Aristotle says, are shameful for us, and more particularly to the filth of sexual intercourse. This is why God used just this to disgrace all pretenders, so that truth might become known to those who seek it and they might be neither deceived nor misled. Just consider how Zedekiah, the son of Maa-seiah, and Ahab, the son of Kolaiah, claimed prophecy and men followed them when they uttered revelations which had been received by others. Then they be-

came involved in vile sexual lust, so that they committed adultery with wives of their colleagues and followers, until God brought their crimes to light as He had disgraced others before them, and the king of Babylon had them burned, as Jeremiah says: *And of them shall be taken up a curse by all the captivity of Judah which are in Babylon, saying, The Lord make thee like Zedekiah and like Ahab whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire; Because they have committed villainy in Israel, and have committed adultery with their neighbours' wives, and have spoken words in my name falsely, which I have not commanded them; even I know and I am a witness, saith the Lord* [Jer. 29:22–33]. Get this point quite clear.

Book III

Chapter 27

Two things are the purpose of the entire Law: the welfare of the soul and the welfare of the body. The welfare of the soul is achieved through communicating to the mass of the people correct beliefs within their intellectual grasp. Some of these have to be imparted by explicit statements, others by parables, since on the whole the nature of the multitude is not so as to allow them to grasp those things as they are. The welfare of the body is achieved by setting aright the way they live together. This purpose is attained by two things. One of them is to remove injustice from their midst. This means that no man is permitted to do what he wants and has power to do, but is constrained to do only such things as are for the common benefit. The second means is to train every individual in socially useful habits so that the affairs of the state run smoothly.

You will appreciate that without any doubt one of these two purposes is the nobler, namely the achievement of welfare of the soul by imparting correct beliefs, while the other precedes it both in the order of nature and of time, I mean the welfare of the body, which is the administration of the state and the happy arrangement of the conditions of its inhabitants as far as this is in our power. This second aim is the more urgent; in the exposition of this subject and its details much effort has been expended, since the first purpose cannot be achieved before the second is attained. For

31. This word is missing in some manuscripts.

it is proved that man can achieve perfection in two respects, firstly in his body and secondly in his soul. The first concerns his being as healthy and fit in his body as possible. This cannot be unless he finds his needs whenever he requires them, namely food and other requisites of his body, such as shelter, baths, etc. However, no man can succeed in this alone, but every individual can only achieve all this by combining into a state. As is well known, man is social by nature.

The second form of perfection is attained when he becomes actually rational, i.e. acquires an intellect in actuality, by knowing of all existing things everything man has the power to know in accordance with his ultimate state of perfection. It is obvious that this ultimate perfection does not carry with it any actions or moral qualities, but consists in opinions alone to which one has been led by speculation and compelled by investigation. It is also obvious that this glorious ultimate perfection cannot be attained unless the first form of perfection has been achieved. Man is unable to conceive clearly an idea, even if it is explained to him, leave alone arrive at this idea through his own efforts, when he is affected by pain, violent hunger, thirst, heat, or violent cold. Only after attaining the first form of perfection is it possible to achieve the ultimate perfection, which is doubtlessly the nobler one and is alone the cause of everlasting life.

The true law, which, as we have explained, is the only and unique one, namely the Law of Moses, has been given so as to bestow upon us the two kinds of perfection together. It provides for the improvement of human relationships by removing injustice and in-

culcating good and generous habits, so that the community will last without any disturbance of its order, and thus every member of it attain to his first stage of perfection. At the same time it ordains for the improvement of men's beliefs and the instilling of correct opinions by which man can attain to ultimate perfection. The Torah expressly mentions these two stages of perfection and informs us that the aim of the entire Law is to attain these: *And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, that it might be well with us at all times, and that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day* [Deut. 6:24]. In this passage the ultimate perfection is mentioned first, in keeping with its importance, since we have explained that it is the ultimate purpose. It is contained in the words 'that it might be well with us at all times.' You know well what the Rabbis have said in discussing the verse: *that it may be well with thee and that thou mayest prolong thy days* [Deut. 22:7]; 'That it may be well with thee—for a world which is wholly good, and that thou mayest prolong thy days—for a world which is eternally extended' (Qiddushin 39b, Yalqut I, 930). Similarly the intention of 'that it may be well with us at all times' here is the attainment of the world that is wholly good and eternally extended, i.e. everlasting life, while the words 'that he might preserve us alive as it is at this day' refer to the first, corporeal existence which lasts only a certain time, and which does not achieve its perfect order except in society, as we have shown.

[. . .]