[CHAPTER 1: PROVIDENCE IS DEFINED]

1. The Greeks call providence προνοία or προνοή [foreknowledge]. The Hebrews derive [the word *hashgachah*, "superintendence"][1] from the verb *hisgiah* in the Hiphil, meaning "to precisely see and distinguish." As for its definition, Cicero says in his book *On Invention*, "It is that by which something future is foreseen before it takes place."[2] But if this definition be applied to divine providence, it does not capture the latter, because that definition denotes merely knowledge of the future and the faculty of knowing in advance, whereas divine providence includes not only the knowledge of God's mind but also his will and

1. Here the original version, Genesis 1569, inserts the Hebrew word החגשה (*hashgachah*) and lacks *deducunt* ("derive"). London 1576 and Zurich 1580 both omit the Hebrew term, while Heidelberg 1603 restores it (transliterated as *Haschgachah*). *Hashgachah* is a key notion in the rabbinic tradition and classical Jewish philosophy; that Vermigli is conversant with the term evinces his familiarity with rabbinic literature.

2. Cicero, *De inventione* 2.53.160.

choice by which it is fixed and determined that events will happen in one way rather than another. Besides these things, providence also includes the power and capacity to direct and govern the things for which he is said to make provision, since we find in things not only their very substance and nature but also the order by which they are connected to one other and tend one to another, such that one thing helps another or one thing is completed by another. And things have been well ordained in both of these respects, for all of them were said to be good individually with regard to themselves and to be very good generally with regard to order. That this order exists in things can be proved from the very nature of order. For Augustine defines *order* as an arrangement of equal and unequal things that allocates to each what belongs to each.[3] And everyone knows that the parts of the world are varied and unequal if they be compared with one another. Further, both the testimony of experience and the teaching of the sacred writings show how fittingly God has allotted to every one of them their own places and their proper spots and positions. For we are told that God set a limit for the sea and the waters and that they do not dare to go beyond the boundaries prescribed for them [Prov. 8:29], and further that he measures the air with the hollow of his hand [Isa. 40:12], and so on.

Since so great a benefit received from his hand is to be ascribed to him by reason of providence, we will be able to define it: *providence* is the system[4] which God uses

3. Augustine, *De civitate dei* 19.13.1 (*City of God*, *NPNF* 1/2:409).

4. The Latin term Vermigli uses here is *ratio*, which has a wide range

in directing things toward their proper ends. This definition includes not only knowledge but also the will and the power to accomplish the thing. Accordingly, Paul brilliantly expressed what we are saying in the first chapter of his letter to the Ephesians when he said, "Who works all things according to the counsel of his own will" [v. 11]. And in his speech *For Milo*, Cicero taught by what indications this providence can be grasped from natural reason. For he writes, "No one can judge otherwise except a person who thinks that there is no heavenly power or divine sway, and who is not moved either by the sun out there or by the movement of the skies and heavenly bodies or by the alterations and orders in events," and what follows.[5] Paul described this same proof in the first chapter of his letter to the Romans [vv. 19–20], as did Job, chapter 12 [vv. 7–8]: "Ask the cattle and the birds of the sky, the fish of the sea, and the bushes of the earth, and they themselves will teach you." Likewise Psalm 19 [v. 1]: "The heavens tell forth the glory of God." And again, Job chapter 31, about the goats, deer, the horse, Leviathan, and Behemoth [Job 39, 40, 41].

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of meanings including *system*, *method*, *plan*, *principle*, *relation*, and *account*.

5. Cicero, *Pro Milone* 30.83.

[CHAPTER 2: PRELIMINARY OBJECTIONS TO PROVIDENCE ARE ANSWERED]

2. Therefore, let this be settled: the order of things demonstrates that what was created was not made haphazardly or by chance; therefore, God is a purposeful agent, and all things are subject to his providence as to a certain all-embracing and supreme art, and nothing can be found that evades it. However, some have dared to deny this. They entrust only certain very high and paramount matters to God's care, while ascribing the rest—the smallest matters—to natural causes, and leaving the relatively important matters be carried out by angels or demons. One can see this in Plato's *Protagoras*, where the creation of things is described such that certain things were granted to Epimetheus to make, others to Prometheus.[1] The only thing that is claimed to have been accomplished by the work of the gods is taking thought for the best interests of the human race. But Christ teaches us otherwise in the gospel: "The hairs of your head are all numbered, and of two sparrows not even one falls without the will of your Father"

1. Plato, *Protagoras* 320c–322a.

[Matt. 10:29–30]. "And the Lord himself looked out from heaven upon all the children of men" [Psalm 14:2].

Now if those men were interpreting the matter to mean that there is not providence over all things in the same way that there is over human beings, we would grant this—not because providence, despite being absolutely simple in itself, ought to be called multiple, but because the effects that it directs are varied and diverse, and so providence itself also seems to have diverse ways of being. Thus we concede that the providence over upright persons is greater, to such an extent that, in comparison with them, the Lord could say to the damned and to the foolish virgins, "I do not know you" [Matt. 7:23; 25:12]; and by the same token, it concerns human beings more than it does irrational creatures.

And from living faith in this providence we derive many useful benefits: above all, consolation in adversity, since we know that those things happen not haphazardly but by the will and supervision of God our Father. Also, we are spurred on more and more each day to good works, since we realize that God is aware of and witness to our actions and that he will justly judge them in the future. Besides this, the gifts which we enjoy are more pleasing to us on account of their having been bestowed on us by a provident God. Moreover, within that providence we contemplate predestination, which brings such great consolation to upright persons that they are wonderfully strengthened by it.[2]

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2. For the relationship between providence and predestination in Vermigli's thought, see McLelland, *Philosophical Works*, xxxii–xxxviii, which includes a comparison with the views of Calvin, Zwingli, and Bullinger.

3. Nor do we need to fear any novelty in God on account of his providence. In the case of human beings, they are devoid of knowledge when they are brought forth into the light by their parents and are incapable of acquiring knowledge without change. But we should by no means surmise this of God, since he has possessed his knowledge from eternity. Besides that, he has this knowledge from his own self whereas we derive our knowledge from things. So James correctly wrote that with him there is no change or shadow of alteration [James 1:17], and it never happens that God's knowledge is changed by a change in things. Moreover, this highest knowledge is safely stationed in God: there is no looming danger that he may abuse it as do human beings, of whom it is written in Jeremiah 4 [v. 22], "They are wise only to commit evil." But God is the best and has knowledge of what is best, and anyone who has such knowledge cannot use other things evilly, as Plato taught in *Second Alcibiades*. There it is proved that in the absence of this knowledge it is better to be unaware of many things; for Orestes' interests would have been better served if he had not recognized the woman approaching him as his mother after he had resolved to kill her.[3]

This supervision of things does not mean that God is wrenched from his tranquil felicity or from contemplation of better[4] things. Such is the lot of human beings: sometimes the handling of superfluous matters distracts them from better and serious pursuits. Hence it is not without

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3. Plato, *Alcibiades 2* 144b–c (generally considered an apocryphal work).

4. *meliorum* Genesis 1569, London 1576, Zurich 1580: *meliore* Heidelberg 1603.

reason that Paul condemned empty and meddlesome questions [2 Tim. 2:23]. This is a consequence of the restrictedness of our intellect, which is not able to direct its energy to many things. But since God is infinite in regard to all that is his, he can without any difficulty perceive all things that happen, that will happen, or that have ever happened.

Nor does this knowledge of things spur God to evils. That does happen to human beings, because their appetitive faculty has been corrupted. Hence Solomon said, "Do not look at wine when it gleams golden in the glass," etc. [Prov. 23:31]. Psalm 109 [119:37]: "Turn away my eyes from beholding vanity." And Job in chapter 14 said that he had made a covenant with his eyes that he would not think about a virgin [Job 31:1]. But since God is the first yardstick of justice and integrity, he cannot be impelled to evil. Yet Averroes said, "Certainly his intellect would be cheapened if he discerned and apprehended all these lower things."[5] However, because he acquires that knowledge not

5. Ibn Rushd (1126–1198), known to the Latin West as Averroes, was an influential Islamic philosopher and polymath. He held that the First Form "understands nothing outside itself" (*Long Commentary on the* De Anima *of Aristotle*, trans. Richard C. Taylor [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009], 3 §5, 326), and that "if it is not possible for it to think what is lower, nor that which is better than itself—since there is nothing better than itself—then it thinks only itself" (Charles Genequand, *Ibn Rushd's Metaphysics: A Translation with Introduction of Ibn Rushd's Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics, Book Lām* [Leiden: Brill, 1984], §1700, 194). For Averroes, God, the Prime Intellect, does not have either a universal or a particular knowledge of the created world. Nevertheless, the First Principle is not ignorant of what it has created: it knows them in a manner unique to itself, by virtue of its being their cause. See *Averroes' Tahafut Al-Tahafut (The Incoherence of the Incoherence)*, trans. Simon Van Den Bergh (London: E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 2012), 2 vols. in 1, §468 (1:285);

from things but from his own self, this conclusion is not to be granted nor does it actually follow. Similarly, when we behold a mirror, we are not contaminated because it reflects back the images of base things, nor again is the visible sun above us contaminated when its course takes it over mire and filth.

And God does not suffer from any distress in understanding. For in this action he does not use any bodily instrument, as do human beings: for them distress does arise from understanding, because the body is thereby impaired and wearied severely. Hence Solomon not without reason called this pursuit of knowing a shattering or affliction of the spirit [Eccl. 2:11]. For knowledge sometimes produces disturbance in us, because those who understand more see more things that displease them and irritate them. That is why it is said, not without reason, "He who adds knowledge adds distress as well" [Eccl. 1:18], for we have a hard time coping with things that happen unfittingly. But God is not at all subject to those human feelings, for he has something more: he sees the outcome of things and directs them, no matter how unfitting they are, and knows that they will turn out for his glory.

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§§226–27 (1:135), §§339–41 (1:204–5); §507 (1:310). As Averroes asserts elsewhere (in his *Epistle Dedicatory*), the denial that God knows particulars "by means of a generated knowledge" (as opposed to "eternal knowledge," which Averroes does ascribe to God) is "the ultimate in removing imperfections [from God] that it is obligatory to acknowledge." *Averroes' The Book of the Decisive Treatise Determining the Connection between the Law and Wisdom and Epistle Dedicatory*, trans. Charles E. Butterworth (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2001), 42. For a summary of Averroes's view, see Posti, *Medieval Theories of Divine Providence*, 61–62.

[CHAPTER 3: ON PROVIDENCE, NECESSITY, AND CONTINGENCY]

4. The objections that we have eliminated so far have not been difficult to remove from divine providence, seeing that a plain and ready way out was presenting itself in regard to them. But there remain a number of other objections more difficult to solve. The first of these is based on chance and fortune, which seem to be ousted from the nature of things if we attribute to God providence over all things. For nothing is more opposed to fortune and chance than reason. Fortune, after all, is a cause which acts from an intention[1] when something happens that is not intended or decided or resolved, contrary to expectation and when we are unaware. But we resist this argument in the following way. As far as we are concerned, God's providence does not do away with fortune and chance.

1. Cf. Aristotle, *Physics* 2.5.197a5–7: "So it is clear that chance [ἡ τύχη] is a cause by accident of things that are done by choice for the sake of something." Medieval Latin commentators on the *Physics* debated in what sense *fortuna* can be described as *agens a proposito* or *agens secundum propositum*. See, e.g., Aquinas's *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* 2.8.213–16.

For what prevents its being the case that nothing comes about fortuitously with respect to God, yet many things happen haphazardly and by fortune with respect to us? A rather fitting simile can be brought forward here. Suppose a master sends his slave to the market-house to stay there until the ninth hour. If he sends some other slave of his to the market-house before that hour has elapsed, the event of those[2] two slaves running into each other will not happen haphazardly or fortuitously with respect to the master, since he anticipates this by sending them to the same place; but it will not happen intentionally on their part, since the one will have been entirely unaware about the other.[3] Therefore, many things which happen under God's foreknowledge and awareness take place by chance and fortuitously if you will refer them to a dull-witted human being and his weak intellect.

But they say: If, as we believe, all things are directed by God and happen by his counsel, where will there any longer be contingency in things? Everything comes about by necessity. And some think that this argument against divine providence is so powerful that the freedom of our choice can hardly be defended. But basically the same pattern of response can be brought to bear on this line of reasoning which we used a little earlier with respect to fortuitous things. For it is possible that if you focus on the proximate causes, the things that take place rightly are contingent and are rightly so called, since it is not at all

2. *illi* Genesis 1569, London 1576: *illic* Zurich 1580, Heidelberg 1603.

3. This well-known illustration is adapted from Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I[a] q. 116 a. 1 co.; cf. also Aristotle, *Physics* 2.4.196a4–8.

incongruous for that cause to produce that specific effect just as much as its opposite. For instance, with respect to my own will, it is just as possible for me to sit as it is for me not to sit. Therefore, if those effects be referred to that cause, they will be contingent, since it is possible for them to be otherwise; but inasmuch as they are subject to divine providence, we should not in the least deny that they are necessary. At any rate, if one admits a twofold necessity, namely absolute and hypothetical, it is possible that those things which are necessary hypothetically are contingent and not necessary if you take them as outside the hypothesis.[4]

Isaiah chapter 14 deals with the overthrow of the Babylonian kingdom. This event was contingent with respect to its own worldly causes, since there was nothing preventing it from being otherwise. And yet the prophet, wishing to show that it would undoubtedly happen, focuses on the divine purpose and says, "God has so resolved: who will be able to dissolve it? The hand of the Lord has now been stretched out, and who will be able to draw it back?" [v. 27]. Thus, at this point the matter was necessary on that account. And in Psalm 37 [33:11] we read, "But the counsel of the Lord remains forever, and the counsels of his heart to all generations."

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4. Here and in section 13 below, where these concepts are developed more fully, Vermigli uses the technical expression *necessitas ex hypothesi*, referring to "a necessity that arises out of a set of circumstances or out of a disposition or capacity hypothetically rather than absolutely or necessarily conceived." Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, s.v. "necessitatis consequentiae." See also note 3 on p.35 below.

Still they push back: "Necessity seems to block divine providence. For we do not consult about things that cannot be otherwise. Therefore, since many things in the world that fall into this category are necessary, they seem to exclude divine providence." But at this point we must observe that even if all things are necessary inasmuch as they are referred to God's decree and plan as something accomplished and decided, still all things are contingent in respect to God who decides and determines the act, and therefore nothing in the world is necessary to the point that it could not be otherwise. (We are not talking now about the definitions of things or about necessary propositions or interconnections: those things are not guided by divine providence, for they are expressions of eternal truth and of the divine nature.) One also finds some people who think that there would be no evil things to be found in the world if it were guided by God's providence, since no one who acts providently in his own works would leave any place for evil. But there is an easy response to such people: no evil can be found that is not useful for the saints and that does not contribute to their salvation or manifest God's justice and mercy or promote the order of the universe or its preservation.[5]

5. In order that we may follow some method,[6] we must ask firstly whether there is any providence; secondly, what it is; thirdly, whether all things are subject to it;

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5. Heidelberg 1603 adds a note here: "The same topic, but clearer, from 1 Samuel 10 verse 2."

6. *Vt methodum aliquam sequamur* London 1576, Zurich 1580: *Vt autem methodus intelligatur* Samuel 1564: *Verum ad haec fusius explicanda ut methodum aliquam sequamur* Heidelberg 1603.

fourthly, whether it is unable to change; finally, whether it allows for any contingency in things. But before I come to the topic itself, something must be said about the meaning of the terms themselves. *Contingent* is the term for what the Greeks call ἐνδεχόμενον [possible], referring to something of such a kind that it is able both to happen and not to happen, and whether it happens or does not happen, nothing is entailed that is absurd or contrary to reason or contrary to the word of God. It is divided into three categories. The first of these is called by the Greeks ὁποτερ' ἔτυχεν [whichever happens to be the case], referring to that which has an equal propensity in each of two directions; the second ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολύ [for the most part], referring to that which tends in most instances to happen in one way or the other, but is able to turn out differently; the third is called ὡς ἐλάχιστον [extremely infrequent], referring to that which happens only rarely and unusually.[7]

The philosophers lay down a twofold foundation of contingency: matter, which as it encounters in turn different acting causes takes on different forms in turn; and will, by which our actions are governed. Will has the principle of matter because it is guided and impelled by the intellect. Augustine in *Eighty-Three Questions*, question 31, says that the philosophers divide prudence into three parts: intelligence, memory, and providence, and that they refer memory to past things and intelligence to present things, while the provident man is one who can determine on the basis of past and present things what will happen later

7. This Greek terminology largely derives from Aristotle's *De interpretatione* 9.19a10–23 (*On Interpretation*, 139).

on.[8] Now God not only recognizes and sees what is going to take place, but also adds will to these things. For we do not postulate in God only bare intelligence, but also efficacious will by which he guides and controls all things. The Greeks call this προνοία [foreknowledge], and Cicero in *On the Nature of the Gods* calls it "the prophetic old woman of the Stoics."[9] She was considered of such great worth among the ancients that she was even worshipped as a goddess in Delos because she had helped Latona in childbirth. But this story indicates nothing other than that second causes, despite having some power in themselves, still do not bring anything to pass unless the providence of God supervenes. For Latona is nature; providence is a midwife: if the latter does not supervene and help and, so to speak, perform her midwifely duty, then the former does not bring forth anything.

8. Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* 31.1 (*Eighty-Three Different Questions*, 58).

9. Cicero, *De natura deorum* 1.8.18.