

HALACHIC AND HASHKAFIC ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

SERIES 3: 1 - TESHUVA, FREE WILL & GOD'S KNOWLEDGE OU ISRAEL/BEIT KENESSET HANASI - FALL 2024

A] CONFUSION AND CULPABILITY - TESHUVA OF THE MIND

1. על חטא שחטאנו לפניך בתמהון לבב

וידוי ביום כיפור

One of the 'al chets' that we say on Yom Kippur is for 'timhon leivav' - confusion of the mind.

2. יִכְכָּה ה' בְּשִׁעָרוֹ וּבִעְגָרוֹ וּבְתַמְהוֹן לִבָּב: (רש"י - חוטם כלב, אשטורדישו"ן² זל"ט"ז [תדכמח])

דברים כח:כח

The expression is from the Tochacha. Rashi defines it as 'blockage of the mind' - confusion or stupefaction.

- Many of the commentators on the vidui understand that this 'al chet' is referring also to confusion in hashkafa and emuna - our understanding of God and the manner in which He runs the world.

B] BELIEF IN DIVINE OMNISCIENCE - THE 10TH IKAR

3. א פל אחד ואחד מבני האדם יש לו זכויות ועונות. מי שזכויותיו יתרות על עונותיו צדיק. ומי שעונותיו יתרות על זכויותיו רשע. מחצה למחצה בינוני ...

ב אדם שעונותיו מרבין על זכויותיו מיד הוא מת ברשעו שנאמר (ירמיהו ל"ד) על רב עונתך

ה ... ויכן כל הרשעים שעונותיהן מרבין דנין אותן כפי חטאייהם ויש להן חלק לעולם הבא שכל ישראל יש להם חלק לעולם הבא אף על פי שחטאו שנאמר (ישעיה ס"בא) ועמך כלם צדיקים לעולם יירשו ארץ. ארץ זו משל כלומר ארץ החיים והוא העולם הבא. וכן חסידי אמות העולם יש להם חלק לעולם הבא:

ו ואלו הן שאין להן חלק לעולם הבא אלא נכרתים ואובדין ונדונין על גדל רשעם וחטאתם לעולם ולעולמי עולמים. המינים. והאפיקורסין. והכופרים בתורה. והכופרים בתחיית המתים ובביאת הגואל. המורדים. ומחטיאי הרבים. והפורשין מדרך צבור. והעושה עברות בנד רמה בפרהסיא ביהולקים. והמוסרים. ומטילי אימה על הצבור שלא לשם שמנים. ושופכי דמים. ובעלי לשון הרע. והמושף ערלתו.

ח שלשה הן הנקראים אפיקורסין. ... [ו]האומר שאין הבורא יודע מעשה בני האדם.

רמב"ם הלכות תשובה פרק ג

In the third chapter of Hilchot Teshuva, the Rambam explains that even those people who are 'reshaim' - meaning that the 'majority' of their spiritual reality is negative - still have a place in Olam Haba. However, some categories of people do NOT have a place in Olam Haba³ due to the severity of their actions or beliefs. These include a person who denies that God knows the actions of every human being.

4. והיסוד העשירי שהוא יתעלה יודע מעשי בני אדם ואינו מזניחם, ולא כדעת מי שאמר (יחזקאל ח"ב) עזב ה' את הארץ, אלא כמו שאמר (ירמיהו ל"ב) גדל העצה ורב העליגה אשר עיניך פקחות על כל דרכי בני אדם, ואמר (בראשית ו"ה) ויגרא ה' כי רבה רעת האדם בארץ, ואמר (בראשית י"ב) זעקת סדם ועמרה כי רבה. וזה יורה על זה היסוד העשירי

רמב"ם - הקדמה לפ' חלק, משנה סנהדרין

Belief in God's omniscience is enshrined in the 10th of the 13 Ikarim.

1. See Rav Aharon Lichtenstein's analysis of *timhon leivav* in *Return and Renewal: Reflections on Teshuva and Spiritual Growth*, p.154-158. He states there: "In thinking of 'the sin of ... *tim'hon leivav*', we may think along both tracks. There is a sense in which one might assume that *tim'hon leivav* itself, the skepticism which we noted earlier, is a sin. But, I think, at least for some, there is a sin of *tim'hon leivav* which understands it as a very desirable and necessary part of introspection, with the sin being the failure to apply it intelligently and adequately." Rav Lichtenstein goes on to suggest that the Charedi community, with all its admirable qualities, suffers from a 'surfeit of certitude' and a lack of proper self-criticism and introspection. Whereas the Modern Orthodox community, with all its admirable qualities, suffers from a surfeit of skepticism.
2. Old French: *estordison*. Modern French: *étourdissement* (dizziness).
3. This is different from the consequence of 'karet' which applies to a number of mitzvot in the Torah - eg avoda zara, Shabbat, chametz on Pesach. The exact difference between karet in Olam Haba and losing a chelek in Olam Haba is beyond the scope of this shiur.

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• The Rambam famously formulated 13 Principles of Jewish belief in the 12th Century. These were accepted by many subsequent authorities⁴ as the definitive position of the Rambam's (and Torah) dogma and many Jews connected to them through the scores of piyutim⁵ composed to liturgize them. The two most famous today are the 'Ani Ma'amins' standardly printed in the siddur, and the hymn Yigdal.

5. וכאשר יודה האדם באלה היסודות כלם, ויאמין בהם אמונה שלמה - הריהו נכנס בכלל ישראל, וחיבים לאהבו ולרחם עליו, וכל מה שחיב ה' מקצתנו לקצתנו מן האהבה והאחווה. ואפילו עשה מה שעשה מן העברות מחמת התאוה והתגברות הטבע הגרוע - הרי הוא יענש לפי מריו, ויש לו חלק והוא ממושעי ישראל. ואם יתקלקל לאדם יסוד מאלה היסודות - הרי יצא מן הכלל וכפר בעקר, ונקרא 'מין' ו'אפיקורוס' ו'קוצץ בנטיעות', וחיבים לשנאו ולאבדו. ועליו הוא אומר (תהילים קל"ט:כא) *הַלֹּא־מִשְׁנֵאִידָהּ אִשְׁנָא וְכוּ'*
הקדמת הרמבם לפרק חלק ע' (בסוף)

When a person accepts all of these principles and believes them fully, he enters into the community of Israel and we are obligated to love him and care for him in all the ways that God requires us to act towards our fellow man, with love and fraternity. No matter what sins he committed due to desire or to his negative inclination overpowering him, he will be punished according to his rebellion, but he has a place [in the World to Come]; he is one of the sinners of Israel. But if a person denies⁷ one of these principles, he has left the community and rejected a fundamental. He is called a heretic, an 'apikoros' and one who 'cuts in the plantings', and we are required to reject and destroy him. About him it is written (Tehillim 139:21) "Do I not hate them, God, who hate You!?"

End of the Rambam's Introduction to Perek Chelek

*The Rambam's Ikarim have enormous implications for the definition of who is and who is not a heretic, and indeed who is a Jew! According to the Rambam, rejection of any of the Ikarim excludes a person from Jewish society.*⁸

• As such, the stakes are high and it appears crucial that we get this right!

C] FREE WILL

C1] A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE ISSUES

- Human beings feel intuitively that they have choices in many things and the ability to make free decisions between those choices⁹.
- However, what if that feeling is actually misleading and we only think that we have freedom to make those choices? Indeed, there are reasons to question whether we truly have free will, two of which are:
 - The scientific challenge¹⁰ that we live in a causally determined material world where different events naturally lead to pre-determined and predictable consequences. There may be too many of these for us to predict accurately, giving us the illusion of free choices. But, in fact, all of our choices may be entirely determined by our sub-conscious which is itself a determined outcome of our genetic nature and environmental nurture.
 - The theological challenge that human free will is incompatible with Divine omniscience and omnipotence. If God knows all things, then our choices are also known and determined by that Divine knowledge. And if God is all powerful, how is that He is effectively subordinated to the contingencies of our choices¹¹?
- Philosophically, there are, broadly speaking, a number of approaches:
 - DETERMINISM: the position that there is no free choice and all things are determined.
 - LIBERTARIANISM: the position that there is no determinism and free choice is absolute.
 - COMPATIBILISM: the position there is BOTH determinism AND free choice but somehow they can coexist.
- These issues are crucial in assessing moral responsibility. If we are not truly free to choose, how can we be held responsible? In the ethical formula ascribed to Immanuel Kant - "ought implies can"¹².

4. Although not by all. Some later poskim, in particular Rav Yosef Albo and the Abarbanel took issue with the Rambam's formulation.

5. At least 94 medieval poems have the 13 Ikarim as their subject - Israel Davidson, *Ozar ha-Shirah ve-ha-Piyyut, IV* (New York 1933), 493

6. Hebrew translation of R' Yitzchak Shilat התשנו אדומים, מעלה אדומים, הוצאת שילת, למשנה - הוצאת שילת, מעלה אדומים, התשנו

7. This is probably the most important word in the paragraph. מתקלקל is also the word used in other Hebrew translations of the original Judeo-Arabic and implies that the principle has been spoiled or ruined. Perhaps 'denial' is a little strong, although I have seen English translations which say 'doubt', which certainly seems too weak. The Rambam is not stating that a person who merely questions the Ikarim is a heretic, rather one who rejects them. Other popular translations include "breaks away" (Abelson - used in Rabbi Bleich's 'With Perfect Faith') and "gives up" (R. Twersky).

8. This raises the question of how such a principle would apply to non-observant Jews in today's world. We will be'H look at this shortly in a subsequent shiur.

9. This point is made by R. Saadya Gaon in Emunot veDeot (IV:4, 187): "a human being feels conscious of his own ability either to speak or to remain silent".

10. In fact, this challenge may have been dampened in the wake of quantum theory which shows that while most physical phenomena can be explained by scientific cause and effect, there are phenomena that cannot be attributed to any scientific causation. Ironically, if taken to the ultimate extreme that effectively NOTHING can be truly determined because of the inherent indeterminism at the quantum level, this also undermines the concept of real choice since the choice is not a free and logical response to the options but a somewhat arbitrary outcome of quantum uncertainty.

11. We will not address in this shiur the problem of free choice and Divine Omnipotence. Rambam, R. Saadia Gaon, and many others (see Kuzari 5:20) respond that, although God is all-powerful, one way of exercising power is to delegate that power to someone else. So too, God chose to delegate the power of choice to human beings in order to grant us free will. This, in turn, was necessary in order to enable man to emulate God and truly own the consequences of his actions - reward or punishment.

12. "The action to which the 'ought' applies must indeed be possible under natural conditions", Immanuel Kant. Critique of Pure Reason, A548/B576. p. 473.

C2] THE RAMBAM'S POSITION - COMPATIBILISM?

6. א רשות לכל אדם נתונה. אם רצה להטות עצמו לדבר טובה ולהיות צדיק הרשות בידו. ואם רצה להטות עצמו לדבר רעה ולהיות רשע הרשות בידו. הוא שפיתוב בתורה (בראשית ג:כב) הן האדם היה כאחד ממנו לדעת טוב ורע.

ב אל יעבר במחשבתך דבר זה שאומרים טפשי אמות העולם ורב גלמי בני ישראל שהקדוש ברוך הוא גוזר על האדם מתחלת בריתו להיות צדיק או רשע. אין הדבר כן אלא כל אדם ראוי לו להיות צדיק כמשה רבנו או רשע כנרבעם או חכם או סכל או רחמן או אכזרי או פילי או שוע וכן שאר כל הדעות

ג ודבר זה עקר גדול הוא והוא עמוד התורה והמצוה שנאמר (דברים לטו) ראה נתתי לפניך היום את החיים. וכתוב (דברים יא:כו) ראה אנכי נתן לפניכם היום. כלומר שהרשות בידכם. וכל שיחפץ האדם לעשות ממעשה בני האדם עושה בין טובים בין רעים. ומפני זה הענין נאמר (דברים ה:כו) מי יתן והיה לבבם זה להם. כלומר שאין הבורא כופה בני האדם ולא גוזר עליהן לעשות טובה או רעה אלא הכל מסור להם:

ד אלו האל היה גוזר על האדם להיות צדיק או רשע היאך היה מצוה לנו על ידי הנביאים 'עשה כן' ואל תעשה כן' היטיבו דרכיכם ואל תלכו אחרי רשעכם? והוא מתחלת בריתו כבר נגזר עליו או תולדתו תמשך אותו לדבר שאי אפשר לזוז ממנו! ומה מקום היה לכל התורה בלה ובאי זה דין ואיזה משפט נפרע מן הרשע או משלם שכר לצדיק. השפט כל הארץ לא יעשה משפטו?

רמב"ם הלכות תשובה פרק ה

At this stage, the Rambam has posited a strong argument for free will, based primarily on two platforms:

- (i) verses in Tanach that assert free will and even suggest that God is 'limited' (or limits Himself) by human choices.
 (ii) The irrelevance of Torah, mitzvot¹³ and Divine justice if humans have no way to exercise meaningful moral choices.

7. ואמר רבי חנינא: הכל בידי שמים - חוץ מיראת שמים, שנאמר (דברים י"ב) ועתה ישראל מה ה' אלהיך שאל מעמך כי אם ליראה.

ברכות לג:

This argument for freewill is also supported by explicit statements of Chazal - that human choices to fear God or not is outside the reach of Heaven.¹⁴

8. הכל צפוי והרשות נתונה

משנה מסכת אבות פרק ג משנה טו

However, the compatibility of Divine Omniscience and free will is assumed in Pirkei Avot - 'all is foreseen yet free will is given'. No explanation is given as to how these apparently contradictory ideas work in tandem.

9. שמה תאמר והלא הקדוש ברוך הוא יודע כל מה שיהיה קודם שיהיה: ידע שזה צדיק או רשע, או לא ידע; אם ידע שהוא יהיה צדיק, אי אפשר שלא יהיה צדיק, ואם תאמר שידע שיהיה צדיק ואפשר שיהיה רשע, הרי לא ידע הדבר על בריו. ידע שתשובת שאלה זו "ארצה מארץ, מדה; ורחבה, מני-ים" (איוב יא,ט), וכמה עיקרים גדולים והררים רמים תלויים בה; אבל צריך אתה לידע ולהבין בדבר זה שאני אומר. כבר בארנו בפרק שני מהלכות יסודי התורה שהקדוש ברוך הוא אינו יודע בדעה שהיא חוץ ממנו כבני אדם שהן ודעתם שנים, אלא הוא יתברך שמו ודעתו אחד; ואין דעתו שלאדם יכולה להשיג דבר זה על בריו. וכשם שאין כוח באדם להשיג ולמצא אמתת הבורא, שנאמר "כי לא יראני האדם, וחיי" (שמות לג,כ) -- כך אין כוח באדם להשיג ולמצא דעתו שלבורא: הוא שהנביא אומר "כי לא מחשבותי מחשבותיכם, ולא דרכיכם דרכי" (ישעיהו נה,ח). וזכינו שכן הוא, אין בנו כוח לידע היאך ידע הקדוש ברוך הוא כל הברואים ומעשיהם. אבל ידע בלא ספק, שמעשה האדם ביד האדם; ואין הקדוש ברוך הוא מושכו, ולא גוזר עליו לא לעשות כן ולא שלא לעשות כן. ולא מפני קבלת הדת בלבד ידע דבר זה, אלא בראיות ברורות מדברי החכמה. ומפני זה נאמר בנבואה שדנין את האדם על כל מעשיו כפי מעשיו, אם טוב ואם רע. וזה העיקר, שכל דברי הנבואה תלויין בו

רמב"ם הלכות תשובה פרק ה הלכה ה

In Hilchot Teshuva the Rambam deals with the moral question of free will vs Divine Omniscience¹⁵ as follows: (i) the resolution to the problem cannot be understood by us; (ii) this is because our assumptions as to God's Knowledge are all wrong. Since God has no separate knowledge of something outside of Himself but rather this Knowledge is an expression of His Essence, it remains ultimately unknowable.

13. This point is also made by R. Saadia Gaon (Emunot veDeot IV:4, 187): "If God were to exercise force upon his servant, there would be no sense to his command".

14. The Rambam does not cite this statement in Hilchot Teshuva but does bring it in his teshuvot.

15. The moral challenge is: If God knows what I am about to do, how can I have free choice to do it? And if I have no freedom of choice, how can I be held accountable for my actions? Note that there is also a significant philosophical dilemma: (i) If God's knowledge is separate from Him, this offends the notion of God's Unity. How can we even speak positively about God knowing anything independent of His Essence. (ii) On the other hand, if God's knowledge of the world is part of His Essence, that knowledge must be changing as the world changes. Thus there are ongoing modifications (and by implication imperfections) in the Essence of God. (iii) But if God does NOT have full knowledge of the universe, that is certainly an imperfection! The Rambam addresses this in Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah 2:10.

- What we can know (as with all aspects of Negative Theology) is what God's Knowledge is NOT! It is NOT a specific knowledge of an action before it happens (God's Knowledge is in any event beyond time) and thus the philosophical problem is also reduced.
- Although this compatibilism¹⁶ may appear 'convenient' for Maimonides, it is consistent with his general position that positive knowledge of God is never possible. Not only can we not know everything about God, essentially we cannot know anything about Him.
- However, this picture of God's knowledge is complicated by another statement in the Mishne Torah that God knows all things through knowing Himself¹⁷!

10. נמצאת אומר: הוא הידע, והוא הידוע, והוא הדעה עצמה - הכל אחד. ודבר זה - אין כוח בפה לאמרו ולא באזן לשמעו ולא בלב האדם להכירו, על בריו. לפיכך אינו מכיר הברואים ויודעם מחמת הברואים, כמות שאנו יודעים אותם, אלא מחמת עצמו ידעם; לפיכך מפני שהוא ידע עצמו, ידע הכל - שהכל נסמך בהיותו לו.

רמב"ם הלכות יסודי התורה פרק ב הלכה י

God's knowledge is of Himself, and since all existence is subsumed within his own Reality, that knowledge of Himself constitutes complete knowledge of everything.

- The Rambam seems to¹⁸ resolve the philosophical and moral problem by showing that there is no contradiction between free will and something meaningless to us (ie God's knowledge). However, to many people, such an answer will not be satisfactory.

C3] THE RAVAD'S RESPONSE - SOFT DETERMINISM¹⁹

11. וכיון שכן הוא אין בנו כח לידע היאך ידע הקב"ה כל הברואים ומעשה ידיהם. א"א לא נבג זה המחצר מנהג החכמים שאין אדם מתחיל בדבר ולא ידע להשלימו והוא החל בשאלות קושיות והניח הדבר בקושיא והחזירו לאמונה. ועוד היה לו להניח הדבר בתמימות התמימים ולא יעורר לבס ויניח דעתם בספק, ואולי שעה אחת יבא הרהור בלבם על זה! ואע"פ שאין תשובה נחת על זה טוב הוא לסמוך לו קלת תשובה ואומר: אם היו לדקת האדם ורשעתו תלוים בגזירת הצורא ית' היינו אומרים שידעתו היא גזירתו והיתה לנו השאלה קשה מאד. ועכשיו שבצורא הסיר זו הממשלה מידו ומסרה ביד האדם עלמנו אין ידעתו גזירה אבל היא כידעת האלגוניים שידעים מנה אחר מה יהיו דרכיו של זה. והדבר ידוע שכל מקרה האדם קטן וגדול מסרו הצורא בזה המזלות אלא שנתן בו השכל להיותו מחזיקו ללאת מתחת המזל, והוא הכח הנתון באדם להיותו טוב או רע. ובצורא יודע כח המזל ורגעיו - אם יש כח בשכל להוליאו לזה מידו אם לא. וזו הידיעה אינה גזירה. וכל זה אינו שוא.

השגת הרב"ד הלכות תשובה פרק ה הלכה ה

The Ravad is deeply unhappy with the Rambam's answer, which he understands will be seen by many people as evading the question. The Rambam has ultimately given a philosophical answer which deals more with the philosophical question. The real moral question remains - is God really forcing me to do what I actually think I am choosing. The Ravad's answer is that God is certainly not decreeing or causing the specific actions of Man and does not have determinate knowledge of Man's choices. Man's actions are circumscribed by the limitations imposed by mazal which direct a person's life in significant ways. God has total knowledge of the forces of mazal. Man has the intellect to be able to break out of this mazal, each person according to the extent of his or her intellectual strength. Since God also knows the exact parameters of that strength, this, together with his perfect knowledge of the mazal, gives God all the parameters needed to know what choices will be made without causing them.

- This is often called 'soft determinism' - God knows us so well that he can predict with total accuracy what will happen to us and what we will choose.²⁰ Nevertheless, that Knowledge in no way coerces me to make the choice. God is not the CAUSE of my decision.

16. Although most traditional commentators understand Maimonides' position to be compatibilist, based on his apparently clear position in the Mishne Torah, some modern philosophers have argued for an esoteric reading of Maimonides which indicates that he was in fact a staunch determinist, believing there to be no real free will. This position was proposed by Alexander Altmann and Shlomo Pines, based principally on their reading of the Guide 2:48. That passage reads as follows:

'This is the notion to which I wished to draw attention in this chapter. For inasmuch as the deity is, as has been established, he who arouses a particular volition in the irrational animal, and who has necessitated this particular free choice in the rational animal and who has made the natural things pursue their course - chance being but an excess of what is natural, as has been made clear, and its largest part partakes of nature, free choice and volition - it follows necessarily from all this that it may be said with regard to what proceeds necessarily from these causes that God has commanded that something should be done in such and such a way or that he has said: "Let it be thus"'. Alexander Altmann, *The Religion of the Thinkers: Free Will and Predestination in Saadia, Bahya and Maimonides*, in S. D. Goitein, ed., *Religion in a Religious Age* (Cambridge, MA: Association for Jewish Studies, 1974) 25-51. For a broader analysis see also *Maimonides on Freedom of the Will and Moral Responsibility*, Moshe Sokol, *The Harvard Theological Review* Jan 1998, Vol. 91, No. 1 (Jan., 1998), pp. 25-39. Sokol appeals to a theory of 'second-order' will whereby freedom is defined as when one's first-order choices (practical actions) are in line with one's second order deeper wishes. In this sense Paro was indeed 'free' when he let the Bnei Yisrael leave Egypt. Even though God was 'hardening his heart' this actually upheld his deeper freedom. Paro's second order, deeper, wish was NOT to let the people go. The pain and anxiety of his experience during the plagues effectively forced his hand and triggered his first-order decision to allow them to go. God simply realigned his first and second order will, restoring his freedom.

17. This raises the question of whether Maimonides could in fact subscribe to a panentheistic position whereby the entire universe exists 'within' God yet God transcends it.

18. See below as to why the Rambam's resolution may still be philosophically problematic.

19. I purposely did not entitle this 'The Ravad's Position' since, as we will see, his actual substantive position may be identical to the Rambam's. However, he is unhappy with the cadence of the Rambam's answer and thus feels he needs to respond to it, albeit (in his own words) ineffectively.

20. By comparison, imagine offering a toddler a choice of candy or cabbage. You could predict with almost 100% certainty which they would choose, even though the child retains full personal freedom of choice. You would have prior-knowledge of the actual choice, without determining that choice. In the case of God's infinite knowledge, this becomes 100% accurate.

- But does it answer the question!? God's knowledge must be absolutely true. Thus, if God has perfect knowledge (even without causation) that I will do x, then there can be no other possible outcome. So while the Ravad does try to deal with causal determinism, there still remains a logical or theological determinism which limits my real ability to chose.
- And, even according to the Rambam, although I cannot understand God's knowledge and thus there may well be no causal link between God and to my choices, nevertheless doesn't the mere truth of God's knowledge effectively preclude my freedom of choice? Even if we cannot make affirmative statements about God can't we at least say that 'God's knowledge is true'. The answer may be that God's truth also exists in a way that we cannot comprehend. But, if so, what intellectual connection to God do we actually have?

C4] RAV SAADYA GAON'S POSITION - COMPATIBILISM BASED ON REVERSE CAUSATION

- Rav Saadya Gaon argues²¹ argues that the normal direction of causation is misleading us. We normally assume that determinism means God knows what we will do and this knowledge effectively causes us to act in that way. Rather, Rav Saadya argues that since God is beyond time our 'future' decision to act in a certain way was indeed free and that choice is what God knows 'in advance'.

12. ואני אומר שנהג מנהג החכמים! והם חכמים ז"ל ואני אומר דתנא דידן נמי כשאמר 'הכל לפוי והרשות נתונה' כונתו להודיע שניהם אמתיים. וכדברי הרמב"ם בפירושו אלא ודאי דעת התנא להעיר ולומר שאף שהכל לפוי אינו אותה את הבחירה. שטם כל זה הבחירה ציד האדם. כי הרשות נתונה.
 ובמדרש שמואל כתב דמעיקרא לאו קושיא לפי שידעת הש"י היא כלופה ומציט העשייה שעושה האדם ואין שייך לומר שידוע מה שעתיד יעשה האדם וא"כ מוכרח שיעשה. כי לפניו יתברך אין קדימה ואיחור שאינו בחוק הזמן. וכתב שר"ם אלמושינוו כתב שזכו דעת הרמב"ם עלמו בהבדילו ידיעתו מידיעתו שהוא צדק הלא בעלמו שידעתו היא תמיד בהווה ואין עתיד לפניו יתברך. אבל הכל הווה וכמו שבערכינו ידיעת הווה אינה מוכרחת. כן ידיעתו תמיד בהווה ואינה מוכרחת. אבל הספק שצדק בהיותו צדק לפי שאין לנו יכולים ליייר איך תהיה ידיעתו תמיד בהווה אף מה שהוא עתיד בערכינו. ולכן השריש הרמב"ם שאין ידיעתו כידעתנו. ושלא נשתבש צדק. והיינו נמי דתנן הכל לפוי בלשון עבר כי הכל גלוי לפניו. לא מציט בעתיד עכ"ד

תוספות יום טוב מסכת אבות פרק ג משנה טו

Tosafot Yom Tov (17C, Poland) also suggests in the name of the Medrash Shmuel that this may also be the meaning of the Rambam - ie that God's Knowledge, as His Essence, is beyond time. Thus the entire notion of determinism is irrelevant in a dimension in which the act itself is all of past, present and future!²²

C5] THE RALBAG'S POSITION - GOD KNOWS ALL THAT IS KNOWABLE

- A controversial position is proposed by the Ralbag who presents 8 arguments²³ to show that God knows all things in general terms, rather than the particulars. According to the Ralbag, God's knowledge is of all those things which are real in that they are determined by laws of nature, but not those things which are ephemeral and contingent on choices²⁴. For the Ralbag, for God to have knowledge of human choices would in fact be an IMPERFECTION since these choices lack a certain hard reality.

13. in claiming that God does not know particulars, no imperfection in him results, only perfection, for His knowledge concerns superior things, not these trivial matters.

Milchamot Hashem III: 2, 97

- Ralbag is NOT saying that particulars are not important enough for God to know but we lowly humans do know particulars. He is arguing that particulars, by definition, are too trivial to be known in any way, even by us!²⁵
- A similar position²⁶ argues that God's omniscience means that he has total knowledge of all things which are knowable. Future contingent choices simply do not exist as facts and are not knowable.

21. Emunot VeDeot IV:4.

22. A similar approach is presented by R. Avraham ibn Daud (Ravad I, 12C Spain) in Emuna Ramah

23. Milchamot Hashem III:2 and III:4. Such arguments include that particulars are not know conceptually but through sense perception and this is irrelevant to God. Also, that particulars are known only in their specific relation to time and God is beyond time. This position proved so controversial that some commentators suggested that the sefer should be called Milchamot Neged Hashem! Most philosophers of his time, including many of his own students, rejected this position as being too Aristotelian and inconsistent with explicit statements in Tanach and traditional rabbinic sources. See for instance Or Hashem 2:1, Akeidat Yitzchak 19, Shu't Rivash 45.

24. Ralbag makes the point that if God knew all the possible choices we could make and then we eventually chose one, that choice would change the parameters of God's knowledge which would become dependant on human actions, a position which Ralbag rejects as "utterly absurd" (Milchamot Hashem, III: 2, 94). And if God always knew which contingency we would chose, this effectively removes the freedom of the choice, as discussed above.

25. This may seem strange to our modern understanding of knowledge which does accept true knowledge of particulars. But Ralbag follows a strictly Aristotelian understanding of knowledge whereby the particulars are simply data which are perceived by the senses and then abstracted by the mind to produce a conceptual knowledge of the items. In this sense, the particulars are not 'known' as true knowledge can only be abstract and general.

26. Some philosophers want to read this position into Rashi's wording in Sota 2a s.v. ini. However, Rashi does not say this clearly and such a reading is denied by many commentators - see Be'er Sheva, Chochmat Shlomo, and Hagahot HaBach ad loc.

14. the fact that God does not have knowledge of which possible outcomes will be realized does not imply any defect in God (may He be blessed). For perfect knowledge of something is the knowledge of what that thing is in reality. ... Hence God knows these things in the best manner possible, for He knows them insofar as they are ordered in a determinate and certain way, and He knows in addition that these events are contingent²⁷, insofar as they fall in the domain of human choice.

Milchamot Hashem III: 4, 118

- To argue the God knows that which is unknowable is similar to arguing that God can create a table which is not a table. Even if one argues that God transcends human logic and therefore COULD 'create a table which is not a table' the incoherence (at least to our minds) of such a statement effectively tells nothing other than we do not know anything about God (which is the Rambam's position!)

C6] R' CHISDAI CRESCAS - SECOND-ORDER DETERMINISM

- R. Chisdai Crescas²⁸ understands that our free will is superficial. We indeed chose to act based on our deeper will, but we do not choose that deeper will. Rather this is determined by one's genetic nature and nurture and ultimately by God.
- As such, our seemingly contingent choices remain "possible in themselves yet necessary in terms of their causes"²⁹. God's knowledge does not prevent a contingency from remaining logically possible, but makes it causally inevitable.
- Performance of mitzvot will help to create an environment which will determine the nature of our deeper selves.
- According to this view, reward and punishment are not given in response to our actions but are the natural consequence of our actions, just as gaining weight is a 'punishment' for overeating³⁰. Furthermore, even if a person's action is causally determined, R. Crescas understands that he can still perform it with simcha and love of God, which gives rise to the 'reward'. However, an act which is entirely compelled (and not simply caused) cannot be performed with joy. So an act could still be 'free' (enough) even if it were the result of a causal chain.

15. In the final analysis then, we seem to be faced with a stark choice according to Gersonides and Crescas. The former allows us to hold onto human freedom at the expense of traditional understandings of divine omniscience; the latter allows us the traditional view of divine omniscience but has ultimately done away with human freedom. Rabbi Akiva's statement, that 'everything is foreseen, but free choice is granted', suddenly seems rather less secure. One or other of the clauses might be true. But neither Crescas nor Gersonides manages to hold onto both of them unequivocally.

Prof. Daniel Rynhold, *An Introduction to Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (2009), p. 173³¹

C7] THE IZHBITZER AND RAV TZADOK HACHOEN - EXTREME DETERMINISM

- Certain strands of Chasidic thought adopt an even harder version of determinism, arguing that, in fact, everything is God. This includes our actions - for good deeds or bad - which are entirely determined by God in that they are an expression of the Divine Will.
- Logic may dictate that we have free will, but there is a still higher truth accessible to us that defies logic. The ultimate truth is that there is God and only God.
- In this system, true teshuva lies in understanding that one's actions against halacha were, ultimately, also determined by God and to believe with certainty that you are entirely nothing and that everything is God.³²

27. The Ralbag understands that God knows the vast number of different contingencies of all casual connection and also which of these are more and less likely given the scientific and astrological determinants. But the ultimate choice remains with the person, who may make the 1 in a million call against all the odds. This choice is, according to the Ralbag, unknowable, even to God.

28. Or Hashem II: V.

29. Or Hashem II: V, 3, 480.

30. See <https://etzion.org.il/en/philosophy/issues-jewish-thought/issues-mussar-and-faith/free-will-2> by R. Asaf Bednarsh for a broader analysis of R. Crescas's proofs.

31. Dr. Rynhold's chapter on Divine Omniscience (Chap 6, 155-179) provides more analysis and suggested further reading on the issues raised in this shiur. His book is excellent and highly recommended reading.

32. See Rabbi Bednarsh *ibid* for a fuller analysis of this Chasidic position.