

THE PROBLEM WITH OMNISCIENCE THE BIRTH OF JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

1. R. Saadia Gaon, *Emunot Ve-Deot*, Part V, Chapter 4

Should it be asked, therefore: “But if God foreknows that a human being will speak, is it conceivable that he should remain silent?” We would answer simply that, if a human being decided instead of speaking to be silent, we would merely modify our original assumption by saying that God knows that that human being will be silent.

2. Gersonides, *Wars of the Lord*, Part III, Chapter 1

[God] knows the thing in the sublunary world with respect to their general natures, i.e., their essences, but not insofar as they are particulars i.e., contingents. ... 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.

3. Gersonides, *Wars of the Lord*, Part III, Chapter 4

There is no alternative but to say that God knows particulars in one respect but does not know them in another respect. But what these respects are, would that I knew!”

It is evident that the sense in which God knows these particulars is the sense in which they are ordered and determinate, as is the case with the Agent Intellect ... For from this aspect it is possible to have knowledge of them. On the other hand, the sense in which God does not know particulars is the sense in which they are not ordered, i.e., the sense in which they are contingent ... He does not know which of the contradictory outcomes will be realized insofar as they are [genuinely] contingent affairs; for if He did, there would not be any contingency at all. [Nevertheless,] the fact that God does not have knowledge of which possible outcome 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 contingent, insofar as they fall in the domain of human choice.