

BEREL DOV LERNER

RaMBaM and Middle Knowledge: A Puzzle in the *Lehem Mishneh*

RaMBaM's *Hilkhot Teshuva* 2:2 requires that a penitent call upon "Him who knows all secrets to witness that he will never return to this sin again." R. Abraham Di Boton's commentary, *Lehem Mishneh*, on that passage seems to be based on the idea that the RaMBaM would be afraid of attributing knowledge of the future to God, because that would contradict human freewill. This is odd, since in *Teshuva* 5:5 the RaMBaM explicitly rejects the notion that divine foreknowledge contradicts human freewill.

Surely the author of *Lehem Mishneh* must have been aware of that passage! There is reason to believe that Di Boton thought that the RaMBaM's solution to the foreknowledge/freewill problem was based on the notion that God exists in a permanent present, beyond the dimension of time as experienced by human beings. It may further be suggested that Di Boton's comments on *Teshuva* 2:2 were not motivated by worries about a contradiction between human freewill and divine foreknowledge, but rather by worries about a contradiction between human freewill and divine *middle knowledge* (knowledge of how someone would act in any possible situation, whether or not those situations ever actually came about in reality). Since the idea of God existing beyond time obviously does not solve the contradiction between freewill and middle knowledge, despite what the RaMBaM wrote in *Teshuva* 5:5, Di Boton had to take this new problem of freewill into account.

The RaMBaM writes in a famous halakhah from *Hilkhot Teshuva* (2:2):

What is repentance [*teshuva*]? It consists in this, that the sinner abandon his sin, remove it from his thoughts, and resolve in his heart never to repeat it, as it is said, "let the wicked forsake his way, and the man of iniquity his thoughts" (Isaiah 55:7); that he regret the past, as it is said, "Surely after that I turned I repented, after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh" (Jeremiah 31:19); that he calls Him who knows all secrets to witness that he will never return to this sin again, as it is said, "neither will we call anymore the work of our hands our God, for in you the fatherless find mercy" (Hosea

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14:4). It is also necessary that he make oral confession and utter the resolutions that he made in his heart.¹

I would like to draw attention to the role of God in the process of repentance. The RaMBaM says that the penitent must “call ... Him who knows all secrets to witness that he will never return to this sin again.” To understand God’s function here, we must consider at least two different parameters: the nature of the commitment undertaken by the penitent, and the significance of calling upon God as a witness.²

Let us begin with the former.³ Here we must consider two different possibilities (I will later suggest a third). According to the first, true repentance must be *successful*, i.e. a true penitent will not backslide and repeat his sin in the future. This may be called *successful repentance*. If at some future time the penitent *does* sin, that will demonstrate retroactively that his repentance was not effective. While the RaMBaM does not explicitly discuss the idea that tomorrow’s backsliding can retroactively invalidate today’s repentance, R. Saadia Gaon openly rejects it. He offers an alternative understanding of repentance, according to which the penitent’s resolve can be *sincere* – and therefore effective – even if he does backslide and repeat the sin in the future (let us call this *sincere repentance*).⁴

There are also at least two ways to understand the RaMBaM’s notion of calling upon God to witness. According to the first, God serves as a witness in the sense that He offers – so to speak – testimony verifying the penitent’s statement of resolve. It is easy to see how this view would dovetail with the notion of successful repentance described above; if the validity of the penitent’s present declaration of repentance is dependent upon his future behavior, it makes perfect sense that the penitent would cite the testimony of the only witness possessing genuine knowledge of future events, i.e. God. On the other hand, this view of God’s role could also accommodate Saadia’s position. If the validity of the penitent’s declaration is dependent upon his sincerity, who could better testify to that sincerity than God? Both possibilities can find some support in the RaMBaM’s own formulations. On

1 All *Mishneh Torah* quotes from Moses Maimonides, *The Book of Knowledge*, trans. Moses Hyamson (Jerusalem: Boy’s Town, 1965).

2 My thanks to an anonymous referee for pointing out that the RaMBaM is not necessarily saying that the penitent actively calls upon God to serve as his witness, but, rather, he might be saying that the penitent’s repentance is so profound that even God will testify to its validity. However, Hyamson’s translation here follows the *Kesef Mishneh* and the *Lehem Mishneh*. See also Harav Joseph B. Soloveitchik’s *Al HaTeshuva* (Jerusalem: 6735), pp. 225-29.

3 This part of the discussion draws upon Yitzhak Izack and Alexander Klein’s *B’nivhei Ha’tshuva: Biur Le’hilkhot Tshuva shel HaRaMBaM* (Jerusalem: Hevruta, 1997), p. 30.

4 Saadia Gaon, *Emunot Ve’Deot* 5:5.

the one hand, he quotes a biblical verse that seems to emphasize the importance of actual future events: “neither will we call anymore the work of our hands our God.” On the other hand, he describes God as being the One “who knows all secrets [*yode’a ta’alumot*],” an expression used biblically in connection with knowledge of people’s inner thoughts, i.e. “God would surely search it out, for He knows the secrets [*ta’alumot*] of the heart” (Psalms 44:22).⁵

The second way of thinking about how God could serve as a witness would involve His witnessing – or more precisely *attesting* – the penitent’s act of swearing never to sin again. Here, the penitent calls upon God as a witness in the same way that Moses called upon the heaven and the earth as witnesses: “I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day; I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse” (Deuteronomy 30:19).

The point of this verse is not that heaven and earth are at present privy to any special knowledge. Rather, as Rashi there explains, “These will exist forever, so that when evil befalls you they will bear witness that I have warned you of all this.” Similarly, if years down the road all human beings who knew of the penitent’s promise have either died or forgotten it, God will surely be there to remember the declaration that was made (and, perhaps, He will mete out an appropriate punishment if necessary). The point here is no longer that the Divine Witness has some special knowledge of the penitent’s present intentions or future success, but rather that the Witness will be there in the future to make sure that the declaration will never be forgotten.⁶

The question of how to understand the nature of God’s witnessing the sinner’s declaration is not a new one. One of the greatest RaMBaM scholars, R. Abraham Di Boton (Salonika, 1545-88), brings up the issue in his classic commentary on the *Mishneh Torah*, the *Lehem Mishneh*:

And if you ask how the Holy One, blessed be He, can testify thus regarding him, since he will be left without [free] choice.... It may be said that it should be interpreted thusly, that at the time he repents he must take the blessed Lord upon himself as a witness that he will never return to his sin, in the manner of [the expression] “I call upon the heavens and the earth as my

5 Alternatively, *yode’a ta’alumot* can be understood not as referring to God’s knowledge of the penitent’s inner resolve, but, rather, to God’s knowledge of whether the penitent might be backsliding by thinking sinful thoughts. My thanks to an anonymous referee for pointing this out to me.

6 As per n. 5, God’s overseeing of the penitent’s behavior may itself involve special knowledge of the penitent’s inner mental states.

witnesses,” that he takes the heavens and the earth upon himself as witnesses.⁷

The *Lehem Mishneh* clearly seems to champion the notion that the RaMBaM would have the penitent call upon God to *attest* his proclamation of repentance. The point is not that God knows whether or not the penitent will succeed in the future, but rather that God – like the heavens and the earth – will endure into the future as a witness to the fact that the penitent made his declaration.

Now we arrive at a crucial juncture in my argument, which is marked by what would seem to be an inexplicably thoughtless mistake on the part of the *Lehem Mishneh*. At the beginning of the paragraph just quoted, the *Lehem Mishneh* explains that the motivation for his understanding of God’s role as a witness is *philosophical*. If, following the first interpretation, we claimed that God actually bore witness to the fact that the penitent would succeed, this would infringe upon the penitent’s free choice to remain loyal to his proclamation. In other words, this rejected interpretation would run us afoul of the classical contradiction between human freewill and divine foreknowledge.

There is something very troubling about all of this. The *Lehem Mishneh*’s interpretation of the RaMBaM is motivated by his concern to avoid the conflict between human freedom and divine foreknowledge. However, just a few chapters later, in *Hilkhot Teshuva* (5:5), the RaMBaM himself addresses that very paradox and dismisses its philosophical validity:

Perchance you will say, “Does not the Almighty know everything that will happen before it happens?” He either knows that this person will be righteous or wicked, or he does not know. If He knows that he will be righteous, it is impossible that he should not be righteous; and if you say that He knows that he will be righteous and yet it is possible for him to be wicked, then He does not know the matter clearly. As to the solution of this problem, understand that “the measure thereof is longer than the earth and wider than the sea” (Job 11:9), and many important principles of the highest sublimity are connected with it. You, however, need only to know and comprehend what I am about to say ... we have already explained that God does not know with a knowledge external to Himself, like human beings whose knowledge and self are separate entities, but He, blessed be His Name, and His knowledge are One. His, the human intellect cannot clearly apprehend.... This being the case, we lack the capacity to know how God knows all creatures and their activities. Yet we do know beyond doubt that a human

⁷ Standard Vilna edition, my translation.

being's activities are in his own hands and the Almighty neither draws him on, nor decrees that he should act thus or not act thus... .

The RaMBaM's response to the conflict between divine foreknowledge and human freedom reflects his more general doctrine, that it is impossible for humans to genuinely understand God. We, trapped in our human mindset, think that foreknowledge contradicts freedom. As soon as we realize that divine knowledge is radically unlike human knowledge, we can stop worrying that divine foreknowledge rules out human freedom. It is not too difficult to begin fleshing out this idea. As a human being, I can have knowledge of future events only if either I plan and directly cause those events myself, or if those events are predetermined by deterministic causal processes of which I am aware. That means that there are only two situations in which I can have foreknowledge of someone else's behavior: if I have resolved to force the person to behave according to my own plans, or if that person's behavior is predetermined by causal processes whose nature is known to me. In either case, it would be difficult (although not impossible according to all philosophical accounts) to claim that that other person will indeed act freely. If, however, as the RaMBaM contends, God's foreknowledge is unlike human foreknowledge, there is no reason to assume that it derives from God's having decreed the future or from God's having knowledge of deterministic causal processes that will necessarily cause the future to unfold as it will. God's knowledge of the future need not contradict human freedom in the way that human knowledge of the future would.

This is all very well, but the RaMBaM himself knows that he faces a much pricklier philosophical difficulty. Even if we grant that God does not know my future behavior by decreeing it or by being aware of causal processes that determine my future behavior, I am still left with the problem that if I choose not to behave as God predicted then God's knowledge will be shown – after the fact – to have been imperfect. As stated by the RaMBaM above: “If He knows that he will be righteous, it is impossible that he should not be righteous; and if you say that He knows that he will be righteous and yet it is possible for him to be wicked, then He does not know the matter clearly.”

The RaMBaM tells us that there is some difference between divine foreknowledge and human foreknowledge that can defuse this quandary, but he offers only the slightest hint of what that crucial difference might be. Famously, the Ra'AVaD on *Teshuva* 5:5 attacks the RaMBaM for beginning to talk about something that he has no intention of explaining. We, however, are free to speculate about the particular philosophical position to which the RaMBaM was hinting.

One possible candidate is the solution to the problem of human freewill and divine foreknowledge usually attributed to the Christian philosopher Boethius (480-525),⁸ and further developed by Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), a major figure of medieval Christian philosophy.⁹ A modern formulation of Boethius's solution would go something like this: The whole problem of freedom and foreknowledge is built on the presupposition that God exists in the temporal dimension in the same way as people do. I am uncomfortable with the notion that I remain free to act as I choose in February if back in January God already knew what I was going to do. However, if, following Boethius, I reject the whole notion of God existing in time in the manner that human beings do, it becomes impossible to talk about God knowing anything *in January*. All I can do is claim that God's knowledge exists in some kind of eternal present tense, something like "God knows that I do not sin in February." Since I can no longer talk about God knowing what I will do *before* I do it, I can no longer construct the paradox.

I am not the first person to suggest that the RaMBaM embraced the Boethian solution. Rabbi Moshe ben Barukh Almosnino, a prominent leader of the Jewish community of Salonika in the 16th century, made exactly this claim while explaining the RaMBaM's views in his commentary on *Pirkei Avot*, called *Pirkei Moshe* 3:15:

Thus His knowledge, may He be blessed, does not determine the actions of human beings even though He knows of them because He knows them in an eternal present, since there is no future for Him, may He be blessed, and all of what are for us endless future times exist in the present for Him...¹⁰

The important historical point for our discussion is that the author of the *Lehem Mishneh* was also a resident of Salonika and studied with Almosnino's students, making it likely that he had been taught Almosnino's thesis that the RaMBaM's statements on divine foreknowledge allude to the Boethian solution.¹¹

8 Boethius occupied a unique position in Western intellectual history, standing just on the borderline between late classical and early medieval thought. On Boethius's solution, see William Lane Craig's *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents from Aristotle to Suarez* (Leiden & New York: E.J. Brill, 1988), pp. 79-98.

9 See *ibid.*, pp. 99-126.

10 Moshe Almosnino, *Sefer Pirkei Moshe al Pirkei Avot*, ed. Ezra Bazri (Jerusalem: Machon Haktav, 1995), p. 113. I am indebted to Michael Shmidman for bringing to my attention the fact that Almosnino held that the RaMBaM accepted Boethius's doctrine (while not necessarily being aware that Boethius had invented it!). See Shmidman's, "Radical Theology in Defense of the Faith: A Fourteenth-Century Example," n. 10 (*Tradition*, forthcoming).

11 See *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "Boton, Abraham Moses Di" and "Almosnino, Moses Ben Baruch."

If we assume that the *Lehem Mishneh* holds that the RaMBaM had accepted some version of the Boethian solution, how does this affect our reading of his comments on *Hilkhot Teshuva* 2:2? At first glance, it would seem to make those comments even less coherent. If the RaMBaM had access to such a powerful solution to the problem of freedom and foreknowledge, why would he worry that God's "witnessing" future events would interfere with the penitent's freedom of choice? It might be suggested that by *presently* calling upon God to give witness to future events, the penitent is somehow trying to drag divine knowledge into the human temporal framework. In effect, the *Lehem Mishneh* would then be saying that if a penitent thought that he could call upon God to serve as a witness in *that* sense, he would have committed a philosophical error. Be that as it may, I would like to suggest a more speculative – and more philosophically interesting – reading of these texts.

Let us return to the RaMBaM's concept of repentance. Halakhah 2:2 begins with the words: "What is repentance [*teshuva*]? It consists in this, that the sinner abandons his sin, removes it from his thoughts, and resolves in his heart never to repeat it... ." What exactly is the penitent's intention here? One reading might suggest that the penitent is promising that, willy-nilly, it will turn out that he will never actually repeat his sin for the rest of his life. I would like to suggest a subtly different understanding of the penitent's promise, i.e. that the penitent is claiming that he would never sin again in any conceivable situation, *regardless of whether he actually ever finds himself in those situations*. The immediately prior passage in *Hilkhot Teshuva* has some bearing on this point:

What is a perfect repentance? It is so when an opportunity presents itself for repeating an offense once committed, and the offender, while able to commit the offense, nevertheless refrains from doing so, not out of fear or failure of vigor, but because he is penitent. For instance, if a man had sinful intercourse with a woman, and after a time was alone with her, his passion for her persisting, his physical powers unabated while he continued to live in the same district where he had sinned, and yet he refrains and does not transgress, he is a sincere penitent. And so Solomon said, "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth before the evil days come, and the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, 'I have no pleasure in them'" (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

If, however, a person only repented in old age, at a time when he is no longer capable of doing what he had done – although this is not an excellent mode of repentance, it nevertheless avails him and he is accepted as a

penitent. Even if one transgressed all his life and only repented on the day of his death and dies penitent, all his iniquities are pardoned to him, as it is said, “Before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain” (Ecclesiastes 12:2) – which is an allusion to the day of death. Hence the inference that if a person remembers his Creator and repents before death, he is forgiven.

Let us first consider the case of “perfect repentance.” Here we have someone who, as per Halakhah 2:2, has undertaken never to repeat his sin and who actually managed to pass a severe test of his resolve when facing the exact same circumstances that had led him to sin in the first place. Other penitents have the good fortune to avoid such trials; sheer luck (combined, perhaps, with prudent steps to avoid temptation) may save them from backsliding. Perfect repentance, in contrast, cannot just be a matter of luck; the penitent must actually pass a serious test of his commitment.

In the second case, we have an old man for whom repetition of the sin has become a physical impossibility (but not a logical impossibility – we can imagine the sinner regaining his ability to sin thanks to some kind of miraculous intervention). He does not need good luck to steer him clear of temptation – the laws of nature will see to it that he never sins again. Despite that, his repentance “nevertheless avails him and he is accepted as a penitent.” In the very next passage, the RaMBaM tells us that repentance “consists in this, that the sinner abandon his sin, remove it from his thoughts, and resolve in his heart never to repeat it.” How is the aged penitent to fulfill this requirement? There would be little point to his announcing the obvious – that in the future he will not commit a sin that is a physical impossibility for him. The aged penitent must be understood as referring to a future counterfactual (a logically possible situation that will not actually occur in the future); if, despite its physical or practical impossibility, the penitent *were* to face an opportunity to sin once again, he would successfully resist temptation. If the aged penitent’s declaration of repentance refers to future counterfactuals, it makes sense to say that all declarations of repentance refer not only to how the penitent will act in *actual* future situations but, rather, also to how he *would* act in future counterfactual situations if he were only given the opportunity.

Now we may see that the RaMBaM is ranking the various kinds of penitents in *modal* terms: *Teshuva* 2:2 describes a penitent as one who promises never to sin again *in any possible circumstances* – but we are not told that he will *actually* face the test of challenging circumstances. The perfect penitent is one who has *actually* faced a challenging test with success, while the lowest class of penitents consists

of people for whom sinning is no longer physically possible. Presumably, the middle ground is held by those penitents who are physically capable of repeating their sin, but who have the good fortune not ever to have their resolve seriously tested.

Given this interpretation of what it is that the penitent is undertaking, we may return to the earlier question of what it means for God to serve as a witness to the declaration of repentance, and, in particular, what it would mean for God to serve as a witness in the manner rejected by the *Lehem Mishneh*. If the penitent is now promising that he will never commit the sin again *in any possible situation*, then in order for God to validate the truth of the declaration He would need to have knowledge of how the sinner would behave *in any possible situation* – whether or not the situation ever actually occurs. This particular category of knowledge has played an important role in Christian theology, and is referred to in that tradition as “middle knowledge.” It was employed by the 16th-century Jesuit theologian Louis de Molina to harmonize Catholic ideas about freewill and grace in a doctrine that has come to be known as “Molinism.”¹² While I am unaware of the RaMBaM or the *Lehem Mishneh* having access to any philosophical discussion of middle knowledge, Scripture itself offers what seem to be instances of its operation. For example, we read in the Book of Exodus (13:17) that the Israelites took a roundabout route to the Land of Canaan rather than “by way of the land of the Philistines for it was near, because God said, Lest the people reconsider when they see war and return to Egypt.” Ibn Ezra comments:

He led them by a long route so that they would not see war and say, “Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt.” And we know that God knows future events without uncertainty and he knew that they would reconsider *if* He led them by way of the land of the Philistines.

Ibn Ezra seems here to imply that God does possess middle knowledge; God’s perfect knowledge of the future includes His knowledge of how the Israelites *would have reacted* to the counterfactual situation of traveling through the land of the Philistines. An apparent example of divine middle knowledge that generated considerable interest amongst Christian theologians appears in the twenty-third chapter of 2 Samuel.¹³ There we read of David’s predicament when he was hiding

12 See Craig, n. 8 *supra*, pp. 169-207.

13 See the extended discussion of the Keilah episode in Robert Merrihew Adams, “Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil,” *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 14 (1977): 109-17.

from Saul in the town of Keilah. David was worried that, if he stayed there, Saul would send his troops to attack the town, and its inhabitants might hand him over to the attackers. David sought divine counsel through Eviyatar the priest and his ephod:

And David said, “O Lord, God of Israel, Your servant has heard that Saul intends to come to Keilah and destroy the town because of me. Will the citizens of Keilah deliver me into his hands? Will Saul come down as Your servant has heard? O Lord, God of Israel, tell Your servant!”

And the Lord said, “He will.”

David continued, “Will the citizens of Keilah deliver me and my men into Saul’s hands?”

And the Lord answered, “They will” (1 Samuel 23: 10-12).

David did not wait around for these prophecies to be fulfilled. Instead, he prudently departed the town with his men; when Saul heard of this he decided there was no longer any point in setting out for Keilah. In other words, David asked God for information about a possible situation that was never realized in actuality. Saul never attacked the town and the citizens of Keilah never had to make the decision of what to do with David. Assuming that the prophecy did contain accurate information about how the people of Keilah *would have behaved* under those circumstances, the story may be read as offering us an example of divine middle knowledge.

Leaving aside the tricky historical question of how conscious the RaMBaM and the *Lehem Mishneh* may have been of middle knowledge as an epistemological category, I would like to continue in a speculative vein and consider whether the introduction of this concept into our understanding of *Teshuva* 2:2 can help us make sense of the *Lehem Mishneh*’s comment. To recap our present exegetical situation: the *Lehem Mishneh* rejected the notion that God serves *now* as a witness to the penitent’s *future* behavior, because that thesis would contradict the penitent’s freedom of choice. However, *Lehem Mishneh*’s theological qualms regarding divine foreknowledge seem odd in light of the RaMBaM’s explicit rejection of the conflict between divine foreknowledge and human freedom. It further appears reasonable to assume that the *Lehem Mishneh* believes that the RaMBaM’s rejection of that problem is based upon his esoteric acceptance of the Boethian doctrine. Next, I argued that in order for God to serve as witness (in the manner unacceptable to the *Lehem Mishneh*) to the success of the penitent’s declaration, He would not only need knowledge of actual future events but also “middle knowledge” of how the penitent would react in any possible situation – including counterfactual situations.

It should be obvious by now that all of the above leads us to one crucial question: does the idea of divine middle knowledge pose a threat to human freedom that cannot be solved by Boethius's doctrine?

One thing is immediately clear: there is no reason to assume *a priori* that a Boethian non-temporal God would possess middle knowledge. The Boethian God "instantly" observes all that has happened and will happen, but that gives Him no access to knowledge of how people *would have behaved* in circumstances that will never become actual. What would happen if we were to assume that God's "instantaneous" knowledge of the actual future also includes middle knowledge – would this result in any new and troublesome difficulties for free choice?

The problem is that in order for middle knowledge to have any *particular* content regarding some possible situation, it must be true that there is only one way in which a particular person would behave in that situation. If God knows that a penitent will not sin in a particular set of possible circumstances, then there must be some fact of the matter about how the penitent *would* behave in those circumstances. Apparently, it would be impossible for the penitent to act otherwise. However, the whole point of saying that the penitent's choice was free (at least according to the metaphysical views held by the RaMBaM in his exoteric works) is that he *could* have chosen to sin just as he could choose not to sin. Unfortunately, it appears that the existence of middle knowledge would require that in any particular possible situation the penitent can only act in one particular way.

At first blush, this attack on middle knowledge seems similar to the problem with straightforward divine foreknowledge, which the RaMBaM was so quick to dismiss. However, the Boethian strategy of removing God from time does not solve the problem of middle knowledge in the way that it solves the problem of foreknowledge. Temporality is not an issue for middle knowledge in the way that it is for knowledge of actual future events. While some philosophers may have qualms over the implications of God's knowledge of future events for human freedom, nobody is worried that *present* divine knowledge of *actual present* events creates a problem for human freedom. Even human beings quite often have knowledge of each other's present activities, but no one would say that that poses a threat to their metaphysical freedom! That is why Boethius felt that it was possible to solve the problem of foreknowledge by claiming that God lives in some kind of eternal "present" and can never be said to know things *before* they happen. However, no matter *when* God possesses middle knowledge, it will always be in conflict with human freedom of choice. If on 1 June God knows that *a month earlier*, on 1 May, the penitent successfully contended with a situation in which he had no

option to sin, then we cannot say that the penitent acted freely on that day, because there is a set matter of fact regarding how he would respond to exactly those possible circumstances. We can understand how God's mere *foreknowledge* of that decision would not interfere with the penitent's freedom – his choice could have gone either way, and God is simply aware of how he *actually* chose to act. However, while God's foreknowledge can be based on acquaintance with the actual future, what could serve as a basis for His middle knowledge of human responses to all possible (including counterfactual) circumstances?¹⁴ Are we to suppose that, in addition to our living in the actual world, each of us also freely lives out his or her life in response to an infinite variety of counterfactual circumstances in an infinite number of unactualized “virtual worlds,” and that God's middle knowledge is based on His being privy to the happenings in every one of those “virtual worlds”? Or is God's middle knowledge based on His acquaintance with causal processes that predetermine our behavior for any possible set of circumstances? Neither solution is especially attractive; the former involves a wild flight of metaphysical fancy, while the latter does not sit well with the idea that humans enjoy freewill.

I propose that it is *this* problem that the *Lehem Mishneh* was trying to avoid in his interpretation of *Teshuva* 2:2. He was not worried by the idea that God knows how the sinner will behave in actual future situations; rather, he wanted to avoid the idea that God knows how the sinner would behave in any *possible* situation.

I would not want to make the impression that I have here offered a decisive proof that divine middle knowledge is incompatible with human freedom. Even today, divine middle knowledge continues to have its champions; it has generated a substantial and often highly technical body of discussion.¹⁵ However, the notion of divine middle knowledge remains highly problematic. The author of *Lehem Mishneh* was wise to avoid interpreting the *Mishneh Torah* in a way that might suggest that the RaMBaM supported it.

14 This is a variation on the so-called “grounding objection” to middle knowledge, which denies that there is any basis for attributing truth or falsity to statements about how metaphysically free human beings would behave in counterfactual situations. See Adams for an early presentation of the problem.

15 William Lane Craig is perhaps the best known contemporary advocate of middle knowledge. Some of his writings on the topic (including his attempts to deflect the “grounding problem”) are conveniently available at <http://www.leaderu.com/offices/billcraig/menus/omniscience.html>