

SECTION III: GOD'S KNOWLEDGE, HUMAN FREEDOM AND PROVIDENCE

Our treatment of the question of attributes in the earlier section has revealed to us how much influence Arabic philosophers exercised in the Middle Ages, particularly on Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas. Without trying to simplify a whole complex philosophy, we could in certain sense say that in the Middle Ages, all Arabic and Jewish thought on the question of God's knowledge, revolved around two fundamental issues: the possibility of attributing knowledge to God seen within the larger picture of reconciling the multiplicity of attributes and the absolute divine simplicity; and the question of whether God has knowledge of singulars, a question that Arabic philosophy discussed much under the influence of Aristotle.¹ In his well known discussion of God as the Necessarily Existent, Avicenna teaches that God as the Necessarily Existent knows Himself and that this knowledge does not introduce any form of multiplicity in the divine simplicity. On the more difficult question of God's knowledge of things outside of Himself, Avicenna responds on the basis that God knows all things by Himself as their universal cause and principle. That means that singular things are known universally by God. This position of Avicenna, in itself complex and controversial, would be contested by both Maimonides and Aquinas for whom such a thesis seemingly implies that God does not even know the existence or non-existence of actual things.² Avicenna's interpretation is highly regulated by the emanation theory according to which matter is not a direct and immediate product of the first principle. But if God is the immediate cause of all things, Aquinas thinks that the fact of their being material would not prevent God knowing them as singulars. Maimonides in his various interpretations of scriptural passages seems equally to attribute this knowledge of singulars to God. The problem would be whether such knowledge extends to singulars of all species. Their differences apart, Maimonides and Aquinas both would consider God's knowledge of creatures as a *conditio sine qua non* for the exercise of His providence over the universe. When the object of divine knowledge is considered in a more determinate way, it takes various conceptual nuances. Divine knowledge becomes known as 'foreknowledge' when it has as its object future contingent things, either good or evil. Moreover, Maimonides and Aquinas would engage in trying to explain how

¹ Cf Bonino, Serge-Thomas, *Thomas d'Aquin, De la Vérité ou La Science en Dieu*, (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires Fribourg, 1996) p 52-53.

² Cf Gardet, L, *La Pensée religieuse d'Avicenne*, "Études de philosophie médiévale, 41, 1951, pp 71-85; Marmura, M.E, "Divine Omniscience and Future Contingents in Alfarabi and Avicenna," in *Divine Omniscience and Omnipotence in Medieval Philosophy: Islamic, Jewish and Christian Perspectives*, Tamar Rudavsky, ed., (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1985).

God knows the future and how this knowledge does not affect the liberty of the human will to choose between alternatives. On another note, divine knowledge is in certain way called ‘providence’ inasmuch as it involves in a rational and intentional ordering of all things to their ultimate end, which is the divine goodness.³ As will become very evident in our discussion, Aquinas’s insistence on God’s universal and particular knowledge of creatures would be to defend the nature of God as omniscient and as provident based on Christian faith and on philosophical reasoning. For Aquinas, every denial of God’s knowledge of particulars as insinuated by certain Arabic philosophers and by Maimonides is a denial of God’s nature as omniscient. God who is considered as *Ipsum Esse Subsistens* should be perfect in everything including knowledge. Were this perfection to be lacking in God, it would be baseless to think that He knows things outside of Himself and that He exercises providential care over them.

But how do we explain this knowledge that God has of the universe in general and of man in particular while preserving the immutability and the transcendence of God? How do we explain God’s knowledge of corporeal things without compromising His absolute simplicity? If we say that He knows even things that are yet to happen in the future, as we understand *spatio-temporal* events, how do we assure that these things foreknown by God are not determined to happen? Where then does human freedom of choice come in if things known by God necessarily happen as known? Does God’s knowledge embrace man’s contingency and the fact that evil is a part of man’s daily situation? Does God’s knowledge include the knowledge of evil? These and many more questions, bordering on the relationship between God and the world, would constitute the objects of discussion in this section that prepares the ground for our examination of divine providence. For both Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas, knowledge is inseparable from providence⁴ and, it is on an existential problem of what a lack of knowledge would do that Maimonides launches us into the issue of God’s knowledge of things outside of Him. But to properly situate the discussion between Maimonides and Aquinas, we have to look briefly at this problem from its Arabic point of view; particularly Avicenna’s and Averroes’s who undeniably served as major links between our Jewish and Christian thinkers. These thinkers are very present in the reflections of Aquinas and it is not a surprise they are regarded as “interlocuteurs

³ ST I, q.22, a.1: “In rebus autem invenitur bonum, non solum quantum ad substantiam rerum, sed etiam quantum ad ordinem earum in finem, et praecipue in finem ultimum, qui est bonitas divina. »

⁴*Dux Neutorum*, lib.III, cap.XVII, fol.80: “Postquam ergo ostendi quod loqui de scientia Creatoris et cura ipsius sunt invicem colligata:” Cf *Guide* III, 16, p 464.

privilegiés” of Aquinas.⁵ This arrangement should not be seen as a mere satisfaction of our intellectual curiosity, but rather, an essential requirement for a better understanding and interpretation of the significance of their position in Aquinas’s reading of Maimonides. Their much vaunted doctrine of divine knowledge of particulars “in a universal way” will have to be examined in order to determine its precise meaning. This approach will definitely help us to appreciate how both Maimonides and Aquinas agree or disagree with the Arabic commentators and with one another, and their contribution to the discussion of God’s knowledge of particulars.

1.0 Avicenna on God’s Universal Knowledge of Particulars

The question of divine knowledge of particulars as discussed by Avicenna would have to be located in his metaphysical thought. This thought would express itself in Avicenna's triadic emanative scheme of intelligence, soul and heavenly sphere or body. This scheme is constructed on Avicenna's well known division of being into “necessarily existent being” and “possibly existent being.” The necessarily existent being is a being whose existence is certain. Alternatively, “it is such that when it is assumed not to exist, an impossibility results” whereas a possibly existent being is a being that contains no necessity for either its existence or nonexistence and alternatively, it is “such that whether assumed not to exist or to exist, no impossibility results.”⁶ Avicenna goes on to supplement these two distinctions by noting that the necessarily existent being is of two types. It was Aristotle who first gave this distinction when he wrote: “some things owe their necessity to something other than themselves; others do not, but are themselves the source of necessity in other things.”⁷ Under the inspiration of Aristotle, Avicenna goes on to note that a necessarily existent being can be either by virtue of itself or by virtue of something else. The necessarily existent being by virtue of itself is truly said to be in itself by a certainty of existence. To say that it does not exist consists in a contradiction. On the

⁵ Bonino, Serge-Thomas, *Op. Cit.*, p 52.

⁶ Cf Davidson, H.A, *Proofs for Eternity, Creation and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) p 290. According to Goichon, the distinction is made like this: “L’Etre nécessaire est l’être qu’il serait contradictoire de supposer inexistant. L’être possible est l’être que l’on peut supposer existant ou inexistant sans contradiction. L’Etre nécessaire est l’Indispensable, mais l’être possible n’a pas en soi nécessité de quelque manière que ce soit, c’est-à-dire ni dans son existence ni dans son inexistence. » Goichon, A.M, *La Distinction de l’Essence et de l’Existence d’après Ibn Sina*, (Paris : Desclée de Brouwer, 1937) p 159-160.

⁷ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* V, 5, 1015b5-15.

other hand, the necessarily existent being by virtue of another implies that its existence is caused by another. The illustrations given by Avicenna to explain the second type of necessarily existent being are “four,” which is “necessarily existent not by itself but when we assume two plus two to exist. Combustion is necessarily existent not by itself but when contact is assumed to take place between fire and inflammable material.”⁸ Hence, the necessarily existent being by virtue of something else must be possibly existent by virtue of itself.⁹ In all, there are three categories of being envisaged by Avicenna: (a) the necessarily existent by virtue of itself, (b) the necessarily existent by virtue of another, but possibly existent by virtue of itself, and (c) the possibly existent by virtue of itself which is not rendered necessarily existent by virtue of another. Of the three categories of being, Avicenna calls the first two the categories of actual existence necessary in one sense or the other.¹⁰ For the purposes of advancing his proof for the existence of God, Avicenna calls God the One and unique being that is Necessarily Existent by virtue of itself. This being cannot have a cause but is rather the cause of other beings. A closer examination of the “possibly existent being” reveals that it is not opposed to «being in act » but must be understood in a larger sense as « that which can be, that which may or may not be present in act. »¹¹ By his conception of a possibly existent being, Avicenna underlines the ontological constitution of essence and existence that is found in all beings except God. As he remarks, “all things other than the Necessarily Existent have quiddities and these quiddities are those which in themselves are possible existents. Existence comes to them from the exterior.”¹² Thus, the possibly existent being is that being whose essence is distinct from its existence because it is caused, while a necessarily existent being is that being in which its existence is identical to its essence. Avicenna describes this Necessarily Existent as a Pure Intellect because He is an essence separated from all forms of matter.¹³ By virtue of its nature as Pure Intellect, He is also the Knower, the Knowledge

⁸ Cf Goichon, A.M, *La Distinction de l'Essence et de l'Existence d'après Ibn Sina*, p 160.

⁹ Ibid. p 161 : «Tout ce qui est nécessaire par autrui est possible en soi. Parce que ce qui est nécessaire par autrui a une nécessité qui fait suite à un certain rapport, à une certaine relation. »

¹⁰ Avicenne, *La Métaphysique du Shifa*, livre I, chap. 6, §37-§40, livres I à V, traduction et notes par Georges C. Anawati, (Paris : Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1985) pp 112-115; Cf also Davidson, H.A, *Proofs for Eternity, Creation and the Existence of God*, p 291.

¹¹ Goichon, A.M, *La Distinction de l'Essence d'après Ibn Sina*, p 158.

¹² Avicenne, *La Métaphysique du Shifa*, VIII, 4, 347, 5-10, p 88 : «Et toutes les choses autres que le nécessairement existant ont des quiddités et ces quiddités sont celles qui en elles-mêmes sont possiblement existantes. L'existence ne leur survient que de l'extérieur.» All translation into English is ours.

¹³ Ibid. VIII, 6, 356, 15, p 95 : «Le nécessairement existant est intelligence pure parce qu'Il est une essence séparée de la matière de toute manière. »

and the Known without any multiplicity introduced in His pure essence.¹⁴ This is contrary to neo-platonic doctrine according to which knowledge of all things introduces a duality of subject and object in the divine essence.¹⁵ As the principle of all things, He knows all things by His essence. Latter, St. Thomas will make proper use of this principle according to which God's knowledge brings about divine causality. This permeates the discussion of God's knowledge of singulars in both Avicenna and St. Thomas. By His very act of self-intellection, God necessarily brings other things into existence. It is the principle of the necessity of all things that it makes necessary "d'une nécessité première ou par intermédiaire."¹⁶ Although all existents other than God are in themselves possible, they are rendered necessary by their cause, the Necessarily Existent that is God. A very positive point is made by Beatrice Zedler who notes that "the Necessary Being is '*necesse Esse*' in double sense: He not only exists necessarily but He must act necessarily as well, and His act is an act of self-reflection."¹⁷ Thus He exercises necessity both on the ontological level and on the epistemological level. It is this force of double necessity first on the ontological level, because the Necessarily Existent brings beings into existence by necessity and on the epistemological, because He knows other beings by His necessary self-reflection, which permeates the triadic chain of existents outside of God.

At the summit of Avicenna's world, is the Necessarily Existent. His very act of self-knowledge directly necessitates one existent, a pure intelligence. This is in accordance with the principle that from one only one proceeds.¹⁸ This first intelligence undergoes an eternal act of self-knowledge and generates a soul and a heavenly body or sphere. It consequently becomes aware of a triple truth of its existence: that God's existence is necessary in itself; that its own existence is necessitated by an external cause-the Necessarily Existent; and that its own existence is only possible in itself. In other words, what is not necessarily existent is "possible in itself" and "necessary through another." Before pursuing our inquiry, we pause to note that Averroes had problems with this notion of "possible in itself" and "necessary through another." He makes

¹⁴ Ibid. VIII, 6, 357, 5, p 96 : « Son essence est donc intellect, intelligent et intelligé. Ce n'est pas à dire qu'il y ait là des choses multiples. En effet, en tant qu'il est identité pure, il est intelligence. »

¹⁵ Cf. Plotinus, *Ennead* VI, 7.

¹⁶ Avicenne, *La Métaphysique du Shifa*, VIII, 4, 343, 10-15, p 85 : « Si rien d'autre que lui n'est nécessairement existant, il est le principe de la nécessité de l'existence de toute chose qu'il rend nécessaire d'une nécessité première ou par intermédiaire. »

¹⁷ Zedler, B.H, « Another Look at Avicenna » in *The New Scholasticism*, vol L, (1976), p 506.

¹⁸ Avicenne, Op. Cit., IX, 4, 405, 10-15, p 140 : « car tu sais que l'un en tant qu'il est un ne peut nécessairement produire que l'un. »

allusion to the fact that Avicenna's error arises from his (Avicenna) mistaken belief that the celestial spheres are necessary through another and possible by themselves.¹⁹ For Averroes, if a thing is necessary, possibility has no place in it and “that there exists nothing of a single nature of which it can be said that it is in one way possible and in another way necessary in its existence.” Possible natures cannot become necessary and in necessary natures, there is no possibility. The possible is the opposite of the necessary.²⁰ The fact that the first intelligence conceives the Necessarily Existent as necessary in itself and itself (first intelligence) as caused by the Necessarily Existent implies plurality in its nature.²¹ These triple acts of self-cogitation engender another intelligence, a soul and a heavenly sphere. This intelligence in its turn does the same thing and engenders three things thus mentioned: a third intelligence, a soul and a heavenly sphere.²² As the intelligences are different from one another, there is no reason not to think that the existents in each triad belong to different species from the species of other triads. This process repeats again and again until the final emergence of the tenth intelligence known as the Active or Agent Intelligence. It is this intelligence that produces the world of generation and corruption as a result of the dissipation of the emanative power.²³ Davidson brings a little explication:

While it is true that the “necessary proceeding ... of a multiplicity (of beings) from an (incorporeal) intelligence” implies a multiplicity of aspects in the emanating intelligence, the position is “not convertible” and not all intelligences containing the same kind of effects. What an intelligence emanates depends on its nature and power. As intelligences succeed one another, their power diminishes, and because the active intellect stands low

¹⁹ Averroes, *Tahafut Al-Tahafut*, Eighth Discussion, translated by Simon Van Den Bergh, (Cambridge : EJW Gibb Memorial Trust, 1954) p 238.

²⁰ Averroes, *Tahafut Al-Tahafut*, Eighth Discussion, p 146: «But the possible nature cannot become necessary, unless the nature of the possible can become necessary. Therefore there is in necessary natures no possibility at all, be it a possibility necessary by itself or a possibility necessary by another.”

²¹ Avicenne, *La Métaphysique du Shifa*, IX, 4, 406, 1-5, p 140 : « Il faut donc qu’il y ait en lui en fait de multiplicité, [à savoir] l’intention par laquelle [il intelli]ge son essence comme possiblement existente en elle-même et qu’il intelli]ge la nécessité de son existence à partir du Premier, qui est intelligible par soi ; enfin qu’il intelli]ge le Premier ... Ensuite la multiplicité qu’il y a en lui du fait qu’il intelli]ge le Premier et qu’il s’intelli]ge lui-même est une multiplicité concomitante à la nécessité de son existence à partir du Premier. »

²² Ibid. IX, 4, 406, 15-20, p 141 : « Dès lors, de la Première Intelligence, il résulte nécessairement, en tant qu’elle intelli]ge la première l’existence d’une intelligence au-dessous d’elle, et en tant qu’elle s’intelli]ge elle-même, [il se produit] l’existence de la forme de la sphère ultime et sa perfection qui est l’âme. »

²³ Ibid. IX, 4, 407, 1-5, p 141 : « Il en est de même pour chaque intelligence et pour chaque sphère jusqu’à ce qu’on arrive à l’Intellect Agent qui régit nos âmes. »

in the hierarchy, its power is no longer sufficient to emanate eternal beings like those emanated by the intelligences above it.²⁴

This brief exposition of Avicenna's cosmogony built on a necessary generation of intelligences, souls and spheres, reveals a kind of necessitated "cosmic teleology" in which each higher hierarchy achieves perfection by engendering the next. Heath notes that it is the Aristotelian principle of entelechy based on the dichotomy of potentiality and actuality, which motivates the conceptual impetus of Avicenna's cosmogony.²⁵ Thus, we have a universe conceived as an eternal and necessary "static structure of downward devolution from the ultimate perfection represented by the Necessary Existent."²⁶ This emanative scheme is primarily for Avicenna, a description in temporal imagery, of the eternal relation of the world to God. The dependence of the world upon God is thus, eternally causal and not temporal. How then does Avicenna reconcile an eternally existing material world with a unique eternally existing immaterial God? He appeals to Alfarabi's response, that is, to "interpose many levels of spiritual substances the intelligences, between God and matter as a shield to safeguard the divine unity from multiplicity. By relating these spiritual intelligences to God as the necessarily acting source of their 'esse', he tries to account both for the necessity of their being and for their indebtedness to God as their "creative cause."²⁷ Another Thomistic interpretation of the Avicennian possible being sees it as a being that exists through the causality of another, which is God.²⁸ The fact that this being is possible in itself, and necessary through another, shows its ontological dependency on God. Unlike Avicenna however, St. Thomas would conceive "possible beings" as proceeding by creation freely from the divine will which constitutes them in accordance with His wisdom. St. Thomas's adoption of Avicenna's doctrine would be examined latter in our research. Having cleared the metaphysical basis of Avicenna's doctrine, we now turn to his teaching that God knows particulars in a universal way. Our examination of this teaching will be based on the excellent work written on this issue by Michael Marmura.²⁹

²⁴ Davidson, H.A, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) p 76.

²⁵ Heath, P, *Allegory and Philosophy in Avicenna*, (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1992) p 38.

²⁶ Ibid. p 39.

²⁷ Zedler, B.H, *Op. Cit*, p 507.

²⁸ Smith, G, «Avicenna and the Possibles, » in *The New Scholasticism*, vol. 17, (1943) p 340.

²⁹ Marmura, M.E, «Some Aspects of Avicenna's Theory of God's Knowledge of Particulars » in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 82, 3, (1962) pp. 299-312; "Divine Omniscience and Future Contingents in Alfarabi

Avicenna debuts his discussion of God's knowledge of singulars by noting that it is not going to be an easy question because it would demand a 'penetrating intelligence' to understand this manner of knowing things. This is perhaps because of the gap between the human process of knowledge and God's manner of knowing things. Humans because constituted of matter, move through sensible things in order to arrive at knowledge. This, man does by abstracting intelligibles from matter, intelligibles that constitute the veritable objects of the human knowledge. On the contrary, God is pure intellect and has no need of the material things to arrive at pure intelligibles. God by His essence knows all things necessarily. The question that arises is how God can know particular things seeing that He is not attributed with sensory organs?³⁰ Or must we have to accept that His knowledge is confined exclusively to universals? As to the how of this knowledge, Avicenna thinks that He knows them in a universal way.

The Necessarily Existent knows all things according to the universal mode, and despite that, nothing of what is particular escapes Him: not even the weight of an atom in the heavens or on the earth escapes Him. It is one of those marvels, that demands, in order to be understood, a penetrating intelligence.³¹

As the Principle of all things, Avicenna maintains that God knows the causes and their consequent effects, such that all the intelligences that emanate successively from Him and their subsequent emanations are known by Him. God "thus apprehends singular things in as much as they are universal."³² Here, we get the two passages where Avicenna uses the terms "universal" and "particular" in an entirely ambiguous manner. Thus, following Marmura, a distinction must be made in the use of the term "universal" for it can refer to three things: "(a) the nature of God's knowledge as such; (b) the manner of God's knowing; (c) the object known by God."³³ As regards the nature of God's knowledge, it is "universal" in the sense that it is "conceptual" or

and Avicenna" in *Divine Omniscience and Omnipotence in Medieval Philosophy: Islamic, Jewish and Christian Perspectives*, pp 81-94.

³⁰ Avicenna, *La Métaphysique du Shifa*, VIII, 6, 359, 10, p 97 : « Or nous avons montré ... que toute forme sensible et toute forme imaginative, nous la percevons qu'en tant qu'elle est sentie ou imaginée au moyen d'un organe divisible. »

³¹ Ibid. VIII, 6, 359, 10-15, p 98 : « Bien plus, le nécessairement existant n'intelligit toute chose que selon un mode universel, et malgré cela rien de ce qui est particulier ne lui échappe : pas le poids d'un atome dans des cieux ou sur la terre ne lui échappe. C'est là une de ces merveilles qui demande pour être comprise une intelligence pénétrante. »

³² Ibid. VIII, 6, 360, 1-5, p 98 : « Il saisit donc les choses singulières en tant qu'elles sont universelles. »

³³ Marmura, M, « Avicenna's Theory of God's Knowledge of Particulars, » p 300.

“intellectual.”³⁴ God as pure intellect, eternal and changeless, has no need of sensation and imagination like material things to come to knowledge. He exists outside of time and cannot be affected by changeable things. His knowledge is one in the identity of His essence.³⁵ As regards the manner of God’s knowledge, it is instantaneous.³⁶ This means that God is eternal act and His knowledge does not involve a transition from “concept to concept” as if it were to move from potency to actuality.³⁷ By knowing Himself in an eternal act of self-knowing, things come to exist as the consequence of this knowledge.³⁸ The implication is that divine knowledge, by its universal manner of knowing, is ontologically and causally prior to the existents. It is not like in human knowledge where it is the object of human knowledge that causes knowledge in the human. When we come to the meaning of “universal” with reference to the object of God’s knowledge, Avicenna maintains that God “apprehends particulars in as much as they are universal, that is, in as much as they have qualities.”³⁹ This is to signify that God knows only the general natures or the universal aspects of particulars, and not particulars in all their material distinguishing natures.⁴⁰ What seems contradictory is the latter addition noted above by Avicenna, in accordance with the sayings of the Quran, that “not even the weight of an atom escapes His knowledge.” St. Thomas would attack Avicenna on this ground that his philosophy does not support the Quranic saying. If God knows the minutest details of the weight of an atom, then He knows particulars. Can God in His eternal and changeless knowledge know each particular in both the celestial and the terrestrial realms? But is that the correct meaning of Avicenna’s doctrine? What does the term “particular” mean for Avicenna?

³⁴ Ibid. p 301.

³⁵ Avicenne, *La Métaphysique du Shifa*, IX, 4, 403, 5-10, p.138 « Mais c’est une intellection une. »

³⁶ Marmura, M, «Avicenna’s Theory of God’s Knowledge of Particulars, » p 303.

³⁷ Avicenne, *La Métaphysique du Shifa*, IX, 4, 403, 5-10, p 138 : «Ce n’est pas une intelligence sortant de la puissance à l’acte, ni une intelligence passant d’un intelligible à un intelligible. »

³⁸ Ibid. VIII, 6, 359, 15-360, 1-5, p 98 : « Quand il intellige lui-même et qu’il intellige les premiers existants [qui proviennent] de lui et ce qui s’engendre d’eux. Rien de ce qui se produit n’existe qui ne devienne nécessaire d’une certaine manière à cause de lui ... Le Premier connaît les causes et leurs applications. Il serait par suite nécessairement ce qui en résulte, les temps qui les séparent, et les retours qu’ils ont, car il est impossible qu’il connaisse celles-là sans qu’il connaisse celles-ci. »

³⁹ Ibid. VIII, 6, 360, 1-5, p. 98 « Il saisit donc les choses singulières en tant qu’elles sont universelles. Je veux dire, en tant qu’elles ont des attributs.»

⁴⁰ Marmura, M, « Avicenna’s Theory of God’s Knowledge of Particulars, » p 304.

Avicenna himself tells us that a thing can be known individually if it is the only member of its species. It is the case of the celestial bodies like the Sun or the Jupiter.⁴¹ They are changeless and immaterial. If the species is made up of many individuals with different particularities as in the world of generation and corruption, God knows them universally. Marmura correctly notes that universal descriptions alone cannot specify corruptible particulars, because the particular is one amongst many that share the same qualities.⁴² In the celestial triad, each existent represents the only member of each species such that, God in knowing each species, knows not only its universal qualities but the fact that this species is only one member. It is in this sense that the species is known individually.⁴³ What about eclipses? Particular entities of celestial realms are known particularly by God because they are only individuals of the species of the celestial realms. They are immaterial and changeless. Particular events following such particular entities are likewise known by God without the necessity of sensation. But in the realm of generation and corruption, it is not the same. Avicenna discusses God's knowledge of such a particular event as an eclipse, of a particular entity as the moon. Even though it involves other particular entities like the sun and the earth, these are only individuals of their species. Avicenna holds that God knows every particular eclipse in its concrete instance in a "universal" way where "universal" refers to the nature and manner of God's knowledge, that is, "conceptually" and "eternally." In one of the passages, he states that the goal is to show that this type of knowledge does not involve change in the knower.

As you know the movements of all the celestial bodies, you know all eclipse and all conjunction or separation existing particularly in itself by knowing them however in a universal manner ... If somebody refuses to name this "knowledge of the particular from a universal point of view," there is nothing to argue with him, since our purpose at this moment is something else, that is, to let it be known how particulars can be known and apprehended ... without this involving change in the knower.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Avicenne, *La Métaphysique du Shifa*, VIII, 6, 360, 5-10 p 98 : « Si cet individu est de ceux qui auprès de l'intelligence sont également individuels, l'intelligence peut le décrire. C'est le cas pour l'individu qui est seul de son espèce sans pareil comme le soleil ou Jupiter. Mais si l'espèce s'étend à des individus, l'intelligence ne peut pas définir cette chose jusqu'à ce qu'on la désigne premièrement selon ce que tu sais. »

⁴² Marmura, M, « Avicenna's Theory of God's Knowledge of Particulars » p 307.

⁴³ Marmura, M, « Divine Omniscience and Future Contingents in Alfarabi and Avicenna » p 90-91.

⁴⁴ Avicenne, *La Métaphysique du Shifa* VIII, 6, 360, 10-361, 8-13, p 98-99 : « Nous disons : comme tu connais les mouvements de tous les corps célestes, tu connais toute éclipse et toute conjonction ou séparation existant en lui-

From his analysis, we understand that sensory apprehension of individual eclipse brings about change in the knower whereas intellectual apprehension does not. That is how God knows individual eclipses eternally since His knowledge of particulars is limited to individuals and events in the celestial realm. If his emanation stops at the level of the active intelligence from where the world of generation and corruption begins, it is in consonance with Avicenna's epistemological principles that God's knowledge of particulars should not reach to the individuals of the corruptible world. How then does he claim that not even the weight of an atom on the earth escapes God's knowledge? Do we not say that Avicenna tries to conform to the demands of the theologians and the Quran, by adding the debated passage while trying to hide his true conviction more in keeping with the Aristotelian view that God knows primarily Himself?⁴⁵ Marmura interprets this addition as "a defensive measure on the part of Avicenna to conceal the real implications of his theory from the more scripturally literal."⁴⁶ He also suggests that Avicenna could be playing a reconciliatory role between scripture and philosophy.⁴⁷ A recent writer however begs to disagree with the interpretation of Marmura. According to this writer, the texts of Avicenna are not clear enough as to conclude that God has no knowledge of individuals of the corruptible world. He warns that "there is no ground to neglect or explain away Avicenna's subscription to the theory that God knows each and every thing."⁴⁸

Another simpler way of interpreting Avicenna on this issue of God's knowledge of singulars is to divide such knowledge into two types: a particular knowledge of particulars and universal knowledge of particulars. This division is suggested by Bonino.⁴⁹ We think this interpretation supported by clear textual references brings out in a clearer fashion, the real thought and intention of Avicenna. In the texts of Avicenna, we are made to understand that there are two ways of knowing singulars: in a universal manner and in a particular manner. Avicenna explains

même particulièrement en les connaissant cependant de manière universelle ... Si quelqu'un s'oppose à ce qu'on appelle cela une connaissance du particulière du point de vue universel, il n'y a pas à discuter avec lui, car notre intention en ce moment est autre : nous voulons, en effet, faire savoir comment les choses particulières sont connues et perçues ... d'une science qui ne provoque aucun changement chez le connaissant.»

⁴⁵ Belo, Catarina, «Averroes on God's Knowledge of Particulars» in *Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol. 17:2, (2006) p 185.

⁴⁶ Marmura, M, «Avicenna's Theory of God's Knowledge of Particulars » p 311.

⁴⁷ Ibid. p 312.

⁴⁸ Acar, Rahim, «Reconsidering Avicenna's Position on God's Knowledge of Particulars, » in *Interpreting Avicenna: Science and Philosophy in Medieval Islam*, edited by John McGinnis, (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2004) p 156.

⁴⁹ Bonino, Serge-Thomas, *Thomas d'Aquin : De la Vérité ou La Science en Dieu*, p 60-61.

by the use of a particular event, the occurrence of eclipse. We can know a singular event like an eclipse in a particular way by getting acquainted with its occurrence at a given time and its non occurrence at another time.⁵⁰ This type of knowledge according to Avicenna is not durable. It is temporal and changes in accordance with the occurrence or the non occurrence of the eclipse. It is a knowledge that necessitates the total apprehension of all the particular circumstances of each movement by a sensible perception,⁵¹ and *ipso facto*, introduces change in the knower. This is definitively not how God knows particulars.

The knowledge of singulars is universal when the singular is known in its universal causes, which means, knowing all the principles and the movements of the stars that bring an eclipse into existence. This type of knowledge does not require witnessing an eclipse sensibly and neither does it bring about change in the knower. It is the knowledge of the particular that Avicenna attributes to God. In one passage he notes:

If you existed eternally, you would have knowledge not of an eclipse absolutely, but of all existing eclipse and the existence of this eclipse or its non-existence would change nothing in you: in the two cases, your knowledge would be the same, that is, that an eclipse exists having such properties after a certain eclipse or after the presence of the sun ... and that intellection from your part would be true before, during and after the eclipse.⁵²

Alghazali quickly disagrees with Avicenna on a number of points. Taking God as pure intellect who lives in an eternal self-knowledge and does not will what emanates by force of necessity from Him, is not acceptable to Alghazali. It is because this God lacks will that according to Alghazali, He does not know what emanates from Him. The God which lacks will cannot be the God of their faith.

⁵⁰ Avicenne, *La Métaphysique du Shifa*, VIII, 6, 361, 15, p 99 : « Mais si tu fais entrer le temps en cela, et que, par suite, tu connaisses à un moment donnée que cette éclipse n'existe pas puis que tu saches à un autre moment, qu'elle existe, cette science que tu as ne demeure pas quand l'éclipse a lieu mais il se produit une autre science ».

⁵¹ Ibid. VIII, 6, 361, 5-10, p 99 : « il se peut que tu ne puisses juger de l'existence de cette éclipse à cet instant ou sa non-existence que si tu connais les particularités des mouvements par perception sensible... »

⁵² Ibid. VII, 6, 362, 10-15, p 99 : « si tu existais éternellement, tu aurais une science non de l'éclipse absolument mais de toute éclipse existante et l'existence de cette éclipse ou sa non-existence ne changerait rien en toi ... Et cette intellection de ta part serait vraie avant cette éclipse, avec elle et après elle. »

The universe is known to Him, for the universe was willed by Him and produced by Him, and nothing comes into existence but what is produced through His will, and nothing is everlasting but His essence alone. And when once it was established that God wills and knows what He wills, He must be necessarily living, and every living being is conscious of its own self, and He is the most capable of knowing Himself. Therefore the whole universe is known to God, and they understood this through this argument, since they had found that He willed everything that happens in the world.⁵³

The consequences of denying God a proper knowledge of particulars, for that is what Avicenna's doctrine amounts to, are far reaching. Does it not make man more knowledgeable than God? Does it not render God ignorant and incapable of distinguishing a believer from a non-believer? God would not even know a particular prophet and this is disastrous.⁵⁴ And finally, if there is no knowledge of particulars in God, the Islamic doctrine of providence is compromised and a God who does not know cannot be trusted with administering justice, mercy and compassion.

Averroes shares a lot in common with Avicenna. They both agree that God is pure intellect completely detached from any material attachments. His immaterial nature marks out His absolute transcendence over all. As pure intellect, God is the cause of all existents and knows all existents by being their cause. But Averroes distances himself from Avicenna by insisting that God's knowledge is neither universal nor particular.⁵⁵ He equates universal knowledge with potential knowledge and thus, God's knowledge cannot be potential. And neither can His knowledge be particular since particular knowledge is sensory knowledge.

The knowledge of things through a universal knowledge is inadequate, for it knows them in potency ... it should be impossible to ascribe to its perception knowledge of universals, let alone knowledge of individuals, because universals are intelligibles which

⁵³ Alghazali as quoted in Averroes, *Tahafut Al-Tahafut: The Incoherence of the Incoherence*, Eleventh Discussion, p. 255 translated by Simon Van Den Bergh, (London :Gibb Memorial Trust, 1954).

⁵⁴ Alghazali in Averroes, *Tahafut Al-Tahafut*, Thirteenth Discussion, p 277.

⁵⁵ Averroes, *Tahafut Al-Tahafut*, Thirteenth Discussion, p 280: "The most competent philosophers therefore do not call God's knowledge of existents either universal or individual, for knowledge which implies the concepts of universal and individual is a passive intellect and effect, whereas the First Intellect is pure act and a cause and His knowledge cannot be compared to human knowledge."

are consequent on and posterior to existents, whereas on the contrary the existents are consequent on this intellect.⁵⁶

God is pure intellect and pure act. For Him to have a universal knowledge is to show some lack of perfection, because it is knowledge attained indirectly and involves the use of the active intellect. Thus, when Avicenna says that God has knowledge of particulars but in a universal way, Averroes takes such doctrine as implying that God is perfected through intelligibles and that God's knowledge is thus caused as in human knowledge. What appears to Averroes as the best approach to the problem of God's knowledge of particulars is equivocity.⁵⁷ He relies on the purely equivocal character of the notion of "knowledge" applied to God and to humans. God's knowledge is causative as it brings about the existence of beings while human knowledge is caused by existents. What about the issue at stake, is God ignorant of particulars? It seems that Averroes remains agnostic on the problem. Since knowledge is equivocal, asking whether God is ignorant of the knowledge of particulars is not adequate. Maimonides would make the doctrine of equivocity and its implications, the central stream of his treatment of divine attributes and God's knowledge.

2.0 Maimonides on God's Knowledge

To discuss the problem of God's knowledge, Maimonides examines an existential issue that puts at risk, the great religious belief in divine providence. The existential problem of "a lack of order in the circumstances of the human individuals⁵⁸" throws up a lot of question regarding God's knowledge and His providence over His creatures. This lack of order results in a contradictory situation where wicked individuals prosper whereas just men suffer some grievous and miserable plights. In the thinking of certain philosophers, if God knows these people individually, He

⁵⁶ Averroes, *Tahafut Al-Tahafut*, Sixth Discussion, p 203.

⁵⁷ Averroes, *Tahafut Al-Tahafut*, Thirteenth Discussion, p 280: «since the term 'knowledge' is predicated equivocally of divine and human knowledge of the universal and the individual. »

⁵⁸ *Dux Neutrorum*, lib.III, cap.XVII, fol.79: "illud quod apparet in principio cogitationis de malitia ordinis diversitatum hominum." Cf *Guide* III, 16, p 461.

should treat them appropriately resulting in just rewards for just actions. But the evidence at hand proves the contrary and thus, the conclusion:

Either He knows nothing at all of these circumstances, or He knows them and establishes in them the most excellent order. But we at any rate find that they are without order, do not observe analogies, and have no continuity such as they ought to have. Consequently this is a proof that He does not know these circumstances in any way or through any cause whatever.⁵⁹

Where He knows and fails to act, it is either He is not capable or He is negligent. But the philosophers know that God is capable because omnipotent and is not negligent because caring. Thus, not wanting to risk God's transcendence and omnipotence, they conclude that God lacks knowledge of individuals "and that everything that is in this lowly world is hidden from Him, and He does not apprehend it."⁶⁰ To justify this position, they offered up some seemingly valid reasons for denying that God has knowledge of singulars. In the first place, they noted that since particular things are apprehended by means of the senses only and not by the intellect, God cannot apprehend by means of the senses and thus, cannot know particular things. Again, they reasoned that the infinity of particular things makes it impossible to be understood all at once through knowledge. Finally, knowledge of particular things involves continuous change. If God were to possess knowledge of particular things that are never stable, it would introduce change in Him for it would involve a continuous renewal of knowledge. These reasons explain their saying that God has no knowledge of particular things. How does Maimonides answer to these arguments against God's knowledge of singulars? What is Maimonides's position concerning singulars of other species that are not human; does God know them as well?

⁵⁹Ibid : « De distinctione vero supradicta non remanet nisi quod ignorat diversitates hominum omnino : et idcirco non ordinat eos secundum ordinem rectum. Et nos invenimur inordinati, et non coniuncti cum via sensus : nec procedimus secundum quod convenit. Istud est probatio quod nullo modo scit hoc : » Cf *Guide* III, 16, p 462.

⁶⁰Ibid : « Casus autem illorum (quod fugiebant) in malum, est quod ipsi fugiebant attribuere Creatori, scilicet quod postponeret, et attribuerunt ei praecise ignorantiam, et nescit : » Cf *Guide* III, 16, p 462.

2.1 God's Knowledge of Particulars and of Universals

The denial of attributes in God is aimed at preserving the transcendence and the absolute simplicity of God. This is at the heart of Maimonides's faith and his metaphysics. On the basis of that transcendent nature of God, Maimonides draws two basic principles: the first is that all perfections must exist in God and that all deficiencies must be denied of Him. The second is that ignorance with regard to anything is a deficiency and that God is ignorant of nothing.⁶¹ These are the principles on the basis of which he opposes the opinions of those who denied that God could have knowledge of singulars. How could He not possess the knowledge of singulars? For Maimonides, God is an intellect *in actu* that has absolutely no potentiality in Him. He does not need to pass through the senses before apprehending. Thus it follows necessarily that:

He is always and constantly an intellectually cognizing subject, an intellect, and an intellectually cognized object.⁶²

His essence is the same as His intellect *in actu* which exists in absolute unity with the intellectually cognizing subject, the intellect and the intellectually cognized object. The numerical unity of—*intellectus, intelligens et intellectum*—the intellect, the intellectually cognizing subject, and the intellectually cognized object, does hold good with reference to God since the three notions form in Him one single notion in which there is no multiplicity.⁶³ As intellect *in actu*, God must have the conception of whatever it is that exists. In a more practical and primary way of showing that God has knowledge of singulars, Maimonides writes:

In the case of everyone who makes any instrument, it is clear that unless he had a conception of the work to be done with that instrument, he would be unable to make it. ... When therefore, some of the philosophers thought that God does not apprehend these individual things because they are apprehended by the senses, whereas, He does not apprehend with a sense but through an intellectual apprehension ... if the meaning of the

⁶¹Ibid. lib.III, cap.XX, fol.82: "Non est dubium quia de primis intelligibilibus est quod in Creatore sint omnia genera perfectionum : et quod omnes imperfectiones longe sunt ab eo : et fere erunt intelligibilia prima : quoniam ignorantia imperfectio est in quacumque re invenitur : Creator autem nihil ignorat. » Cf *Guide* III, 19, p 477.

⁶²Ibid. lib.I, cap.LXVII, fol.27: "ideoque sequitur de necessitate ut sit intellectus et intelligens: et intellectum semper per omnia secula." Cf *Guide* I, 68, p 166.

⁶³Ibid: "Iam scis verbum manifestum quod philosophi dixerunt de Creatore, quod ipse est intellectus et intelligens et intellectum : et quod ista tria sunt unum in Creatore : et non est ibi multitudo. » Cf *Guide* I, 68, p 163.

apprehension of the sense of sight is hidden from Him and He does not know it, how did He bring into existence this instrument, which is disposed for visual apprehension?⁶⁴

Another problem is that particular things are never stable and change continuously. If God were to have knowledge of particular things, there is the probability that there would be change in the essence of God Himself since it would involve His knowing now what He did not know before. This thinking is considered erroneous by Maimonides since God's manner of knowing is not the same thing as our human way of knowing.

A matter concerning which there is a general consensus is that it is not true that new knowledge should come to Him ... so that He would know now what He did not know before.⁶⁵

God's knowledge is His essence and His essence is His knowledge. Because of this, nothing comes to be superadded to His essence as if He were not perfect. By the virtue of His essence, He knows with one single knowledge, the many and numerous things without introducing into His essence, multiplicity of diverse knowledge. As *intellect in actu*, no new knowledge comes to Him in any way.

Similarly, we say that He has known all the things that are produced anew before they have come about and that He has known them perpetually.⁶⁶

Things that are nonexistent but have the possibility of becoming existent at a certain time and for a certain duration, are actually known by God. These particular nonexistent but realizable things may be infinite in number, and are still known by God.⁶⁷ Maimonides here already hints on God's knowledge of future contingents. They do not constitute in Him any new knowledge. On

⁶⁴ Ibid. lib.III, cap.XX, fol.83: "Notum quod omnis operator alicuius instrumenti non posset facere instrumentum illud nisi opus quod fit illo instrumento sciretur ab eo...Quoniam vero philosophus aliquis dixit quod Creator non apprehendit sensibilia, quia apprehenduntur sensibus. Ipse vero non apprehendit sensu, sed apprehensione intellectus...Si apprehensio visio lateret Creatorem quomodo operaretur illud instrumentum per quod exercetur visus:" Cf *Guide* III, 19, p 478-479.

⁶⁵ Ibid. lib.III, cap.XXI, fol.83: "Conuenimus omnes in hoc quod in Creatore non renovatur scientia, scilicet ut dicas quia scit modo quod prius nescivit : » Cf *Guide* III, 20, p 480.

⁶⁶ Ibid: "Similiter dicimus quod illa quae sunt nova scit ipse antequam sint: et idcirco non renovatur in eo scientia ullo modo." Cf *Guide* III, 20, p 480.

⁶⁷ Ibid : « Sequitur autem secundum istam credulitatem quod scientia pendeat de privatione, et sit circa infinita. Et propter hoc crediderunt corda nostra in hoc: » Cf *Guide* III, 20, p 481.

the contrary, that which is nonexistent and can never become existent, is not an object of God's knowledge since it is an absolutely nonexistent thing.⁶⁸

However Maimonides recognizes a real difficulty about understanding God's knowledge of the infinite. He cites the opinion of certain people of speculation who, to avoid this problem, think that divine knowledge "has for its object the species, but in a certain sense, extends to all the individuals of the species."⁶⁹ Philosophers rather affirm that He knows permanent immutable things, that is, the individuals of the sphere above the moon and the species of the sublunary sphere. Maimonides would trace the earlier part of the opinion to Arabic influences specially Avicenna for whom the emanationist theory does not permit God a direct knowledge of the individuals of the species; he would also actually trace the idea to Aristotle for whom God's knowledge reaches not the individuals but the species below the sphere of the moon. Maimonides does not accept the solution proposed by Avicenna because of its system of emanation and what Gardet describes as "*gnose intellectuelle*" that it implies.

Il (Avicenne) fut par là même confirmé dans une recherche de *gnose intellectuelle et moniste*, où Dieu, Etre nécessaire, Lumière de lumière et Source des lumières, se manifesterait en émanant nécessairement et volontairement de toute éternité un mode contingent par essence.⁷⁰

Having rejected the inadequacies of the Avicennian theory and having examined the difficulties involved in a proper grasp of God's knowledge of individuals, Maimonides proposes that the fundamental problem lies in our eagerness to establish analogical relations between our knowledge and divine knowledge as if we can apprehend God's essence.⁷¹ But God's knowledge is not outside of His essence, and thus, it remains inaccessible to human intellect. There is no common ground between our knowledge and His knowledge. To think that our knowledge is like His knowledge is very erroneous.

⁶⁸ Ibid : «Quod autem nullo modo est vel erit ens : hoc est privatio praecise, de qua non pendet eius scientia : » Cf *Guide* III, 20, p 481.

⁶⁹Ibid : « Et quidam de viris speculativis dixerunt quod ipsius scientia pendet de specie : et diffunditur super singularia speciei aliquo modo. » Cf *Guide* III, 20, p 481.

⁷⁰ Gardet, L, «L'attitude philosophique d'Ibn Sina, » dans *Le Millénaire d'Avicenne*, (Téhéran, 1956) p 98.

⁷¹ *Dux Neutorum*, lib.III, cap.XXI, fol.83: "Ego vero dico quod causa quae fecit cos in talibus vagari, est, quia posuerunt comparationem inter scientiam nostram et scientiam Creatoris:et quaelibet illarum sectarum necesse habet opinari quod illa quae sunt impossibilia in scientia nostra, sunt necessaria in eius scientia, vel multum laborabunt in alia ratione. » Cf *Guide* III, 20, p 481.

It is from this that incongruities follow necessarily, as we imagine that things that obligatorily pertain to our knowledge pertain also to His knowledge.⁷²

Maimonides remains faithful to the metaphysics that animates his rejection of divine attributes and to equivocality as the linguistic tool with which we can express God's relation to things outside of Him. The transcendence of the divine essence must not be compromised by any form of seeming analogical likeness that could exist between God and things outside of Him. On the grounds of God's unique transcendence and the perfection that is His, Maimonides establishes his own position thus:

We say that this essence apprehends all that is other than itself; that in all the things that exist, nothing whatever is hidden from it; and that between our knowledge and His knowledge there is nothing in common, as there is nothing in common between our essence and His essence. With regard to this point, only the equivocality of the term "knowledge" occasions the error; for there is a community only in the terms, whereas in the true reality of the things there is a difference.⁷³

Thus, for Maimonides, the problem about God's knowledge of singulars arises because of our inattention to the equivocality of the word "knowledge." Once we understand that there is a difference between our order of existence and God's transcendent order of existence, we shall begin to accept that His manner of knowing is very much different from our manner of knowing. This clarity would lay to rest the opinion of certain men of speculation that God does not know particular things either because He is deprived of the senses or because they are infinite or because such knowledge would imply continuous change in knowledge in the divine essence. The truth according to Maimonides is that, "the meaning of knowledge, the meaning of purpose, and the meaning of providence, when ascribed to us, are different from the meanings of these

⁷² Ibid: « Propter hoc ergo sequuntur inconvenientia: quia putant quod ea quae sequuntur nostram scientiam, consequuntur etiam scientiam eius. » Cf *Guide* III, 20, p 482.

⁷³ Ibid: « ita dicemus quod substantia eius apprehendit per suam sapientiam quicquid est extra ipsum. Nihil latet ipsum ex omnibus entibus aliquo modo : et non communicant scientia nostra et scientia ipsius, sicut et nostra substantia non communicat cum eius substantia. In hoc autem loco errare fecit homines communicatio scientiae. Communicatio namque in solo nomine est, et differentia in sua veritate. » Cf *Guide* III, 20, p 482. Note that our latter discussions on divine providence would cast a little doubt on this Maimonidean position on God's knowledge of singulars. His tool of self-defense will be God's unknowable essence and the language of equivocation. Our manner of knowing things is quite different from God's and they are only the same in name.

terms when ascribed to Him.”⁷⁴ Hence, he affirms the radical transcendence of the divine knowledge and corroborates this stand with the saying of the prophet: “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isa.55: 8-9) It is not only that God’s knowledge radically differs from ours, the human intellect cannot explain the *how* of God’s knowledge since His essence is inaccessible to us.

Maimonides goes on then to explain, according to the dictates of the Law, how God’s knowledge differs from ours. First is that His knowledge while being one, corresponds to many things belonging to various species. Second is that it may have as its object something that does not exist but that may possibly exist and thirdly, it may also have as its object, something that is infinite. Fourth is that no change comes to His knowledge in its apprehension of temporal things. And finally, God’s knowledge of a possible thing does not make that possible thing lose its nature of possibility.⁷⁵ We shall still precise the last point when we come to examine God’s knowledge of future contingents. Thus, against those who deny that God has knowledge of particulars, Maimonides affirms that God as *Intellect in actu* apprehends at all times and that nothing among all the beings is hidden from Him.

Realizing that God as *Intellect in actu* who apprehends at all times, could still be likened to Avicenna’s God who continuously emanates and through the various intelligences, exercises a universal knowledge of things, or exercises what Wohlman describes as “une vision spéculative,”⁷⁶ Maimonides tries to press home the particular character of God’s knowledge of singulars. He borrows the Aristotelian model of intimate practical knowledge possessed by an artisan over his work.⁷⁷ Aquinas would also refer to this same example of an artisan. In the words of Maimonides, we note:

⁷⁴Ibid. fol.84: “Scimus ergo quod ratio scientiae et ratio intentionis et ratio curae quae nobis attribuuntur, non sunt illae quae attribuuntur Creatori.” Cf *Guide* III, 20, p 484.

⁷⁵Ibid: « Istud autem non egreditur a natura possibilitatis ullo modo: sed natura possibilitatis remanet cum eo. Scientia etiam in eo quod renouatur de possibilitate, non facit ut alterum duorum impossibile sit de necessitate.” Cf *Guide* III, 20, pp 482.

⁷⁶ Wohlman, Avital, *Thomas d’Aquin et Maïmonide, un dialogue exemplaire*, (Paris : Les Editions du Cerf, 1988) p 213 : « A contre-courant des philosophies néo-platoniciennes de l’émanation dont Ibn Sina lui propose un modèle, il refuse d’adopter une explication de la connaissance divine des être créés qui serait construite sur le mode d’une vision spéculative. »

⁷⁷ Cf Aristotle, *Metaphysics* II, 1, 993b21; Wohlman, A, *Op. Cit*, p 214.

A great disparity subsists between the knowledge an artificer has of the thing he has made and the knowledge someone else has of the artifact in question.⁷⁸

The artificer realized the art work only through the knowledge he already possessed in his mind. This knowledge is quite different from the knowledge of the same work possessed by an admirer. The latter's knowledge of the artifact grows by his looking at the artifact, and each time he looks, he acquires a new knowledge of the work until he acquires a complete knowledge of the artifact. If the motions of the artifact are infinite, the admirer could never contain them in his knowledge, and neither could he know any of these motions before they take place because his knowledge is derived from the artifact. This cannot be said of the artificer who conceived the work and knows even its infinite motions. The admirer's knowledge is according to Maimonides, the example of human knowledge of things. Divine knowledge on the contrary is not like that.

The things in question follow upon His knowledge, which preceded and established them as they are ... For through knowing the true reality of His own immutable essence, He also knows the totality of what necessarily derives from all His acts ... and it is impossible for us to know in any way this kind of apprehension.⁷⁹

Maimonides seems to endorse here that God's knowledge of singulars is more ontologically intimate and direct than the "vision spéculative" meant by Avicenna. That seems to be the correct interpretation of what Maimonides means by saying that "God knows the totality of what necessarily derives from all His acts." What would throw this in doubt is Maimonides's insistence that divine providence does not reach to individuals of all species but only to the individuals of the human species.⁸⁰ As we shall see, he will be criticized by Thomas Aquinas for, among other things, trying to denigrate God by denying that God is omniscient. However, in this actual context, Maimonides maintains the transcendence of God and insists on the equivocity of our knowledge and God's knowledge. What seems again paradoxical is that Maimonides could appeal to analogy of an artificer's knowledge of his artifacts in order to explain God's

⁷⁸*Dux Neutrorum*, lib.III, cap.22, fol.84: « Differentia magna est inter scientiam artificis eius rei quam operatur, et scientiam alterius de eadem re. » Cf *Guide* III, 21, p 484.

⁷⁹*Ibid.* lib.III, cap.22, fol.84: "Sed omnia sequuntur suam sapientiam: quia ipsa prior est et mensuratrix earum secundum quod sunt...cum scit veritatem substantiae suae quae non mutatur, scit quicquid provenit et sequitur ex omnibus operibus suis ... et quod impossibile est nos apprehendere illam apprehensionem. » Cf *Guide* III, 21, p 485.

⁸⁰*Ibid.* lib.III, cap.XVIII, fol.81: "Ego credo quod cura specialis est in hoc mundo inferiori, qui est sub sphaera Lunae: et est coniuncta in singularibus specie hominum tantummodo." Cf *Guide* III, 17, p 471.

knowledge of singulars. If there is nothing in common between human knowledge and God's knowledge, why would Maimonides make use of this analogy? Again, if God's providence does not extend to individuals of all species, why does Maimonides compare the artificer's perfect knowledge of his artifacts to God's knowledge of singulars? Or does this belong to his esoteric teachings?

2.2 God's Knowledge of the Future Contingents and Human Freedom

By the virtue of His essence which is immutable, God knows with one single knowledge many and diverse things and knows them perpetually. This means that no new knowledge comes to Him in any way at all. Among the objects of His knowledge are things nonexistent but which have the possibility of becoming existent at a certain time and for a certain duration. These actually nonexistent things which can actually come to exist at a certain time are called future contingents. An illustration of how God knows them is the analogy of the artisan's knowledge of his work. While an observer would be required to understand the functioning of the work before coming to grasp with it, the artisan already knows the principles on which his product is based, and knows how it will function in the future. Maimonides places much emphasis on the form, which defines a thing and makes it what it is. The form of a house which the artisan has in his mind is what the house is all about; the concrete house is a realization of the form and the principles of its design. Knowing the house as a particular house involves knowing the form and the matter of the house. For Maimonides, God by knowing His own essence knows the totality of what necessarily derives from all His acts.⁸¹ Thus, He knows not only the principles of things, but what might come out of such principles even in the future. He knows what form, future actions of His will take. This knowledge of the future does not in any way bring about change in the knowledge God has as His essence is changeless. We recall that he holds God's 'knowledge of a thing before it has come into being and after it has acquired reality as existent and after it has ceased to exist to be one and the same knowledge in which there is no change.'⁸² Here

⁸¹ Ibid. lib.III, cap.XXII, fol.84: "cum scit veritatem substantiae suae quae non mutatur, scit quicquid provenit et sequitur ex omnibus operibus suis. » Cf *Guide* III, 21, p 485.

⁸² Ibid. lib.I, cap.LVIII, fol.23: "et scit quod est antequam sit: et postquam est in esse suo post suam privationem scientia quae non variatur." Cf *Guide* I, 60, p 144.

Maimonides alludes to the notion of “eternal present” that Aquinas would make the focal point of his discussion of God’s omniscience. Commenting on God’s knowledge of things, Ivry observes that:

God knows all of them through the formal principles with which he endows them: and he knows the future and the present, since for God there is neither past, future or present, just an eternal now.⁸³

However, what we do not know is the ‘how’ of God’s knowledge and on the suggestion of Maimonides, it would require a divine nature for us to understand how God knows. Knowledge in God is not acquired but is eternally present as a result of the unceasing identity of intellect, intellectually cognizing subject and intellectually cognized object that forms an integral part of God’s essence.⁸⁴

If the things that will happen in the future are known by God, there are some major problems of necessity, determinism and freedom that come up. The first is how to address the suggestion that there seems to be a kind of necessity attached to that knowledge such that what is known by God must necessarily come to be realized. It is only a part of the tension in Maimonides’s writings between the doctrine that God acts out of His own free choice and the opposed claim that He acts out of necessity. A clear example is seen in one of his lexicographic chapters of the *Guide* where Maimonides takes the verse that God speaks to Moses, “And thou shalt see my back,” to mean, “thou shalt apprehend what follows from Me, has come to be like Me, and follows necessarily from My will—that is, all the things created by Me.”⁸⁵ According to this text, all things created by God, and surely known by Him because he cannot create what He does not know, follow necessarily from His will. Opposed to this is a similar statement where Maimonides identifies “the First Cause of all things, I mean God’s will and free choice.”⁸⁶ Very noticeable in this outward tension is the inherent perplexity in the mind of Maimonides who needs the Aristotelian

⁸³ Ivry, A, «Providence, Divine Omniscience, and Possibility: The Case of Maimonides,” in T. Rudavsky, ed., *Divine Omniscience and Omnipotence in Medieval Philosophy*, (Dordrecht and Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1985), p 154.

⁸⁴ Diamond, James A, *Maimonides and the Hermeneutics of Concealment* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), p 92.

⁸⁵ *Dux Neutorum*, lib.I, cap.XXXVII, fol.14: “Videbis post me: hoc est apprehendes quod ex me manat et sequitur, ‘Ex voluntate mea’, ac si diceret omnes creaturas meas.” Cf *Guide* I, 38, p 87.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* lib.II, cap.XLVIII, fol.70: “Et ita proceditur donec perveniatur ad causam primam. Et ipsa est voluntas Creatoris.” Cf *Guide* II, 48, p 409.

God to explain scientifically the world in which there is a fixed natural order, and the Creator-God of the *Scripture* acting in freedom and according to His own will, in order to explain biblical prophecy, miracles, divine commandments, reward and punishment, etc. Throughout the *Guide*, this type of tension exists and Maimonides most of the time, does not affirm one at the expense of the other. It is this ongoing tension that has given rise to the debate as to the esoteric and the exoteric doctrines of Maimonides. Leo Strauss is most prominent in propagating that “contradictions are the axis of the Guide.”⁸⁷ The second of the problems points to the fact that things known by God are already determined to be realized at a given time. And thirdly, there is no place left for chance occurrence in nature, and where humans are involved, there is a total negation of freedom. The first question hinges on the causality of God’s knowledge, and how it affects future contingent things. A closer examination tends to suggest that there being known by God imposes on them an effective necessity that changes their natures and draws them into reality. But Maimonides disagrees and maintains that things preserve their natures even when they are known by God.

One of the things that have become clear to me by the texts of the Torah is that His knowledge, may He be exalted, that a certain possible thing will come into existence, does not in any way make that possible thing quit the nature of the possible. On the contrary the nature of the possible remains with it; and knowledge concerning what possible things will be produced, does not entail one of the two possibilities becoming necessary.⁸⁸

Of very important is the difference that should be established between the nature of the knower and the nature of the known. Thomas brings in this clarification. If a future contingent thing is known by God, it is known as being present in the mind of God, since God is not bound by time. His nature as eternal makes whatever is known to Him eternally present. This form of knowledge does not take away the fact that what is known remains in the nature of contingency, “His knowledge of them does not abolish their natures, for the possible remains as it was with the

⁸⁷ Strauss, Leo, « The Literary Character of *The Guide for the Perplexed*, » in *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1952) p 74.

⁸⁸ *Dux Neutrorum*, lib.III, cap.XXI, fol.83: “Quod autem ostensum est mihi ex versibus legis quod scire Creatorem omnia genera entium, est possibile : videtur dicendum in scientia Creatoris quod modus universi esse est possibilis. Istud autem non egreditur a natura possibilitatis ullo modo : sed natura possibilitatis remanet cum eo. Scientia etiam in eo quod renovatur de possibilitate, non facit ut alterum duorum impossibilium sit de necessitate. » Cf *Guide* III, 20, p 482.

nature of possibility.”⁸⁹ And because it is very peculiar to divine knowledge, there is no easier way to understand and to explain it.⁹⁰

The other concerns touch on the problem of determinism and free choice. That God knows that these future events will come about as He has known them perpetually, underlines a certain form of determinism and throws into doubt, the place of free choice in the affairs of men. There seems to be certain determinism in the fact that there is little or no place left for human deliberation and choice. If God knows in advance, how can there be any free choice? And if He does not know the future, would He still be God? Maimonides in the treatise ‘*The Eight Chapters*’ exposes the problem thus:

Dieu savait-il, oui ou non, que tel individu serait juste ou impie? Que si tu prétends qu’il le savait, il en résulte que cet homme a été contraint à cette manière d’agir que Dieu connaissait d’avance, ou bien que la science de Dieu n’est pas réelle. Que si tu prétends, au contraire, que Dieu ne le savait pas d’avance, il s’en suit alors d’énormes monstruosité et les bases de la religion sont ébranlées.⁹¹

It is important to note that the problem of reconciling God’s knowledge of the future with human free will is as old as the Jewish religion. It has long been known as the ‘problem of knowledge versus free will.’⁹² In simple terms, it is stated thus: if God knows long before a man is born, how he is going to behave throughout his life, how then can that man be blamed and punished for his wrongful acts and praised and rewarded for his virtuous acts? Among the contemporaries of Maimonides who tackled this perennial problem include Gersonides. Faced with choosing to safeguard God’s foreknowledge against human free will, Gersonides in his ‘*The Wars of the Lord*,’ safeguards human free will and compromises God’s foreknowledge. According to him, God knows all the choices open to man, but does not know beforehand the particular circumstances that would condition man’s choices. At best, man’s choice depends entirely on his

⁸⁹Ibid. fol.84: « Scientia eius non aufert ei naturam suam : sed possibile firmum est in natura possibilitatis. » Cf *Guide* III, 20, p 483.

⁹⁰ *Le Guide des égarés suivi du Traité des huit chapitres*, VIII, (Verdier : Les Dix Paroles, 1979), p 683: « Il est encore établi en métaphysique que notre esprit est impuissant à embrasser parfaitement la notion de l’essence divine et cela à cause de la perfection même de son essence et de l’infirmité de notre esprit, et que nous ne possédons pas de moyens par lesquels nous puissions la connaître ; »

⁹¹Ibid. p 682.

⁹² Jacobs, Louis, *The Jewish Religion: A Companion*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) p 174.

own free will.⁹³ Plausible as this solution may seem, it theologically and metaphysically fails since it reduces God to an ordinary human who does not know beyond his immediate present. How can a Creator-God not have knowledge of the future seeing that He is the principle of all existents? Another philosopher that is approximately within the same school is the Spanish-Jewish philosopher Hasdai Crescas (1340-1410). He teaches what is generally classified as “soft determinism,” that is, an attempt to reconcile determinism with freedom; he in actual fact says that God’s foreknowledge takes away man’s free choice.⁹⁴ How would Maimonides solve the problem of human free will and God’s foreknowledge? His response would be based on his conception of religious faith and on his teaching of the negative attributes. In the first place, this problem only arises for those who have formed God in the image of man. Anthropomorphism must be eliminated from the philosophic-religious system if we hope to arrive at a true knowledge of the divine. Maimonides would appeal to two major tools in this fight against the problem of human language about God: the first is equivocal predication by which he insists on the total difference in meaning between the same terms applied to God and to humans; the second of such tools is the way of negation by which he insists that all that is human must be denied of God. What we call knowledge comes in for particular examination because we tend to apply our human conception of knowledge to God, whereas there is nothing in common, according to Maimonides, between human knowledge and divine knowledge, except the name. Humans know from the senses and are able to abstract their objects of knowledge from concrete things whereas God’s knowledge preexists before all things and all things proceed from it. In fact, Maimonides expresses it well when he writes:

Eh bien ! écoutez ce que je vais dire et réfléchissez-y bien ; c’est à coup sûr la vérité. Il est démontré dans la théodicée, c’est-à-dire en métaphysique, que Dieu, le Très-Haut, ne sait pas par la science, et qu’il ne vit pas par la vie, de façon que lui et la science constituent deux choses distinctes, comme il en est de l’homme et de sa science, car l’homme est distinct de la science, comme la science est distincte de lui et constituent par

⁹³ Gersonides, *The Wars of the Lord. Treatise three: on God’s Knowledge*, 4, a translation and commentary by Norbert Max Samuelson, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1977) pp 233-234: “But He does not know which of the two possible alternatives will be actualized from the point of view that they are contingents.”

⁹⁴ Cf Seymour, Feldman, «A Debate Concerning Determinism in Late Medieval Jewish Philosophy, » in *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, vol 45, 1984, pp 15-54.

conséquent deux choses différentes. Mais si Dieu savait par la science, il s'en suivrait la multiplicité dans la notion de Dieu.⁹⁵

As we have earlier seen, Maimonides here touches on his fundamental religio-metaphysical belief that attributes no matter their form, introduce ontological multiplicity into the divine nature and this is tantamount to idolatry. God knows by His essence and there is no difference between His essence and His knowledge, and as His essence remains unknowable, so is His manner of knowing.

The problem of determinism is linked to what Maimonides would call 'general providence,' that is, the events and the laws of nature that God has written into the fabric of the world for the good functioning of the world. By nature, man is an element of the natural order and is subjected to its natural laws of causality and its consequences. But by the action of his will and his reason, he goes beyond the forces of determinism. In all, it would seem that Maimonides considers the purported contradiction between God's knowledge of the future and human free choice merely fictional. As he writes in the *Book of Knowledge*:

A tout homme a été donné le libre arbitre. S'il désire s'engager dans la voie du bien et être un juste, il ne tient qu'à lui. S'il veut, au contraire, s'engager dans la voie du mal et être un méchant, il lui est tout loisible également ... il fait l'un ou l'autre selon ce qu'il désire et sans qu'il soit personne qui puisse empêcher sa main de l'accomplir.⁹⁶

3.0 Aquinas on God's Knowledge

Like the problem of the nature and attributes of God, Aquinas is very much given to a proper examination of the question of knowledge in God. The rich treatment of this question by mostly his Arabic and Jewish predecessors, provide a solid base on which to begin his treatment of God's knowledge of His creatures. That is not to neglect the influence of Pseudo Dionysius, Sts. Augustine, Anselm, and Albert the Great to mention but a few. A closer look at the works of Aquinas would reveal four major concentrations where he discusses the question of knowledge

⁹⁵ *Traité des huit chapitres*, VIII, p 682f.

⁹⁶ Maïmonide, M, *Le Livre de la Connaissance*, traduit de l'hébreu et annoté par Valentin Nikiprowetzky et André Zaoui, (Paris: PUF, 1961), pp 389-390.

in God. The first is located in his commentary of the first book of the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, distinctions 35-36 and 38-39. As one of the qualifications needed to become a Master in theology, Aquinas read and commented on the *Sentences* at Paris between 1252-1256, the date he was admitted as Master in Theology. The second major concentration of Aquinas's discussion of the question of knowledge in God is in his *Quaestiones Disputatae De Veritate* question 2, which is composed of fifteen articles, and is probably written around 1256-1259. The next major work concentrated on the discussion of the question is the first book of the *Summa Contra Gentiles* (1259) chapters 44-71; and finally the prima pars of the *Summa Theologiae* (1266), which contains in most certain terms, the most elaborate and classical discussion of the question of knowledge in God. It is one of the last major works of Aquinas and rightly is described as containing the most ripe and well thought-out teaching of Aquinas on the issue at stake. Our discussion and analysis will consider the works in question where it seems very evident that Aquinas had the exposition and discussion of Maimonides at his sight.

It was Maimonides in our earlier discussion who took knowledge as an attribute and thus an addition to the essence of God.⁹⁷ Because of the danger of introducing ontological multiplicity in the simple essence of God, Maimonides excludes even the attribute of knowledge from God. At best, he takes the idea of knowledge to be totally equivocal from what we normally take knowledge to be.⁹⁸ This is the very concern that Aquinas encounters in his very first discussion of knowledge in God. In the first articles of question 2 of the *De Veritate* and the question 14 of the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas calls this type of reasoning which would suggest the composition of substance and accident in God "absurd and erroneous,"⁹⁹ because it throws into doubt, God's absolute simplicity. Aquinas however insists that knowledge attributed to God does not signify an addition to God but refers to the very essence of God in whom there is no multiplicity. "Knowledge is not a quality in God but substance and pure act."¹⁰⁰ That means, there is an identity of knowledge and essence in God, an identity that does not in any way, except

⁹⁷ *Dux Neutrorum*, lib.I, cap.L, fol.18: "quoniam ratio intelligibilis et prima est quod dispositio rei est praeter substantia illius cui attribuitur: et quod dispositio est res adiuncta substantiae, et est accidens." Cf *Guide* I, 51, p 112.

⁹⁸ Ibid. lib.I, cap.LV, fol.21: "Sicut si dixeris quod ipse est ens viuus, potens, sapiens, et volens: quoniam ista non attribuuntur nobis et ipsi eodem modo. » Cf *Guide* I, 56, p 130.

⁹⁹ De ver q.2, a.1 : "Quidam enim suo intellectu modum creatae scientiae transcendere non valentes, crediderunt quod scientia sit in Deo quasi aliqua dispositio addita essentiae eius sicut et in nobis est, quod est omnino erroneum et absurdum. Hoc enim posito Deus summe simplex non esset: esset enim in eo compositio substantiae et accidentis."

¹⁰⁰ ST 1, q.14, a.1, ad.1 : «Unde scientia non est qualitas in Deo vel habitus, sed substantia et actus purus. »

in our manner of understanding, bespeak of plurality. The act of understanding is an immanent activity and remains in the one understanding as his own act and perfection just as existence is the perfection of one existing. In God there is no form except His essence which is His intelligible species and His existence. It follows then that in God, “intellect, the object understood, and the intelligible species, and His act of understanding are one and the same,” without any multiplicity attached to His substance.¹⁰¹ Maimonides does accept the truth of the identity of knowledge, the known and the knower in God. This truth they both shared from Aristotle though their end results differ radically.

3.1 Aquinas on God’s Knowledge of Individuals

One remarkable thing about St. Thomas on this issue is that he begins the discussion by taking into cognizance those philosophers who “are trying to take away the knowledge of singulars from the perfection of the divine knowledge.”¹⁰² In all the major places it is treated in his works, he takes this brief journey into the history of the debated issue as his point of departure, in order to determine the truth. And because all these predecessors erred on this issue of God’s knowledge of individuals, Aquinas criticizes them for wishing “to confine the nature of the divine intellect within the limits of our own.”¹⁰³ At the back of Aquinas’s criticism and discussion of God’s knowledge of singulars, is his rational conviction of the metaphysical truths of God’s omniscience and providence. His critical interpretation of Maimonides is very much accentuated on those points. Aquinas defends the presence of knowledge in God, as it makes the logic of creation and analogy possible. The first person Aquinas mentions by name is Empedocles whose god is called the least intelligent because it does not know strife, a thing known to all human beings.¹⁰⁴ The irony of that position is that ordinary human beings are shown to be more intelligent than a deity, Empedocles’s god. It is an example that Aquinas

¹⁰¹ ST 1, q.14, a.4: «Et sic patet ex omnibus praemissis quod in Deo intellectus, et id quod intelligitur ut species intelligibilis, et ipsum intelligere, sunt omnino unum et idem. Unde patet quod hoc per hoc quod Deus dicitur intelligens, nulla multiplicitas ponitur in eius substantia. »

¹⁰² SCG I, 63, 1: “Sunt autem quidam qui perfectioni divinae cognitionis singularium notitiam subtrahere nituntur.”

¹⁰³ De ver q.2, a.5 “volentes naturam intellectus divini ad mensuram nostri intellectus coartare.”

¹⁰⁴ ST 1, q.14, a.11: “Nam et philosophus pro inconvenient habet, quod aliquid cognoscatur a nobis, quod non cognoscatur a Deo. Unde contra Empedoclem arguit...quod accideret Deum esse insipientissimum, si discordiam ignoraret.”

borrows from Aristotle.¹⁰⁵ Aquinas reasons that such ignorance and stupidity would be the nature of God were He not to know the individuals of all things. Then without mentioning names, Aquinas talks of ‘*quidam*’¹⁰⁶ or “certain persons” who try to deny the knowledge of singulars from the perfection of the divine knowledge.¹⁰⁷ We cannot but help thinking of certain Aristotelian texts and the consequences drawn from them by commentators such as Alexander of Aphrodisias, Avicenna and Averroes. In the *Metaphysics* and in the *De Anima*, Aristotle seems to argue that divinity is thought thinking only of itself, and for it to engage in the thinking of something else, would be to admit of potency and therefore imperfection in divinity.¹⁰⁸ The conclusion would seem to be that a pure intellect knows only the noblest object, itself, nothing lesser or lowly in the material nature, and surely nothing evil. The divinity that is ignorant of lesser things cannot actually be provident over such. That is exactly the reading that Alexander of Aphrodisias takes to such Aristotelian texts. In Alexander’s interpretation, Aristotle holds that, “divine providence extends to the sublunary world in the effect of the complex motions of the heavenly bodies, and particularly the Sun, in ensuring the regularity of coming-to-be and passing away and the continued existence of sublunary species, though not of individuals.”¹⁰⁹ If providence does not reach to individuals, the responsibility of how particular individuals suffer evil is none of God’s problem. Maimonides actually quotes Alexander of Aphrodisias as interpreting Aristotle to hold providence restricted to the sublunary world without reaching

¹⁰⁵ Cf Aristotle, *De anima*, I, 5 (410b5); *Metaphysics*, III, 4 (1000b5) « Empedocles at any rate must conclude that his God is the least intelligent of all beings, for him alone is it true that there is one thing, Strife, which he does not know, while there is nothing which mortal beings do not know, for there is nothing which does not enter into their composition.”

¹⁰⁶ When Aquinas makes reference to “*quidam*” in his texts, we have very good reason to believe that he is referring to some Muslim theologians who hold that attributes are additions to the divine essence. In SCG I, 23, 9, he calls them “Saracen theologians:” “Ex hac autem veritate ostensa error quorundam in lege *Sarracenorum* loquentium confutatur, qui ponunt quasdam intentiones divinae essentiae superadditas.” His source may well have been Averroes: In *Met.*, XII, com.39. He also silently refers to Maimonides and Aristotle as “*quidam*” in reference to the denial of providence to non intellectual things. Cf ST 1a, q.22, a.2: “*Quidam vero posuerunt incorruptibilia tantum providentiae subiicere; corruptibilia vero, non secundum individua, sed secundum species; sic enim incorruptibilia sunt.*”

¹⁰⁷ SCG I, 63, 1; De ver q.2, a.5: “*Quidam enim ... simpliciter negaverunt Deum singularia cognoscere nisi forte in universali...*” He acknowledges Maimonides as the source of this information. Cf Q. De pot., q.7, a.4, s.c.3: “*Rabbi Moyses dicit, quod huiusmodi nomina non significant intentionem additas supra ejus substantiam. Omne enim accidens significat intentionem additam supra substantiam sui subjecti.*”

¹⁰⁸ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XII, 9, 1074b15-30; *De Anima* III, 6, 430b20-25.

¹⁰⁹ Sharples, R.W, “Alexander of Aphrodisias on Divine Providence: Two Problems,” *The Classical Quarterly*, 32, n.1, (1982) p 198.

individuals. It is the second opinion among five that exist on providence.¹¹⁰ Neither Maimonides nor Aquinas would accept this to be a correct take on divine providence because it denies that God has knowledge of individuals. And it is very much unlikely that Aristotle himself ever took such a clear stand. Shlomo Pines points this out in his translator's note to the *Guide of the Perplexed*:

There is no evidence to show that Aristotle put forward the view regarding providence ascribed to him by Alexander and Maimonides, i.e., the view that divine providence extends only to the celestial spheres up to the sphere of the Moon inclusively, but does not watch over the sublunary world ... Aristotle probably did not feel the need to take so clear a stand in the matter; in all probability, the doctrine in question was enunciated several centuries later by Alexander and other Peripatetics...¹¹¹

Aquinas would then turn to Avicenna and his followers. Before this, Aquinas mentions the "Commentator," that is, Averroes as one of those "who have simply denied that God knows singulars, except, perhaps, in general."¹¹² We have already seen that Averroes accepts that divine intelligence is pure thought and must know things by knowing them as their principle. Without actually being precise on God's knowledge of individuals, Averroes in his commentary on the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle implies that God has 'general knowledge' of things: "he who knows only the heat of fire is not said not to know the nature of heat in other hot things; he rather knows the nature of heat as heat. Hence, the First Principle, that is God, knows the nature of being as absolute being, that is Himself."¹¹³ Another mention of Averroes is in the latter article of

¹¹⁰ *Dux Neutrorum*, lib.III, cap.XVIII, fol.80: "Opinio secunda est illius qui credit quod quaedam res habent curam, et sunt in regimine rectoris, et in ordine ordinatoris. Aliae vero res sunt derelictae secundum quod accidit eis." Cf *Guide* III, 17, p 464.

¹¹¹ Pines, Shlomo, « Translator's Introduction » in the *Guide of the Perplexed*, p lxvi.

¹¹² De ver q.2, a.5: «Quidam, ut Commentator in XI Metaphysicae, simpliciter negaverunt Deum singularia cognoscere nisi forte in universali. » Cf also I Sent., d.36, q.1, a.1 "Commentator enim, in XI *Metaph.*, text.com.51, videtur expresse negare Deo particularium cognitionem, nisi inquantum cognoscit essentiam suam, quae est principium omnis esse."

¹¹³ Averroès, *Grand Commentaire de la Métaphysique d'Aristote*, livre XII, c 51, traduit de l'Arabe et annoté par Aubert Martin, (Paris : Société d'Édition «Les Belles Lettres», » 1984) p 269 : «Il (ne) connaît les êtres (que) dans la mesure où Il est la cause de leur existence. Prenons un exemple : de celui qui ne connaît que la chaleur du feu, on ne peut dire qu'il ignore la nature de la chaleur qui existe dans ce qui est chaud. On dira au contraire que ce qu'il connaît, c'est la nature de la chaleur en tant que chaleur. De même, le (principe) premier, c'est-à-dire Dieu, connaît la nature de l'être en tant qu'être absolu, à savoir Lui-même.»

question 2 of the *De Veritate*. It is again in relation to God's knowledge of particular evil.¹¹⁴ In his commentary on the *De Anima*, Averroes notes that an intellect that is pure act without potency "will not understand privation at all. On the contrary, it will not understand anything outside itself."¹¹⁵ The implication is that since privation is associated with a particular thing, God's ignorance of privation would mean ignorance of individuals. From Averroes's other writings, we could gather that for Averroes, God's knowledge encompasses all but can neither be qualified as universal nor as individual.¹¹⁶ And neither can God's knowledge be confined only to the knowledge of His essence since it would imply that it is ignorant of existents.¹¹⁷ This does not mean that God is lacking in knowledge but rather, that God's knowledge is incomprehensible to humans and incomparable with human knowledge. Averroes concludes to the equivocal character of knowledge applied to God and to man.¹¹⁸ Trying to put our categories of knowledge and our process of knowing into the divine is according to Averroes, the source of all our errors.¹¹⁹

The major part of the discussion is reserved to Avicenna who, even though he is not mentioned by name in some of the references, is noted for saying that God knows singular things but in a universal way for there is nothing singular that has not its origin in a universal cause.¹²⁰ Aquinas mentions the example of an astrologer that is very popular with Avicenna. It was in his

¹¹⁴ De ver q.2, a.15 obj 3 : « Commentator dicit in III *De anima* quod «intellectus qui semper est in actu non cognoscit privationem omnino. »

¹¹⁵ Averroès, *Grand Commentaire du De Anima*, livre III, c.25, traduction, introduction et notes par Alain de Libera, (Paris : Flammarion, 1998) p 132 : «s'il y a un intellect qui n'est pas tantôt pensant en puissance tantôt en acte, alors cet intellect ne pensera absolument pas la privation. Au contraire, il ne pensera rien en dehors de lui-même.»

¹¹⁶ Averroes, *Tahafut Al-Tahafut*, Sixth Discussion 345, p 207: "And since knowledge of the individual is for us knowledge in act, we know that God's knowledge is more like knowledge of the individual than knowledge of the universal, although it is neither the one nor the other." Cf Averroès, *Grand Commentaire de la Métaphysique*, livre XII, c 51, p 270 : "La science de Dieu ne peut donc être qualifiée d'universelle ni de particulière, parce que celui dont la science est universelle connaît en puissance les choses particulières qui sont en acte. »

¹¹⁷ Averroes, *Tahafut Al-Tahafut*, Sixth Discussion, 342, p 204: «But to assume that it thinks something outside its essence would imply that it is perfected by another thing, and to assume that it does not think something outside its essence would imply that it is ignorant of existents. »

¹¹⁸ Cf Chardonnens, Denis, *L'homme sous le regard de la providence*, (Paris : Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1997) p 111 : « Averroès, pour sa part, ne s'attarde guère sur cette question, mais s'empresse de conclure au caractère purement équivoque de la notion de science appliquée à l'homme et à Dieu. Cette équivocité est peut-être un moyen d'éviter de poser que Dieu ignore purement et simplement les singuliers. »

¹¹⁹ Averroes, *Tahafut Al-Tahafut* 351, p 211: «all this is a comparison of man's knowledge with the Eternal Knowledge, and this is the very cause of the mistake. »

¹²⁰ ST 1, q.14, a.11 : «Sed qualiter hoc esse possit, quidam manifestare volentes, dixerunt quod Deus cognoscit singularia per causas universales, nam nihil est in aliquo singularium, quod non ex aliqua causa oriatur universali.» Cf De ver q.2, a.5 : "Alii dixerunt, ut Avicenna et sequaces eius, quod Deus unumquodque singularium cognoscit sed quasi in universali. »

Metaphysics as earlier seen, that Avicenna gives the analogy of an astrologer who knows eclipses just by knowing the universal causes that could lead to the existence of an eclipse. By knowing universally, it is believed by Avicenna that this astrologer knows the singulars. He takes God's knowledge of singulars to be like that of the astrologer. God does not see each eclipse in its singular nature but knows it only through the knowledge of universal causes. Thus, the charge of ignorance of singulars would also apply to God.¹²¹ This is Avicenna's theory as interpreted by Aquinas. How can universal knowledge lead to a particular knowledge of an individual? How can a universal cause produce a particular effect instead of a universal effect? Can a singular be reduced to the sum total of universals? In his *Commentary on the Sentences*, Aquinas notes that "universal causes do not lead to the knowledge of particular things as in the measure where particular things participate of a common nature."¹²² The contention of Aquinas is that nothing can be known in its particularity without its principle of individuation, which is matter. That is why universal causes can only produce universal forms unless there is an intervention that brings about the individuation of such forms.¹²³ If we take a look at Avicenna's cosmogony, we notice that his hierarchical system of emanations do not give any room for a direct causal contact between the Necessarily Existent being and the other beings, not least matter. And neither does that system provide any room for freedom. It explains why Avicenna opts for a universal knowledge of particulars. Thus, by refusing this Avicennian doctrine of God's knowledge of particulars in a universal manner, Aquinas is rejecting Avicenna's metaphysics of necessary emanation which makes the Necessarily Existent being, the First Cause but not the immediate cause of all existents. Radical determinism which is a consequence of that system is also rejected.

In his cosmogony, Maimonides shares a lot in common with Avicenna in that their explanation of the structure of the world reposes on a Neo-platonic metaphysical model of emanation. In this model, the total reality is seen as an overflow of emanations through a hierarchy of intelligences to the Active Intellect responsible for the world of matter. What this implies is that God may not have a causative and direct knowledge of the world and His providence over the world may also

¹²¹ ST 1, q.14, a.11: "Unde secundum modum praedicatum, Deus non cognosceret singularia in sua singularitate."

¹²² In 1 Sent., d.36, q.1, a.1: «Universales causae non ducunt in cognitionem particularium, nisi secundum quod particularia participant naturam communem.. »

¹²³ De ver q.2, a.5: «Ex causis universalibus non consequuntur nisi formae universales si non sit aliquid per quod formae individuentur. » Cf In I Sent., d.36, q.1, a.1: «Quocumque modo universalia aggregentur, numquam ex eis fiet singulare, nisi per hoc quod individuantur per materiam.»

not be direct. But this seems to contradict all that we have learnt of Maimonides above where he compares God's knowledge to that of an artificer who has both formal and material knowledge of his arts. In one particular case, Aquinas does not hesitate to attribute to Maimonides, the teaching that God has knowledge of individuals.¹²⁴ How do we reconcile this then with Maimonides's explicit claim that God's providence does not reach the individuals of the sublunar species except the individuals of the human species? In other words, God's providence does not reach the individuals of non intellectual species. It follows from his teaching that providence is consequent upon the intellect.

For I for one believe that in this lowly world...divine providence watches only over the individuals belonging to the human species...¹²⁵

The insistence upon the intellect in the act of providence, and the overflow coming to it through the Active Intellect, points to the emanative scheme of a universe ruled by a hierarchy of forces making God's relation to the world at best indirect. The other consequence of this system is a negation of God's omniscience. Thus in the face of the dangers threatening two metaphysical doctrines of faith: God's providence over all and God's omniscience, Aquinas rejects and corrects Maimonides:

I answer that certain persons totally denied the existence of providence...Others taught that incorruptible things only were subject to providence and corruptible things not in their individual selves, but only according to their species; for in this respect they are incorruptible...Rabbi Moses, however, excluded men from the generality of things corruptible on account of the excellence of the intellect which they possess, but in reference to all else that suffers corruption he adhered to the opinion of others. We must say however, that all things are subject to divine providence, not only in general, but even in their own individual selves.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ I Sent., d.36, q.1, a.1 : « Ideo alii dixerunt, sicut Rabbi Moyses, quod Deus scit perfectissime singularia. »

¹²⁵ *Dux Neutrorum*, lib.III, cap.XVIII, fol.81: "Ego credo quod cura specialis est in hoc mundo inferiori, qui est sub sphaera Lunae: et est coniuncta in singularibus speciei hominum tantummodo." Cf *Guide* III, 17, p 471.

¹²⁶ ST 1, q.22, a.2 : "Respondeo dicendum quod quidam totaliter providentiam negaverunt...Quidam vero posuerunt incorruptibilia tantum providentiae subiacerere; corruptibilia vero, non secundum individua, sed secundum species; sic enim incorruptibilia...A corruptibilium autem generalitate excepit Rabbi Moyses homines, propter splendorem intellectus, quem participant, in aliis autem individuis corruptibilibus, aliorum opinionem est secutus. Sed necesse est dicere omnia divinae providentiae subiacerere, non in universali tantum, sed etiam in singulari."

The simple statement of Aquinas is that non intellectual things of material nature are all under the providence of God who knows and causes them in the particularity of their nature. It becomes clearer when Aquinas establishes that each and everything is directly and willingly created by God. Our study of the origin of matter in the first section, bails us out. When there is a direct creation, there is a direct knowledge of each and everything. How could God not have knowledge of singulars in their very particularity? Aquinas therefore gives his own explication of how and why God has knowledge of singulars in their nature as particulars.

Therefore, it must be said otherwise, that, since God is the cause of things by His knowledge as stated above (*ST 1, q.14, a.8*), His knowledge extends as far as His causality extends. Hence as the active power of God extends not only to forms, which are the source of universality, but also to matter ... the knowledge of God must extend to singular things, which are individualized by matter. For since He knows other things than Himself by His essence, as being the likeness of things, or as their active principle, His essence must be the sufficing principle of knowing all things made by Him, not only in the universal, but also in the singular. The same would apply to the knowledge of the artificer, if it were productive of the whole thing, and not only of the form.¹²⁷

There are so many things said by Aquinas in this long quotation. In the first place, there is an insistence by Aquinas that God's knowledge is causal—*Deus sit causa rerum per suam scientiam*. In this quotation, there is no explanation how this action takes place by knowledge. This lacuna is filled by the treatment in the *De veritate* q.2, a.14, and in the q.14, a.8 of the *prima pars* of the *ST*. In both of the passages, Aquinas stresses that knowledge *qua* knowledge just as form *qua* form, does not act as an efficient cause that could bring something into being. For an effect to flow forth from knowledge, there must be the mediation of the will, although for certain substances such as God, will is identical with knowledge.¹²⁸ By knowing His essence, God

¹²⁷ *ST 1, q.14, a.11* : «Et ideo aliter dicendum est, quod, cum Deus sit causa rerum per suam scientiam, ut dictum est, intantum se extendit scientia Dei, inquantum se extendit eius causalitatis. Unde, cum virtus activa Dei se extendat non solum ad formas, a quibus accipitur ratio universalis, sed etiam usque ad materiam, ut infra ostendetur ; necesse est quod scientia Dei usque ad singularia se extendat, quae per materiam individuuntur. Cum enim sciat alia a se per essentiam suam, inquantum est similitudo rerum velut principium activum earum, necesse est quod essentia sua sit principium sufficiens cognoscendi omnia quae per ipsum fiunt, non solum in universali, sed etiam in singulari. Et esse simile de scientia artificis, si esset productiva totius rei, et non formae tantum.»

¹²⁸ *De ver q.2, a.14*: “Sciendum tamen quod scientia in quantum scientia non dicit causam activam sicut nec forma in quantum est forma. Actio enim est ut in exeundo aliquid ab agente...et ideo forma non est principium agenda nisi

causes other things and this causality extends to matter that is the necessary condition for individuation. God gives not only the form but also being to the existent things and all these existents are produced according to a likeness of the divine essence. As long as matter enjoys some form of being, albeit in potency, it is created by God and has a certain likeness to divine being.¹²⁹ Divine causality permeates to the minutest detail of a being and that is why God knows matter in its singularity. Aquinas uses the analogy of the artisan's knowledge of his craft to explain God's knowledge and causality of singulars.¹³⁰ He remarks that the artisan possesses two kinds of knowledge: speculative and practical. It is speculative when he knows a work in its intimacy without the intention of bringing it to reality. He thinks up the form of some piece of art work which he does not intend to make.¹³¹ Aquinas uses this analogy to show that God does know pure possibles—things that are not actual, in a speculative knowledge.¹³² His knowledge on the contrary is practical, when the intention is brought to reality as to its end. God's practical knowledge covers those things which are, have been, or will be as He decides.¹³³ In a way that is befitting only to humans, we could say that God wills the contents of His knowledge from logical to ontological existence.

The artisan knows his work by means of the form which he imposes on his art work. He produces only the form and not the matter of his work. Thus the artisan knows his work

mediante virtute.” Cf ST 1, q.14, a.8: “Unde necesse est quod sua scientia sit causa rerum, secundum quod habet voluntatem coniunctam.”

¹²⁹ ST 1, q.14, a.11, ad.3: «Dicendum quod materia, licet recedat a Dei similitudine secundum suam potentialitatem, tamen in quantum vel sic esse habet, similitudinem quandam retinet divini esse.»

¹³⁰ For more discussion of how Maimonides and Aquinas discussed God's knowledge using the analogy of the artisan, consult Avital Wohlman, *Thomas d'Aquin et Maimonide: un dialogue exemplaire*, pp 213-225.

¹³¹ De ver q.2, a.8: “Sed sciendum quod artifex de operabili habet duplicem cognitionem, scilicet speculativam et practicam: speculativam quidem sive theoreticam cognitionem habet cum rationes operis cognoscit sine hoc quod ad operandum per intentionem applicet...”

¹³² In the *De veritate*, Thomas defines pure possibles as « things which neither have been, are, nor will be and which God has decreed never to make.” Cf De ver q.2, a.8: “quorundam vero quae nec fuerunt nec sunt nec erunt, quae scilicet numquam facere disposuit, habet quasi speculativam cognitionem.” The nature of God's knowledge of these “pure possibles” has long been the object of a long debate. Cf John F. Wippel, “Thomas Aquinas, Henry of Ghent and Godfrey of Fontaines on the Reality of Non-Existing Possibles,” in his *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas*, pp 163-190. For further discussion, see James Ross, “Aquinas's Exemplarism; Aquinas's Voluntarism,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 64, (1990) pp 171-198; John F. Wippel, “Thomas Aquinas on the Divine Ideas,” *The Etienne Gilson Series* 16, (Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies: Toronto, 1993), p 10.

¹³³ De ver q.2, a.8: “sed tunc proprie habet practicam cognitionem quando extendit per intentionem rationes operis ad operationis finem.” We do not understand why Thomas in the ST text, seems to have given different names to these kinds of knowledge. Cf ST 1, q.14, a.9 where Thomas refers to God's knowledge of things that were, are or will be, as his *scientia visionis*, and to his knowledge of pure possibles—things that are not, nor will be, nor were, as knowledge ‘*simplicis intelligentiae*.’ “Quaedam enim, licet non sint nunc in actu, tamen vel fuerunt vel erunt, et omnia ista dicitur Deus scire scientia visionis... Et respectu horum non dicitur habere scientiam visionis, sed simplicis intelligentiae.»

universally under the aspect of the form. This form of knowledge is not complete. But with God, there is a remarkable difference. God produces not only the form but also the matter and knows His work formally and materially.¹³⁴ Against Avicenna and others like him, Aquinas in his *De Veritate*, returns to the analogy of the artisan. He insists again on the difference between human art and divine art.¹³⁵ While the former produces only the form of the art, the latter is more penetrating in its production, as it gives rise to both form and matter and thus knows His work more intimately and individually.

Therefore, since divine art produces not only the form but also the matter, it contains not only the likeness of form but also that of matter. Consequently, God knows things in regard to both their matter and their form; and therefore, He knows not only universals but also singulars.¹³⁶

Aquinas goes on to demarcate his thinking from those of his predecessors especially Maimonides by introducing the concepts of “likeness,” “imitation” and “participation.” This “likeness” based on the *ratio* has its proximate foundation in the divine intellect.¹³⁷ In a clearer statement, Aquinas calls the divine essence, the *ratio propria* of every existent thing inasmuch as the existent thing imitates the divine essence in different ways, that is, according to its limited nature.¹³⁸ We recall that *ratio* is the notion of the intention in the intellect that refers to what exists in reality. Here in the *De Veritate*, Aquinas adds that this “likeness of things in the divine intellect is the cause of things” and linking it with the notion of participation, Aquinas continues, “whether a thing has a strong or a weak share in the act of being, it has this from God alone; and because each thing participates of the act of existence given by God, the likeness of each thing is found in Him.

¹³⁴ 1 Sent., d.36, q.1, a.1: «Et ideo cum materia sit principium individuationis, non poterat inveniri apud eos, quomodo Deus singularia, inquantum huiusmodi cognoscat. Sed quia nos ponimus Deum immediate operantem in rebus omnibus, et ab ipso esse non solum principia formalia, sed etiam materiam rei; ideo per essentiam suam, sicut per causam, totum quod est in re cognoscit, et formalia et materialia.»

¹³⁵ A detailed comparison between divine art and human art, has been made by Francis J. Kovach, “Divine Art in Saint Thomas Aquinas,” in *Arts libéraux et philosophie au moyen âge. Actes du Quatrième congrès international de philosophie médiévale*, (Montréal: Institut d’études médiévales, 1969), pp 663-671.

¹³⁶ De ver q.2, a.5 : “Unde cum ars divina sit productiva non solum formae sed materiae, in arte sua non solum existit similitudo formae sed materiae, et ideo cognoscit res et quantum ad formam et quantum ad materiam, unde non solum universalia sed et singularia cognoscit.”

¹³⁷ 1 Sent., d.2, a.3 : «Unde huiusmodi rationes non sunt tantum in intellectu, quia habent proximum fundamentum in re quae Deus est. »

¹³⁸ De ver q.2, a.4, ad 2 : “Deus cognoscit omnia uno quod est ratio plurium, scilicet essentia sua quae est similitudo rerum omnium, et quia essentia sua est propria ratio uniuscuiusque rei ideo de unoquoque propriam cognitionem habet.”

Consequently, the immaterial likeness in God is a likeness, not only of the form, but also of the matter;”¹³⁹ All this use of “likeness” or “imitation” underlines that creation is, for Aquinas, a participation by creatures, of the *esse* of God, but each according to its mode of being. Hence it is most basic that God knows the singular essence of each and everything including matter. Unlike Maimonides, the metaphysics of participation of *esse* is the base on which analogical relationship between God and creatures, is founded. It is that which explains the conformity between things in reality and the *rationes* of these things having their proximate foundation in the divine essence.

3.2 On God’s Knowledge of Future Contingents and Human Free Choice

This is a necessary follow up to the doctrine of God’s omniscience, that is, that God knows all things by the virtue of His divine essence. All things in this sense include individuals, individual things as we have seen, and future contingents. In Aquinas’s discussion of God’s knowledge and future contingencies, there are two distinct problems. The first problem concerns the certainty of the contingent object. If what forms an object of knowledge is what is true, determinate and certain, how does God know future contingents since they are not yet determinate? The second problem concerns the causality of God’s knowledge. If what God knows happens as He knows it, how free is the action since it follows from God’s knowledge of it? Thus the two issues at stake are: the contingency of the object and its truth value; and the freedom of the object. For a better grasp of the problem, Goris calls the first “temporal fatalism,” and the second “causal determinism.”¹⁴⁰ He describes temporal fatalism as having to do with “the relation between God’s fore-acts (foreknowledge, providence, and predestination) and their objects considered from a *diachronic* perspective: it focuses on the prefix ‘fore’-(*prae*) and deals with the relation between present (or past) and future.”¹⁴¹ As for causal determinism, Goris says that “it has to do with the irresistibility of the causal influence of God’s creative activity.” He locates the problem

¹³⁹ De ver q.2, a.5 : “Sed similitudo rerum quae est in intellectu divino est factiva rei; res autem sive forte sive debile esse participet hoc non habet nisi a Deo, et secundum hoc similitudo omnis rei in Deo existit quod res illa a Deo esse participat; unde similitudo immaterialis quae est in Deo non solum est similitudo formae sed materiae.”

¹⁴⁰ Goris, Harm J.MJ, *Free Creatures of an Eternal God: Thomas Aquinas on God’s Infallible Foreknowledge and Irresistible Will*, (Leuven: Peeters, 1996), p 56.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. p 56.

“in the *synchronic* relation of cause to effect as regards God’s fore-*acting*.”¹⁴² In an attempt to interpret the texts of Aquinas and find acceptable solution to the double-headed perennial problem, scholars right from the sixteenth century have been polarized into three major camps. In what is known as the *De Auxiliis* controversy,¹⁴³ Domingo Bañez, by his concept of “physical premotion” (*praemotio physica*), held that God’s absolute causality is such that He knows with certainty future contingencies in their cause. This view is inherently deterministic. The second camp opposed to Bañez and his inherent determinism, is led by Luis de Molina (1535-1600) and Francisco Suarez (1548-1617). They developed the theory of (*scientia media*) middle knowledge, “the contingent knowledge God has of what a possible creature would actually choose, given any possible set of circumstances.”¹⁴⁴ They try to find a middle way between divine causality and divine knowledge. The third camp is labeled the “Ockhamist” solution today represented among others, by William L. Craig. This solution hinges upon “the notion of counterfactuality: God’s foreknowledge would have been different, if I would have made a different choice than I actually shall make.”¹⁴⁵ The major flaw that would characterize the three solutions is their readiness to subsume the problem of God’s foreknowledge into the problem of divine causality. Thomas Aquinas would however, make a distinct separation of the two problems and provide a solution that respects the distinctive mode of divine being and divine knowing.

In discussing this most difficult and most sensitive of questions, Aquinas makes abundant reference to book v of Boethius’s *De Consolatione philosophiae*. The presence of time in the divine eternity is at the heart of Aquinas’s discussion and citation of Boethius. Aquinas begins this teaching by enumerating the two foundations on which he is going to build the defense of God’s knowledge of future contingents. Those two foundations, divine providence and human free choice, are enumerated in the course of criticizing two erroneous opinions on God’s

¹⁴² Ibid. p 62.

¹⁴³ Cf Shanley, Brian, “Aquinas on God’s Causal Knowledge: A Reply to Stump and Kretzmann,” in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 78, (1998) pp 450-451; Goris, H, “Divine Foreknowledge, Providence, Predestination, and Human Freedom,” in Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow, (eds), *The Theology of Aquinas*, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), pp 99-100; Friedrich Schmitt, *Die Lehre des h. Thomas von Aquin vom göttlichen Wissen des zukünftig Kontingenten bei seinen grossen Kommentatoren* (Nijmegen, 1950), pp 196-202.

¹⁴⁴ Goris, H, “Divine Knowledge, Providence, Predestination and Human Freedom,” p 100.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. p118 fn.27 Cf William L. Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom. The Coherence of Theism: Omniscience*, (Leiden: Brill, 1991).

knowledge of future contingents.¹⁴⁶ The first opinion which likens divine knowledge to human knowledge, denies God the knowledge of future contingents. If God does not know future contingents, the implication is that divine providence does not reach to human affairs which are contingents. The second opinion accords such knowledge of the future to God but with the proviso that such future events follow necessarily. In other words, there is nothing contingent about such future events. This second opinion drives at the heart of human freedom on the basis of which man is said to be responsible for his actions and for his choices. As an alternative to them, Aquinas teaches that there is no incompatibility between divine foreknowledge and human freedom. He also agrees with Maimonides in teaching that God knows future events but that this knowledge does not prevent such future events from being contingent.¹⁴⁷ Our use of the term ‘foreknowledge’ is according to Boethius, to designate the order which God’s knowledge has to other things to which it is future.¹⁴⁸

A thing can be considered contingent in two ways: first as it is in itself as something that is now in act, and secondly as it is in its cause; in this way it is considered as future.¹⁴⁹ In the first sense, it is considered as present and determined and thus, an object of certain knowledge. For example, when Socrates is actually running, my sense perception of him as running is correct.¹⁵⁰ In the second sense, as it is in its cause, a contingent thing is considered to be future and indeterminate and hence, for us, they are not subject to certain knowledge. But for God, it is very different. God knows these nonexistent contingent things “in His power, in their proper causes and in themselves—in *sua potentia, et in propriis causis, et in seipsis*.”¹⁵¹ To have the knowledge of a

¹⁴⁶ De ver q.2, a.12: “Quidam enim de divina scientia iudicare volentes ad modum scientiae nostrae, dixerunt quod Deus futura contingentia non cognoscit: sed hoc non potest esse quia secundum hoc non haberet providentiam de rebus humanis quae contingenter eveniunt. Et ideo alii dixerunt quod Deus omnium futuro rum scientiam habet sed cuncta ex necessitate eveniunt alias scientia Dei falleretur de eis: sed hoc etiam esse non potest quia secundum hoc periret liberium arbitrium, nec esset necessarium consilium quaerere, iniustum etiam esset penna vel praemia pro meritis reddere ex quo cuncta ex necessitate aguntur.”

¹⁴⁷ *Dux Neutorum*, lib.III, cap.XXI, fol.84: « Scientia eius non aufert ei naturam suam : sed possibile firmum est in natura possibilitatis.” Cf *Guide* III, 20, p 483.

¹⁴⁸ De ver q.2, a.12: “Unde etiam, ut Boethius dicit in V De consolatione, eius cognitio de futuris ‘magis proprie dicitur providentia quam praeventia quia ea porro quasi longe positus in aeternitatis specula intuetur’, quamvis et praeventia dici possit propter ordinem eius quod ab eo scitur ad alia quibus futurum est. –However it might also be called foresight because of its relation to other things in whose regard what He knows is future.”

¹⁴⁹ ST 1, q.14, a.13: « Uno modo in seipso, secundum quod iam actu est... Alio modo potest considerari contingens, ut est in sua causa. Et sic consideratur ut futurum.”

¹⁵⁰ SCG I, 67, 2: « Unde nihil certitudini sensus deperit cum quis videt currere hominem, quamvis hoc dictum sit contingens. Omnis igitur cognitio quae supra contingens fertur prout praesens est, certa esse potest. »

¹⁵¹ SCG I, 66, 8: “Ea vero quae sunt praesentia, praeterita vel futura nobis, cognoscit Deus secundum quod sunt in sua potentia, et in propriis causis, et in seipsis.”

contingent thing in its cause is to have knowledge of vision.¹⁵² Unlike humans who only know contingent things as determinate and successive, God knows them both in their causes and in their actuality. Otherwise, it would seem that God's knowledge of such a future event changes when the event passes from potential being (future) to actual being (present, determined event). By insisting that God knows contingent things in such a double mode, Aquinas brings to bear his clearest intuition in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, God as *Ipsium Esse Subsistens*—the Subsistent Act of Being, to underline the fact that God's knowledge has no succession. This conception of God as *Ipsium Esse Subsistens*, has far reaching effects in the metaphysics of Aquinas as it not only tries to explain the nature of God's being, but confirms that such divine attributes as knowing, and willing do not differ in reality from His act of being. It is His essence that explains His creating or governing of His creation or His knowing and His willing. Knowing is an immanent act that would require the assistance of the will in order to bring the object that is known into reality. Aquinas explains this well when he says that God's knowledge brings about the cause of things in so far as His will is joined to it.¹⁵³ God's manner of knowing follows His mode of being. That's why we say that God knows eternally. When we talk about causing or creating, we are talking about transitive acts that require the existence of the effect. Applied to God, creating or causing would not involve any setting in motion of a chronologically successive series of events that, after some particular time, result in some particular final effects. God exists in act and His causation or creation should be understood as instantaneous. His knowledge follows from His being. He is Act and does not know in succession but in a simultaneous whole.

Moreover, God's understanding has no succession as neither does His being. He is therefore an ever-abiding simultaneous whole—which belongs to the nature of eternity.¹⁵⁴

The nature of God makes it necessary that all finite things are present to Him in act. The reason is because His knowledge and His being are measured by eternity which being simultaneously

¹⁵² SCG I, 66, 8: "Et horum cognitio dicitur notitia visionis:»

¹⁵³ ST I, q.14, a.8: «Manifestum est autem quod Deus per intellectum suum causa res, cum suum esse sit suum intelligere. Unde necesse est quod sua scientia sit causa rerum, secundum quod habet voluntatem coniunctam.»

¹⁵⁴ SCG I, 66, 7: "Intelligere Dei successionem non habet, sicut nec eius esse. Est igitur totum simul semper manens: quod de ratione aeternitatis est."

whole comprises all time.¹⁵⁵ As succinctly explained by William J. Hill, “eternity grounds within the divine existence, the simultaneity of all time—past, present, and future—so that events that have not yet occurred historically and which thus lack all temporal actuality nonetheless possess eternal actuality within the divine intentionality.”¹⁵⁶ Because eternity is outside of time, all future contingents are known to God as present. It is only human that future contingents are to be known as future, that is as involving a passage of time between one’s knowing of them and their actual realization. God does not know the future as future but as present since he “sees not only the being they have in their causes but also the being they have in themselves, in so far His eternity is present in its indivisibility to all time.”¹⁵⁷ The relation that exists between divine knowledge to anything whatsoever is like that of present to present. How do we understand this?

Aquinas takes the example of a spatial metaphor given by Boethius,¹⁵⁸ of someone observing many people walking along a road in succession. Within a particular period of time, that observer would have seen every individual walking by that road during a particular part of that time. During the whole period of time, he would have seen all who walked by that road as present to him; but he would not have seen them as simultaneously present to him because the time of his seeing them is not completely simultaneous. However, if he were to observe from an elevated position, his vision of all who walked by would be at once, and he would see all of them as simultaneously present to him, though they themselves would not all pass as simultaneously present to one another. The highlight of this example is the manner of human seeing and human knowing. We see in succession just as knowledge comes to us by a process of abstraction. We lack the ability to see or to know all simultaneously because we are bounded by time. That will be the major difference between us and God.

With the conviction that God is transcendent, Aquinas goes on to relate this example to God. While limited beings are bounded by space and time, divine being is eternal and boundless. The duration of time as a component of motion, Aquinas notes, is stretched out through the

¹⁵⁵ ST I, q.14, a.13: “Quia sua cognitio mensuratur aeternitate, sicut etiam suum esse, aeternitas autem, tota simul existens, ambit totum tempus ...”

¹⁵⁶ Hill, William J, « Does God Know the Future? Aquinas and Some Moderns,” in *Theological Studies*, (2001) p 7.

¹⁵⁷ SCG I, 66, 8: “non enim Deus rerum quae apud nos nondum sunt, videt solum esse quod habent in suis causis, sed etiam illud quod habent in seipsis, inquantum eius aeternitatis est praesens sua indivisibilitate omni tempore. »

¹⁵⁸ Boethius, *De Consolatione Philosophiae* V, 6, Loeb Classical Library, (London: William Heinemann, 1973) pp 422-435. Cf ST I, q.14, a.13, ad.3.

succession of the before and after.¹⁵⁹ But eternity is completely outside motion and in no way belongs to time. It is a mode of existence that is neither reducible to time nor incompatible with the reality of time. Eternity does not have the duration of succession but “is present in its presentiality to any time or instant of time”¹⁶⁰ and thus, whatever is found in any part of time coexists with what is eternal as being present to it. Although with respect to some other time, it exists normally as either past or future. Aquinas likens this presentness to the centre of a circle, which, although not a part of the circumference, is related equally and simultaneously to any given determinate point in the circumference. To bring a little explanation to the concept of ‘presentiality,’ or ‘presentness,’ Stump and Kretzmann note the following: “if anything exists eternally, it exists. But the existing of an eternal entity is duration without succession, and because eternity excludes succession, no eternal entity has existed or will exist, it *only* exists. It is in this sense that an eternal entity is said to have present existence. But since that present is not flanked by past and future, it is obviously not the temporal present.”¹⁶¹ It is an eternal present in a timeless duration. With this basic explanation done, Aquinas tells us that God’s manner of knowing and seeing follows from His manner of being. Being eternal, He knows and sees simultaneously in His eternal presence.¹⁶² Thomistic metaphysics falls in line with the basic scholastic principle *quidquid recipitur, ad modum recipientis recipitur*—whatever is received, is received according to the mode of the receiver.¹⁶³ In this case, whatever is known or seen is known or seen according to the mode of the knower or the seer. We are measured by time and that is why our vision is circumscribed by the past, present or future.

Therefore, since the vision of divine knowledge is measured by eternity, which is all simultaneous and yet includes the whole of time without being absent from any part of it, it follows that God sees whatever happens in time, not as future, but as present. For what is seen by God is, indeed, future to some other thing which it follows in time; to the

¹⁵⁹ Thomas gives a more detailed discussion of the relation between time and eternity in SCG I, 66-67; ST I, q.10.

¹⁶⁰ SCG I, 66, 7: “Rursum, cum aeterni esse numquam deficiat, cuilibet tempori vel instanti temporis praesentialiter adest aeternitas. »

¹⁶¹ Stump, E, and Kretzmann, N, « Eternity, » *The Journal of Philosophy* 78, (1981) p 434 This work in an improved form has appeared in a recent book by Eleonore, Stump, *Aquinas*, (London: Routledge, 2003), pp 131-158.

¹⁶² Cf Anthony Kenny who in discussing Thomas’s concept of God as eternal says, “the doctrine of a timeless person is an incoherent one.” In *The God of the Philosophers*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) p 40.

¹⁶³ Cf John F. Wippel, “Thomas Aquinas and the Axiom ‘What Is Received Is Received According to the Mode of the Receiver,’” in R. Link-Salinger et al, eds., *A Straight-Path: Studies in Medieval Philosophy and Culture, Essays in Honour of Arthur Hyman*, (Washington. D. C: Catholic University of America Press, 1988) pp 279-289.

divine vision however, which is not in time but outside of time, it is not future but present.¹⁶⁴

Back to the example of all those walking successively down a road, Aquinas remarks that an observer outside of the ranks of those walking, would see them simultaneously unlike somebody within the ranks of those walking. This later sees only those in the line ahead of him. God is outside of time and sees whatever happens in time simultaneously as present to Him. In the way that our power of sight is not deceived when it sees an actual contingent object as present to it, in the same way God infallibly knows all contingents as present to Him. And if our knowledge of contingent event does not rob that event of its contingency, neither does God's knowledge of contingent events prevent them from happening contingently. God's knowledge of them as contingents does not change their nature since it is only of *notitia visionis*—knowledge of vision. By this the double challenge of temporal fatalism and causal determinism are solved by Aquinas.

It is quite obvious that Aquinas's teaching on God's knowledge of future contingents would draw a lot of attention and criticisms. Not least is that of Anthony Kenny who among other critical discussions, brilliantly argues that Aquinas's teaching that God knows future events as present, leads one to doubt whether God really knows such future free actions in an authentic sense.¹⁶⁵ At the heart of Kenny's attack is the concept of simultaneity arising from eternity. He thinks the concept is incoherent. As he writes:

The whole concept of timeless eternity, the whole of which is simultaneous with every part of time, seems to be radically incoherent.¹⁶⁶

Kenny argues that simultaneity is a transitive relation. If A happens at the same time as B, and B happens at the same time as C, then A happens at the same time as C. Kenny believes that the

¹⁶⁴ De ver q.2, a.12: "Unde cum visio divinae scientiae aeternitate mensuretur, quae est tota simul et tamen totum tempus includit nec alicui parti temporis deest, sequitur ut quicquid in tempore geritur non ut futurum sed ut praesens videat. Hoc enim quod est a Deo visum est quidem futurum rei alteri cui succedit in tempore, sed ipsi divinae visioni, quae non {est} in tempore sed extra tempus, non est futurum sed praesens" Cf I Sent., d.38, q.1, a.5: where Thomas states that the divine intellect knows from eternity every contingent not only as it exists in its causes, but also as it is in its determined being.

¹⁶⁵ Kenny, Anthony, «Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom," in *Aquinas: A Collection of Essays*, edited by Anthony Kenny, (London: Macmillan, 1969), pp 255-270 Our examination of Kenny's criticisms would be partly influenced by the article by R. W. Mulligan: "Divine Foreknowledge and Freedom: A Problem of Language," in the *Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review*, 36:2, (1972) pp 293-299.

¹⁶⁶ Kenny, Anthony, "Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom," p 264.

concept of a timeless eternity according to Aquinas where all things would happen simultaneously, means that “if the BBC programme and the ITV programme both start when Big Ben strikes ten, then they both start at the same time.” The example that Kenny gives already poses some problems as they are two events that have been scheduled to happen at the same chronological time frame. They in turn bring out clearly what Kenny understands ‘simultaneity’ to mean—actions happening at the same time as the other. In the example that Aquinas gives, one who stands at a point on a road and sees the procession walk past him one by one, knows them all in succession and knows them successively. What he would consider as future is what he has not yet experienced. But the one who observes the same procession from a hill top, sees them and knows them in one glance and not successively.¹⁶⁷ God, who is above and outside of time, knows the same events as present because He transcends the temporal relationships guiding the events. But Kenny doesn’t seem to understand it like this. His idea of simultaneity seems to be a condition where things happen at the same time as other things. This is what Stump and Kretzmann would regard as temporal simultaneity *T-simultaneity*: the existence or occurrence at one and the same time.¹⁶⁸ Thus, if God were to know things simultaneously, He would know them as happening at the same time. The example Kenny gives portrays this fact. Referring to Aquinas, he writes:

But on St. Thomas’ view, my typing of this paper is simultaneous with the whole of eternity. Again, on his view, the great fire of Rome is simultaneous with the whole of eternity. Therefore, while I type these very words, Nero fiddles heartlessly on.¹⁶⁹

We would rather think that simultaneity, when used by Aquinas to express God’s knowledge of the future, refers to His manner of knowing rather than to the event that is known. As the Subsistent Act of Being, God is immovable and eternal for He does not admit of change or movement. He knows and sees in one intuition such that ‘simultaneity’ refers to His special manner of knowing, rather than the individual events referred to by Kenny, that are known. The concept of ‘simultaneity’ is borrowed from Boethius’s definition of eternity. As is quoted by

¹⁶⁷ ST I, q.14, a.13, ad.3 : «Sicut ille qui vadit per viam, non videt illos qui post eum veniunt, sed ille qui ab aliqua altitudine totam viam intuetur, simul videt omnes transeuntes per viam. »

¹⁶⁸ Stump, E and Kretzmann, N, « Eternity, » p 435.

¹⁶⁹ Kenny, Anthony, “Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom” p 264.

Aquinas: “Eternity is the simultaneously-whole and perfect possession of interminable life.”¹⁷⁰ Two major characteristics of eternity according to the definition by Boethius: it is interminable—that is, has neither beginning nor end, and secondly, it has no succession, being simultaneously whole.¹⁷¹ Eternity is the measure of a permanent being,¹⁷² and thus, in the context where Aquinas uses simultaneous, it refers to the idea of “timelessness.”

Two things are to be considered in time: time itself, which is successive; and the “now” of time, which is imperfect. Hence the expression “simultaneously-whole” is used to remove the idea of time, and the word “perfect” is used to exclude the “now” of time.¹⁷³

Aquinas’s hesitation to use “now” in order to explain his concept of eternity is not surprising because of the imperfection and the temporality that are implied in its usage. Because God is act, His actions including His creating and His causing are, for a lack of a better vocabulary, instantaneous. At the very moment He causes something, it is, since it is not necessary for Him to be prior to the thing made in duration.¹⁷⁴ His acts are not successive and neither is His knowledge. It is on this foundation that Aquinas thinks that God knows from eternity future contingents. In a major response to Kenny’s objections against the solution offered by Aquinas, the notion of E(ternity)-T(ime)-simultaneity has been propounded by Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann in a very authoritative article, whose improved form has been printed in a book as already mentioned above.¹⁷⁵ While not pretending to give a detailed analysis of this article, suffice it to give a brief summary of it in the knowledge that those interested in the whole debate could consult the text itself.¹⁷⁶ The authors however draw attention to the fact that in the

¹⁷⁰ ST I, q.10, a.1, obj 1: « Aeternitas est interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessio. » Cf Boethius, *De Consolatione V*.

¹⁷¹ ST I, q.10, a.1: «Primo, ex hoc quod id quod est in aeternitate, est interminabile, idest principio et fine carens (ut terminus ad utrumque referatur). Secundo, per hoc quod ipsa aeternitas successione caret, tota simul existens. »

¹⁷² ST I, q.10, a.4, ad.3: “Sicut aeternitas est propria mensura ipsius esse, ita tempus est propria mensura motus.”

¹⁷³ ST I, q.10, a.1, ad.5: «Dicendum quod in tempore est duo considerare, scilicet ipsum tempus, quod est successivum; et *nunc* temporis, quod est imperfectum. Dicit ergo *tota simul*, ad removendum tempus, et *perfecta*, ad excludendum *nunc* temporis. »

¹⁷⁴ ST I, q.46, a.2, ad.1: «Considerandum est quod causa efficiens quae agit per motum, de necessitate praecedit tempore suum effectum, quia effectus non est nisi in termino actionis, agens autem omne oportet esse principium actionis. Sed si actio sit instantanea, et non successiva, non est necessarium faciens esse prius facto duratione;»

¹⁷⁵ Stump, E, and Kretzmann, N, «Eternity, » pp 429-458, Cf. Stump, Eleonore, *Aquinas*, (London: Routledge, 2003) pp 131-158.

¹⁷⁶ The original text is a little bit complicated and not unproblematic. While making use of the original texts, we have decided to give and compliment the summary of E-T(eternal-temporal) simultaneity theory taken from Harm Goris, “Divine Foreknowledge, Providence, Predestination, and Human Freedom,” in *The Theology of Aquinas*,

solution given by Boethius, and subsequently adopted by Aquinas, a solution that is built around the notion of eternity, the reference frames are two: one is eternal and the other temporal.¹⁷⁷ It involves an eternal being that relates with temporal beings. Thus, according to Stump and Kretzmann, an event is ET-simultaneous with the eternal God without becoming eternal itself (E-simultaneous) or simultaneous with another temporal event (T-simultaneous). Contrary to Kenny's assertion that simultaneity is a transitive relation, Stump and Kretzmann hold that since ET-simultaneity involves two different reference frames, it means that it is not transitive.¹⁷⁸ If temporal event x is ET-simultaneous with God and if another temporal event y is also ET-simultaneous with God, it does not entail that x and y, both of which enjoy the same reference frame, are ET-simultaneous (or T-simultaneous) with each other. The metaphysical basis of this ET-simultaneity is the respect for the mode of being of each subject in the relationship. To concretize this theory, Stump and Kretzmann consider a relationship between an eternal entity and a future contingent event; suppose that Richard Nixon will die at noon on August 9, 2020, precisely forty-six years after he resigned from the presidency. In (1) the temporal present, Nixon is still alive but in (2) the eternal present, Nixon is dead. (1) is not incompatible with (2). But there still remains the apparent incompatibility between (2) and (3) Nixon is alive in the eternal present. On the basis of what has been said so far, both (2) and (3) are true. But Nixon is temporal, not eternal, and so are his life and death. The conjunction (2) and (3) cannot be taken to mean that the temporal entity Nixon exists in eternity, where he is simultaneously alive and dead, but rather something more nearly like this. "One and the same eternal present is ET-simultaneous with Nixon's being alive and is also ET-simultaneous with Nixon's dying; so Nixon's life is ET-simultaneous with and hence present to an eternal entity, and Nixon's death is ET-simultaneous with and hence present to an eternal entity, although Nixon's life and Nixon's death are themselves neither eternal nor simultaneous."¹⁷⁹ In all, this ET-simultaneity promotes the understanding of eternity that accepts the compatibility of two different realities with different frames of reference such that the *modus essendi* of each is respected.¹⁸⁰ However, Goris

edited by Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), pp 106f.

¹⁷⁷ Stump, E, and Kretzmann, N, « Eternity, » p 435, Cf *Aquinas*, p 141.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. p 440, Cf *Aquinas*, p 142.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. p 443. We changed the date that they gave in the original article. Even in its modified form, Stump uses the example of an Antichrist who is to be born in 2090. Cf *Aquinas*, p 143-144.

¹⁸⁰ For an objection to this theory of ET-Simultaneity as stipulated by Stump and Kretzmann, consult Garrett J. DeWeese, *God and the Nature of Time*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004) pp160-166. The objections consist of four points

is of the opinion that such a view of eternity ‘would blur the unique distinction between the Creator and all there is and would put an end to analogical predication by making human God-talk univocal.’¹⁸¹ Goris notes that Stump and Kretzmann should have interpreted eternity negatively as Aquinas has done. This has the merit of signifying, in *tandem* with Aquinas’s theology, what God is not, and of denying of God, the basic metaphysical structure of all created beings, viz. temporality.¹⁸² Thus, even though it seems very awkward to say that future contingents are present to eternity, it is logically a consequence of God’s *modus essendi* that is beyond what we can adequately talk about and know of.

A similar criticism of the Thomistic solution to God’s knowledge of the future is that made by Peter Geach. He reasons that if God sees the world as it is in its temporality, then God must see events as changing and temporal; the future would remain unknown even to God since it is not actual. Any attempt at making the future seem present and actual to God, “is just a muddle, a darkening of counsel.”¹⁸³ In his own words, we note:

There is an incoherence of the same kind in Aquinas’s view of God’s seeing from the high tower of his eternity the course of future events—seeing future events as they actually are in their presentness, *prout sunt in actu in sua presentialitate*. Future events are not actual, but only potential; they are not present, and cannot be seen as present.¹⁸⁴

It seems to us that Geach ignores the metaphysical truth that God is *Ipsum Esse Subsistens* and that this metaphysical truth defines God as simple, immutable and eternal. God’s actions follow from His nature. As eternal, He transcends time and this means that, His manner of seeing and knowing must transcend the confines of temporality. God knows contingents not only in their actuality but even in their cause, though this knowledge does not necessarily change its nature as future contingent. We learn from Stump and Kretzmann that Aquinas makes his Boethian

as enumerated on page 162: that “eternal events cannot be individuated; that the notion of a temporal (atemporal) observer ‘observing’ eternity (time) is unclear; that ET-simultaneity entails static time, but to do the required work it must serve to explain problems that arise from dynamic time; and that a stipulative definition is simply inadequate to meeting the dialectical explanatory burden.” Others who think that the ET-Simultaneous theory is not very consistent include: Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983) pp 16-22; Paul Fitzgerald, ‘Stump and Kretzmann on Time and Eternity,’ in *Journal of Philosophy* 82, (1985) pp 260-269.

¹⁸¹ Goris, Harm, *Free Creatures of an Eternal God*, p 250.

¹⁸² Ibid. p 42.

¹⁸³ Geach, Peter, “The Future,” *New Blackfriars* 54, (1973) p 213.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. pp 214-215.

metaphor of God's all encompassing vision from a high tower of his eternity, relational.¹⁸⁵ Eternity is a different mode of existence as real as time but irreducible to time. Such that "the relation of someone at the top of a mountain to some entity E in a procession around the mountain is different from the relation E bears to anything else in the procession." The presentness or not of E depends on the nature of the other term of the relationship. To the question "Is E present?"; "Is E future?" must be answered with the Thomistic doctrine of eternity: "Present with respect to what?"; "Future with respect to what?" If the relation is between E and other term A in the same procession, then present and future would apply according to the position of the terms to each other. But where E is related to another term God whose frame of reference encompasses and transcends temporal terms like "past," "present," and "future," there is no inconsistency in saying that God knows even the future in His eternal present.

Another issue worth examining is the claim that whatever is known by God follows necessarily. There are two sides to this claim. Since God knows future contingents, it means that these future contingents are bound by necessity to be realized, and thus, denying the whole idea of freedom and contingency. Aquinas pays particular attention to this problem because of its capacity to generate misunderstandings. There is a necessity that applies to the manner of speaking and that which applies to the thing spoken about.¹⁸⁶ Where the necessity is applied to the manner of speaking, the proposition is composite and true. This means that whatever is known by God is necessary since it is not possible for God to know something and for that thing not to be. In other words, God cannot have a false knowledge. Aquinas calls this necessary *de dicto*. Let us call it logical necessity. Where the necessity is applied to the thing spoken, then the proposition is divided and false. It would mean that God's knowledge must necessarily bring into existence what He knows.¹⁸⁷ It is this type of necessity that falsifies human freedom and denies contingency to things. Aquinas calls this necessary *de re*, and reminds us that things do not happen necessarily simply because God knows them. We may say that God knows evil but we

¹⁸⁵ Stump, E and Kretzmann, N, «Eternity and God's Knowledge: A Reply to Shanley, » in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 72, (1998) pp 443-444.

¹⁸⁶ De ver q.2, a.12, ad.4: "omne scitum a Deo est necesse; haec est duplex: quia potest esse vel de dicto vel de re. »

¹⁸⁷ De ver q.2, a.12, ad.4; ST I, q.14, a.13, ad.3 «Unde et haec propositio, *omne scitum a Deo necessarium est esse*, consuevit distingui. Quia potest esse de re, vel de dicto. Si intelligatur de re, est divisa et falsa, et est sensus, *omnis res quam Deus scit, est necessaria*. Vel potest intelligi de dicto, et sic est composita et vera ; et est sensus, hoc dictum, *scitum a Deo esse, est necessarium*. »

may not say that He creates or causes evil. In other words, God's knowledge does not impose ontological necessity on what is known. We must not forget that God's knowledge is *notitia visionis*. However, Brian Shanley disagrees with this reading of Aquinas. In his well written article, Shanley argues that God's knowledge is itself causative of what is known: *Scientia dei est causa rerum*.¹⁸⁸ A temporal thing, event, or state of affairs necessarily comes into being by the mere fact that it is known by God. That is, because God knows that an apostle would deny his faith tomorrow, it is God's knowledge that would necessarily cause the apostle to deny his faith. Shanley does indeed accept that this his position of "a causal account of divine knowledge entails a form of epistemic-causal determinism."¹⁸⁹ God's knowledge from eternity means and implies that God creates or causes from eternity. Not minding the far reaching effects of his interpretation, Shanley, nevertheless, thinks that the causal character of God's knowledge "is a pervasive presupposition throughout his (Aquinas's) account of how God knows everything outside of God."¹⁹⁰ In another place, Shanley calls his position the truth underlying the Bañezian position¹⁹¹ and maintains it to be the correct interpretation of what Aquinas means. Thus God's knowledge in Shanley's view of Aquinas imposes ontological necessity on what He knows. Good as Shanley's arguments may sound, we note that he fails to make proper semantic distinctions between God's attributes of knowing, and willing, and causing; in fact, he takes them to be synonymous with each other.¹⁹² Examples of such could be found in the text where Shanley says: "God's knowledge about any contingent fact is a kind of self-knowledge about his will (and his causality) with regard to any contingent fact,"¹⁹³ "what God knows as having real temporal existence is what God wills and causes to have real temporal existence."¹⁹⁴ Because the

¹⁸⁸ Shanley, Brian J, « Eternal Knowledge of the Temporal in Aquinas, » in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 71, (1997) p 205.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. p 206.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. p 205, fn. 20.

¹⁹¹ Shanley, Brian J, « Aquinas on God's Causal Knowledge : A Reply to Stump and Kretzmann, » *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 72, (1998) p 451.

¹⁹² Aquinas makes it clear that although the names applied to God signify one thing, still because they signify that under many and different aspects, they are not synonymous. Cf ST I, q.13, a.4 "Et ideo nomina Deo attributa, licet significant unam rem, tamen, quia significant eam sub rationibus multis et diversis, non sunt synonyma."

¹⁹³ Shanley, Brian J, « Eternal Knowledge of the Temporal in Aquinas », p 216.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. p 217.

conceptual contents (*rationes*) of these names are different from creatures where they represent different activities, each term means something different from another.¹⁹⁵

Shanley again assumes that immanent acts like knowing and willing must terminate in the reality of an external object just like a transient act like cause or create does.¹⁹⁶ But we know that according to Aquinas, certain immanent acts like knowing and willing do not really affect their objects as to bring about their ontological necessity.¹⁹⁷ In a kind of last straw that would break Shanley's objections, Aquinas reminds us that certain divine names or attributes are said of God from eternity while others are said in time. Knowing and willing are said of God *ab aeterno* whereas creating or causing is said of God *ex tempore*.¹⁹⁸ To imply that God's eternal knowledge is eternally causative of temporal events, means that nothing is free, nothing is temporal, and all events are rigidly determined from all eternity. Sound metaphysical reasoning avoids such logical errors. The semantic distinction as we have made them here, do not indicate a real distinction in the divine essence. These logical distinctions are merely our way of understanding the inexplicable divine essence in which knowledge, willing and being are perfectly identical. The how of this function in the divine essence is beyond human comprehension.

Another way that Aquinas tackles this problem of necessity is to examine it in relation to providence. For him, two things must be considered in the case of any provident agent—namely, premeditation of the order, and the establishment of the premeditated order.¹⁹⁹ The *ordinis praemeditationem*—premeditation of the order pertains to God's perfect knowledge by which He knows and embraces the minutest details of all things. The *praemeditati ordinis institutionem*

¹⁹⁵ I Sent., d.38, q.1, a.1: "Respondeo dicendum, quod loquendo de attributis divinis, attendenda est attributorum ratio quae, quia diversa est diversorum, ideo aliquid attribuitur uni quod non attribuitur alteri, quamvis omnia sunt una res."

¹⁹⁶ Cf De Potentia q.10, a.1; SCG II, 1, 3-6; ST I, q.14, a.2; q.54, a.2; q.56, a.1 etc for the distinction between immanent and transient acts.

¹⁹⁷ ST I, q.37, a.1, ad.2: « Intelligere et velle et amare, licet significantur per modum actionum transeuntium in obiecta, sunt tamen actiones manentes in agentibus ... ita tamen quod in ipso agente important habitudinem quandam ad obiectum. » Cf SCG I, 79, 9: "Nec est simile de relatione volentis ad volitum, et creantis ad creatum, et facientis ad factum, aut domini ad subiectam creaturam. Nam velle est actio in volente manens: unde non cogit intelligi aliquid extra existens. Sed facere et creare et gubernare significant actionem terminatam ad exteriorum effectum, sine cuius existentia huiusmodi actio non potest intelligi."

¹⁹⁸ ST I, q.13, a.7, ad.3: "Operatio intellectus et voluntatis est in operante: et ideo nomina quae significant relationes consequentes actionem intellectus vel voluntatis, dicuntur de Deo ab aeterno. Quae vero consequuntur actiones procedentes, secundum modum intelligendi, ad exteriorum effectus, dicuntur de Deo ex tempore, ut *Salvator*, *Creator* et huiusmodi."

¹⁹⁹ SCG III, 94, 9: « Cum autem in quolibet providente duo considerari oporteat, scilicet ordinis praemeditationem, et praemeditati ordinis institutionem in rebus quae providentiae subduntur, quorum primum ad cognoscitivam virtutem pertinet, aliud vero ad operativam. » In the English translation, it appears in number 10.

concerns the operative power of God which is universal and accomplishes His plan by means of a plurality of secondary causes. In His most perfect wisdom, divine providence “intends some of His effects to be established by way of necessity, and others contingently.”²⁰⁰ It is this which establishes that certain things are necessary while certain others are contingent even though they are known eternally in the mind of God. This knowledge of God does not deprive things of their contingency and neither does it necessitate their realization in time.

4.0 Evaluation:

Thomas Aquinas knows the importance of establishing the existence of knowledge in God for it is on the truth of this that would depend the metaphysical theories of omniscience and providence. They are two interconnected and inseparable attributes of God. If God knows everything as proceeding from His essence, it is indispensable that His power should reach everything in their minutest nature. Aristotle had excluded the knowledge of particulars from the divine intellect as its object of knowledge must also be something most perfect not admitting of composition. In other words, God in the language of Aristotle knows and thinks its pure essence and by implication, is ignorant of what is outside of its essence.²⁰¹ Based on this, Arabic/Jewish commentators of Aristotelian heritage made the question of knowledge in God the fulcrum of their discussions as it weighed on the interpretation of the attribute of knowledge seen in the Koran and the Scriptures. Most interpreters of this tradition deny that God possesses knowledge of singulars and where He has it, He knows singulars only in a universal way. Maimonides in his ambiguity attributes both knowledge of singulars to God and at the same time denies that God could have such knowledge of individuals of non intellectual species in their particularity. God’s providence extends to only the individuals of intellectual nature and not to others. Aquinas highlights this contradiction in his interpretation of Maimonides whose teaching introduces into God, a great imperfection. Aquinas however, calls this Maimonidean reasoning according to which divine providence does not reach to individuals of non-rational creatures, a big error:

²⁰⁰ SCG III, 94, 10: “Deus autem, qui est universi gubernator, intendit quod effectum eius hic quidem stabiliatur per modum necessitatis, hic autem contingenter. » In the English translation, it appears in number 11.

²⁰¹ This is what seems to be the meaning of the passage in his *Metaphysics*, XII, 9 (1074b18-21): “And if it thinks, but this depends on something else, then (since that which is its substance is not the act of thinking, but a potency) it cannot be the best substance; for it is through thinking that its value belongs to it.” The debate continues however on whether Aristotle’s God, the Prime Mover, is really ignorant of things outside of His essence.

This error, however, attributes a very great imperfection to God...the error we have mentioned belittles either God's knowledge by denying that He knows individual things or His goodness by denying that He directs individual things as individuals.²⁰²

Before coming to his proper interpretation, Aquinas acknowledges the danger in the said position of Aristotle²⁰³ but finds a way of reconciling him with faith. In our latter examination of the intellect in the next section, Aquinas does exactly the same thing in exonerating Aristotle of the false interpretations of the Arabic commentators, and rehabilitates the agent intellect as part of the human faculty permitting personal knowledge and understanding. In this particular case, Aquinas will introduce a kind of exegetical interpretation that enlarges not the words, but the intention of Aristotle permitting a perfect essence to know all things. Thus for Aquinas, the difficulty in Aristotle is not on the object of divine knowledge but the manner of divine knowing.²⁰⁴ It follows consequently that the most perfect intellect cannot be deprived of the most perfect knowledge which includes knowing things outside of its essence. In the *contra Gentiles*, Aquinas resumes:

Since God is of an infinite power in understanding, as is clear from what has preceded, His knowledge must extend even to the most remote things...Therefore, because of the perfect power of His intellect, God knows the lowliest possible among beings.²⁰⁵

By this interpretation, Thomas Aquinas rehabilitates Aristotle against the Arabic/Jewish readings being attributed to him. God's most perfect knowledge assures that He is provident over every nature, both intellectual and non intellectual. Thus, Aquinas succeeds in reestablishing the metaphysical truths of omniscience and providence in God. It is the truth of providence that will be the major object of our next inquiry.

²⁰² *De ver.*, q.5, a.6: "Sed hic error maximam imperfectionem Deo attribuit...Unde praedictus error vel derogat divinae scientiae, subtrahens ei particularium cognitionem, vel divinae bonitati subtrahens ei ordinationem particularium in quantum sunt particularia. »

²⁰³ *De Substantiis separatis*, XIV (D 65), lin.87-90: « Sed quia occasionem errandi sumpserunt ex demonstratione Aristotilis in XII Metaphysicae, oportet ostendere quod philosophi intentionem non assequuntur. »

²⁰⁴ *De Substantiis separatis*, XIV (D 67), lin.198-202: « Patet igitur praedicta verba philosophi diligenter consideranti, quod non est intentio eius excludere a Deo simpliciter aliarum rerum cognitionem, sed quod non intelligit alia a se quasi participando ea, ut per ea fiat intelligens. »

²⁰⁵ SCG I, 70, 2 : « Cum igitur sit infinitae virtutis in intelligendo, ut ex praedictis patet, oportet quod eius cognitio usque ad remotissima extendatur ...Ergo quantumcumque vilissima in entibus Deus, propter maximam virtutem sui intellectus, cognoscit. »