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Tanrı'nın İlmî: Gazzâlî ve İbn Meymûn'un (Maimonides) Görüşleri Üzerine Bir İnceleme

Özcan Akdağ

Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Erciyes Üniversitesi, İlahiyat Fakültesi, Din Felsefesi Anabilim Dalı
Assistant Professor, Erciyes University, Faculty of Theology, Department of Philosophy of Religion
Kayseri, Turkey

ozcanakdag@erciyes.edu.tr

orcid.org/0000-0002-7156-401X

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God's Knowledge: A Study on The Idea of Al-Ghazālī And Maimonides

Abstract: Whether God has a knowledge is a controversial issue both philosophy and theology. Does God have a knowledge? If He has, does He know the particulars? When we assume that God knows particulars, is there any change in God's essence? In the theistic tradition, it is accepted that God is wholly perfect, omniscience, omnipotent and wholly good. Therefore, it is not possible to say that there is a change in God. Because changing is a kind of imperfection. On God's knowledge, another controversial issue is whether God knows particulars or not. Most of theist thinkers argued that God is wholly perfect; because of perfectness, He must have perfect attributes. Knowing and goodness are a kind of perfect attributes. Ignoring and evil are a kind of imperfectness. If God is perfect being, He should have the perfect attributes and must know the particulars. For me in this subject, there are some similarities between al-Ghazālī and Maimonides. In this study I took into consideration the idea of al-Ghazālī and Maimonides on this subject. Based on Griffel and Stroumsa's argument, I tried to show similarity between al-Ghazālī and Maimonides on God's knowledge.

Keywords: Philosophy of Religion, God's Attributes, Omniscience, Particulars, al-Ghazālī, Moses Maimonides.

Tanrı'nın İlimi: Gazzālī ve İbn Meymun'un (Maimonides) Görüşleri Üzerine Bir İnceleme

Öz: Gerek felsefede gerekse teolojide Tanrı'nın ilim sahibi bir varlık olup olmadığı tartışma konusu olmuştur. Eğer Tanrı ilim sahibi bir varlık ise, bu durumda O'nun tikelleri bilmesi mümkün müdür? Tanrı'nın tikellerini bildiğini iddia ettiğimizde bu durum O'nun zatında bir değişimi gerektirir mi? Tesitik düşüncede Tanrı kâmil bir varlıktır ve O, mutlak manada âlimdir, kâdirdir ve iyilik sahibidir. Dolayısıyla O'nun zatına bir değişim söz konusu olamaz. Tanrı'nın ilmi konusunda tartışılan mesellerden birisi de bu ilmin tikelleri kapsayıp kapsamadığıdır. Pek çok teist düşünür Tanrı'nın mutlak manada kâmil olduğunu iddia etmekte ve bu kemali temele alarak O'nun kemal niteliklere sahip olması gerektiğini belirtmektedir. Bilmek ve iyilik gibi nitelikler kemal niteliklerdir. Cehalet ve kötülük ise nakıs hallerdir. Şayet Tanrı kâmil bir varlık ise bu tür kemal niteliklere de sahip olmalı, nakıs niteliklerden de hâli olmalıdır. Tanrı'nın ilmine dair Gazzālī ve İbn Meymûn'un görüşleri arasında birtakım paralellikler olduğu kanaatindeyiz. Bu çalışmada, Gazzālī ve İbn Meymun'un konuya yaklaşımını ele aldık ve Griffel ve Stroumsa'nın iddiasını temele alarak Tanrı'nın ilmi konusunda Gazzālī ve İbn Meymun'un görüşleri arasında benzerlikler olduğunu göstermeye çalıştık.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Din Felsefesi, İlahi Sıfatlar, Mutlak İlim, Tikeller, Gazzālī, İbn Meymun.

INTRODUCTION

Does God have knowledge? If He has, is He omniscient? If he has, what is the nature of His knowledge? We are experiencing a constant change in everything. Considering that God knows of this change, is there any change in His knowledge? These questions have occupied the minds of many philosophers throughout history. Both Muslim theologians and Christian and Jewish philosophers have pondered on this question and have argued different ideas. In fact, Muslim thinker al-Ghazālī (died 1111) and Jewish philosopher Maimonides, who were born in a Muslim

geography, did not stand idly by these matters and got involved in discussions. We have evaluated the matter within the scope of the ideas of al-Ghazālī and Maimonides as we think that Maimonides might be influenced by the idea of al-Ghazālī, who had lived before himself, regarding these discussions on God's knowledge. In this context, we have tried to exhibit the similarities and differences between the ideas of these two philosophers, based on the argument of contemporary authors, such as Griffel and Stroumsa.¹

Knowledge is as generally defined as justified belief, meaning that, for a proposition to be knowledge, a) it must be true, b) it must be believed by the subject, and c) it must be justified epistemically.² Therefore, is it possible for God to have knowledge on something by this manner? In other words, is it possible that God has certain beliefs and that He has knowledge through justifying them? If we think that God is acquiring this kind of knowledge, some problems will arise. If God has a belief and that He requires epistemical processes in order to justify His beliefs, this does not comply with the theistic description of the perfect being. If God's knowledge based on the changeable states, then His knowledge is temporal and open to change. Such viewpoint would harm the principle of God's immutability, which is considered as one of the main attribute of perfect being.

Some philosophers argued that God has no knowledge upon changing matter, since matter constantly changes in terms of both quality and quantity. This change emerges new knowledge about it. For example, the proposition of "The leaves of the plane tree in the garden are green," is now true, but will not be so in a few months. In this regard, if God had knowledge upon changing matter, the knowledge of them would constantly be renewed, God's knowledge would change, and thus His essence also change. Such viewpoint would harm the principle of God's immutability, which is fundamental to the idea of perfect being. Therefore, God is not a temporal being and it is impossible for Him to know temporal occurrences.³

God being omniscient, although not limited within time, can be considered as Him knowing all the propositions that have same phenomenal contents.⁴ For example, the propositions of "John is in the hospital", "I am in the hospital" said by John about himself, and "Michael knows that John is in the hospital" indicate the same phenomenon, albeit they have different modes. Similarly, the proposition of "The weather is sunny in Ankara on March 11, 2018" and the statement of "Today is sunny in Ankara" by John on that day refer to the same phenomenon. Therefore, God knowing that John is in the hospital or that the weather is sunny in Ankara on

¹ Frank Griffel, "Maimonides as a Student of Islamic Thought: Revisiting Sholomo Pines' "Translator's Introduction" *Pines' Maimonides: The History of the Translation and Interpretation* erişim:14.05.2017, <https://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/ccjs/events-and-performances/2582-2/>. Sarah Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World: Portrait of a Mediterranean Thinker* (Princeton: Princeton Uni. Press, 2009), 25. Bekir Karlığa, *Batı'yi Aydınlatan İslam Düşünürü: İbn Rushd* (İstanbul: Mahya, 2014), 174. Birgül Bozkurt, "Endülü's'te Al-Ghazālī Algısı" *Bevtulhikme: An International Journal of Philosophy* 7 (Temmuz 2017): 297.

² Joshua Hoffman-Gary Rosenkrantz, *The Divine Attributes* (Oxford: Blackwell Pub. 2007), 111-114.

³ Zikri Yavuz, *İnsan Hürriyeti Açısından Tanrı'nın Önbilgisi* (PhD Thesis, Ankara Ü., 2006), 33-34.

⁴ Yavuz, *İnsan Hürriyeti Açısından Tanrı'nın Önbilgisi*, 47.

that day may not hinder Him to know propositions with different modes.⁵ If God knows the moment/date when the weather is sunny in Ankara – despite him being out of time – He would know that the weather is sunny on the mentioned day. Therefore, according to the philosophers arguing that He is eternal, He knows temporal statements/propositions as equivalent propositions that are non-temporal and of the same truth value, and this does not indicate any imperfection in His knowledge.⁶

Another issue upon which the discussions on God's knowledge have concentrate on whether God's eternal knowledge prevents human freedom or not. Some philosophers have suggested that God has no knowledge upon possible occurrences in future in order to save human freedom. For instance, according to Swinburne, God knowing everything of future does not only harm human freedom, but also prevents Himself being free in terms of perfectness.⁷ Knowing everything eternally would cause some kind of necessity. This would rule out alternative possibilities and the idea of free choice, which are the fundamental elements of freedom, leading to a deterministic perception of universe.

In sum, the discussions on God's knowledge center upon the following questions: "Does He know everything?"; "If He does, how does He know?"; "Does His eternal knowledge prevent human freedom?" After a brief introduction to the discussions on God's knowledge, we can look at the idea of al-Ghazālī and of Maimonides on God's omniscience ruling out the third question on the human freedom.

1. AL-GHAZALI'S APPROACH TO THE ISSUE

Like many theist philosophers, al-Ghazālī thinks that God is a perfect being and He must be referred with the attributes of perfectness. According to him, omniscience is certainly an attribute of perfectness, and ignorance is an imperfection. A being that does not know things that are emanated from itself and are involved in action by its essence is not perfect by any means.⁸ If God is a perfect being, He must be omniscient. An omniscient being knows both himself and the rest. Universe, an orderly work of God, refers to His power and knowledge. For example, when we see a uniform writing, we can conclude that it is written by a writer and that the writer has knowledge about how to write. Similarly, we can conclude that there is an agent who organizes

⁵ Sait Reçber, "Tanrı'nın Sıfatları" *Din Felsefesi El Kitabı*, ed. Recep Kılıç-M. Sait Reçber (Ankara: Grafiker, 2014), 105.

⁶ Yavuz, *İnsan Hürriyeti Açısından Tanrı'nın Önbilgisi*, 48-49.

⁷ Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 164-165. Reçber, "Tanrı'nın Sıfatları", 106. Ayrıca bk. Zikri Yavuz, "Tanrı'nın Bilgisi ve İnsan Hürriyeti İlişkisi Bağlamında Frankfurtçu Liberalizmin Eleştirisi" *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 50/1 (2009): 61-62; Hoffman-Rosenkranz, *The Divine Attributes*, 134. Yaşar Türkben, "Spinoza'ya Göre Tanrı ve İrade Özgürlüğü", *Fırat Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* XV (2010): 118.

⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsife*, ed. Selahaddin el-Hevari (Beyrut: al-Maktabat al Asriyye, 2010), 127. See also Özcan Akdağ, *Tanrı ve Özgürlük: Gazālî ve Thomas Aquinas Ekseninde Bir İnceleme* (Ankara: Elis Publishing, 2016), 119.

the universal order and that He has knowledge on organizing.⁹ Therefore, universe has existed by will. The attribute of will refers to the attribute of knowledge. A being that has the attributes such as Omniscience, Will, and Power must fundamentally be *hayy* (eternally alive).¹⁰

Al-Ghazālī bases God's omniscience on His perfectness and the creation of the universe. Since it is proven that God is omniscient, then how does God know the things in time? God ontologically is different from human being, in which case His knowledge is different than ours in terms of involving eternity, being perfect and not being subject to what can be known.¹¹ Furthermore, the relationship between His knowledge and existence is also different from the relationship between our knowledge and the things.¹² Our knowledge of something derives in past, present, and future tenses, however, this is not the case for God's knowledge. Although His knowledge includes many things, this does not change the simplicity of His knowledge. For instance, the notion of the universe that will come into being, before it has come into being, and the notion of the universe has come into being is one in God's knowledge.

Similarly, it does not remove the simplicity of knowledge of the three phases of the solar eclipse, being that it takes place in the past, present or future. al-Ghazālī describes this situation with the following example: If we have the knowledge that Zayd will come when the sun is rising, we have single knowledge that Zayd will come, that he is coming, and that he has come. This single knowledge includes all three phases and this does not require a change in the existence of the knower. This is not a change in the status of the being, but of the knowable. Although relations change, this does not require a change in the God. Therefore, God knows the plurality in the universe as a single knowledge.¹³ Despite the case above is worded in different manners according to tenses, the knowledge of it refers to a single fact. For al-Ghazālī, the fact that the case changes according to tenses does not harm the singularity of the fact. Thus, God knows timely facts as a single knowledge without being in the course of time. In other words, God knows that the universe will occur, that it is occurring at the moment and it will disappearance as single knowledge. Therefore, a suggestion that "God has to be in time in order to know what occurs in time" is not a suggestion that will bind al-Ghazālī.

As seen, al-Ghazālī constitutes a similarity between God's knowledge and our knowledge of Zayd's arrival. As al-Ghazālī stated, if there is a difference between God's knowledge and our knowledge, then, is it correct to compare the singularity of God's knowledge to the knowledge of human beings? In my opinion, it is an issue related to the possibilities and boundaries of the religious language. Although al-Ghazālī says that God's knowledge is different than ours, he is forced to use a comparative language to clarify the issue.

⁹ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtisād fi-l-itiqād*. ed. İbrahim Ağâh Çubukçu ve Hüseyin Atay (Ankara: Ankara University Faculty of Theology Publishing, 1962), 99-100.

¹⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, 142, 147, 148. See also Mehmet Ata Az, *İlahî Basitlik Bağlamında Tanrı'nın Bilinebilirliği*. (Ankara: Otto Publishing, 2017), 242.

¹¹ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqsad*. (Beyrut: Dār al-kutub al-ilmiyye, Tarihsiz), 62. See also *İlahî Ahlak*, trans. Yaman Arıkan (İstanbul: Elif Ofset, 1983), 178-179.

¹² Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, 170.

¹³ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtisād*, 149-150. See also *Tahāfut*, 153. Griffel, *Gazālî'nin Felsefî Kelâmı*, 306.

As we stated above, God's knowledge does not take place upon being subjected to objects. On the contrary, the existence of things is by His knowledge. Human's knowledge of a thing is subject to that thing, while God's knowledge is not. This difference can be likened to the knowledge of the creator of the chess game about the game and that of the player of the game. The creator of the game has the knowledge before the game is played, in fact, this knowledge is the cause of the game's existence. However, the knowledge of the player takes place after the game has come into existence. Thus, God's knowledge on existence should be evaluated in the context of the creator's knowledge on the chess game.¹⁴

Making mention of God's omniscience when explaining His name *Hakim*, al-Ghazālī says that this name derives from the word *hikmah*, which means wisdom, and the word implies organizing reasons and drawing conclusions. God induces both general and particular reasons, as He assesses everything within a certain extent. al-Ghazālī refers to something called time box (clock) in order to explain the extent which exists in the universe. In this box which shows times of *salah*, there is a cylinder which contains a definite amount of water, an empty container and a string whose one end is tied to the cylinder while the other end is tied to the vessel.¹⁵ The mechanism works as follows:

"When all the pieces of the mechanism come together, a hole of a definite size is pierced at the bottom of the cylinder so that the water runs out of it drop by drop. As the water is depleted, the hollow device placed on the surface of the water will be lowered, thus pulling the string attached to it and moving the vessel with the ball in it which nearly tilts it over. Once it is tilted, the ball rolls out of it and falls into the metal container and tinkles. At the end of each hour, a single ball falls. The working of mechanism is a result of calculation. The size of the hole through which the water flows is determined. And that is known by calculation. So the level of the water decreases by that amount, thereby regulating the descent of the hollow device, and so effectuating the string tied to it and initiating the movement of the vessel with the ball in it. All this happens as a result of calculation and determination. It is also possible that the falling of the ball into the container cause the next movement, and this cause a third, and so on through many levels to the point where remarkable movements are initiated by it. And their first cause is the outflow of the water according to a definite amount."¹⁶

According to al-Ghazālī, the occurrences in the universe are similar to the movements of the time box described above. Everything occurs when its appointed time comes and all these take place according to a definite plan. As in the clock example where there is a predestined measure and time for every piece, everything in the universe has a certain measure and time predestined by God.¹⁷ Therefore, as the one who sets up the water clock above knows the movements of pieces, like the string, the ball, etc., every occurrence in the universe, such as benevolence-malice, harm-benefit, good-bad, etc., is known by God and happens within His will.¹⁸ Every

¹⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqsad*, 62; *İlahi Ahlak*, 179.

¹⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqsad*, 66-67; *İlahi Ahlak*, 190-91.

¹⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqsad*, 68-69; *İlahi Ahlak*, 192.

¹⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqsad*, 69; *İlahi Ahlak*, 194.

¹⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqsad*, 69; *İlahi Ahlak*, 195.

occurrences happening in the universe are predetermined by a certain measure and appointment and this is the result of God's name *al-Hakim*.

Since every occurrence in the universe is the necessity of the attribute *al-Hakim*, how is the relationship between particulars constituting the existence and God's knowledge? In other words, does God know particulars individually? If He knows particulars individually, is there a change or a plurality in His knowledge? For al-Ghazālī, God knows everything individually and if the number of things increases, God's knowledge on them is single. As known, al-Ghazālī harshly criticizes the philosophers, especially the approach of Avicenna, on God's knowledge on particulars.¹⁹ Avicenna thinks that God does not know things according to their status of change. If God knows changing things at the moment which they exist and then at the moment which they do not, or at the moment they do not exist and then at the moment which they do, this causes a change in His essence. Thus God knows everything generally.²⁰ Although particulars change constantly, their knowledge do not and are perpetual.²¹ Avicenna tends to solve this issue without harming God's perfectness because a change in the essence of a perfect being will harm its perfectness. As pointed out by Adamson, who is known by his studies on Islamic philosophy, Avicenna tries to find solutions based on the principle of "effects are included in causes" because God is the first cause and at the exact moment He knows himself, He knows all effects caused by Himself, thus all of the things in the universe.²² Despite the fact that Avicenna argues that God knows everything in the universe by knowing himself, according to Adamson, the argument that God knows particulars in a universal manner may not include the knowledge regarding the accidents which are particulars. For instance, even if God knows the existence of Zayd universally, He cannot know if the skin color of Zayd is white or not.²³

This approach of Adamson is problematic in my opinion, to know a thing is to know the cause of that thing in medieval epistemology, contrary to modern epistemology.²⁴ God is the cause of everything. Therefore, God knows everything naturally when He knows himself. In addition, Avicenna states clearly that no particular can hidden to God's knowledge, as we have stated earlier. Therefore, the criticism of Avicenna by Adamson is not built upon a steady foundation.

¹⁹ Rahim Acar, "Allah'ın Cüz'ileri Bilmesi: Klasik İbn Sīnā Yorumunun Değerlendirilmesi" *Divan: İlmî Araştırmalar* 20 (2006): 99-118. Gürbüz Deniz, *İnsan Hürriyetinin Metafizik Temelleri* (İstanbul: Litera, 2010), 97. Özcan Akdağ, "XIII. Yüzyıl Avrupa'sında Gazālī İmajı". *Bilimname* 34 (2017): 502. Özcan Akdağ, "Roma'lı Giles Ve "Errores Philosophorum" İsimli Eser Üzerine". *Bilimname* 30 (2016): 232-33.

²⁰ İbn Sīnā, *Metafizik II*, trans. Ekrem Demirli-Ömer Türker (İstanbul: Litera, 2005), 104-105. See also Rahim Acar, "Yaratan Bilmezse Kim Bilir? İbn Sīnā'ya Göre Allah'ın Cüz'ileri Bilmesi" *İslam Araştırmaları* 13 (2005): 1-23. İbn Sīnā, *an-Nacāt*, II. ed. Abdurrahman Umeyr (Beyrut: Dār al Cīl, 1992), 133.

²¹ Peter Adamson, "On Knowledge of Particulars", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 105 (2005): 266.

²² Adamson, "On Knowledge of Particulars", 274.

²³ Adamson, "On Knowledge of Particulars", 276. See also Rahim Acar, "Allah'ın Cüz'ileri Bilmesi: Klasik İbn Sīnā Yorumunun Değerlendirilmesi" 99-118. See also Hasan Akkanat, "Marmura'nın Tanrı'nın Tikelleri Bilmesi Problemindeki Düşüncelerinin Analizi ve Eleştirisi-II" *Dinî Araştırmalar* 12 (2009): 47-85. Aygün Akyol, "Zorunlu Varlığın Tikellere Dair Bilgisi Üzerine: İbn Sīnā-Şehristānî Merkezli Bir Tartışma" *Hitit Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 5 (2006): 111-130.

²⁴ Aristot, *Metafizik*, trans. Ahmet Arslan (İstanbul: Sosyal, 2010), 80. See also İbn Rüşd, *Metafizik Büyük Şerhi*, trans. Muhittin Macit (İstanbul: Litera, 2016), 56

According to al-Ghazālī, the fact that God knows particulars in a universal manner harms his perfectness. That is, if God does not know Amr and Zayd separately, meaning as particulars, he does not know whether their actions are in accordance with the Sharia. In addition, the fact that God does not know particulars will eliminate the phenomenon of prophethood, which is the basis of the Sharia because if God knows particulars in a universal manner, he could not know particulars individually, and He also cannot know whether who the prophet will be and to whom he will reveal.²⁵ If God is a perfect being, he must know things outside of his essence. As stated by al-Ghazālī, even the intellects that have been emanated from the First Principle know more than He does, from the perspective of philosophers. While the First Principle knows only himself, the first intellect that is emanated from itself knows the second intellect that is emanated from Him, the soul of sphere, and the body of the sphere. As seen, the first intellect knows more than the First Principle, which is its reason of existence. Accordingly, the emanated beings know more than the First Principle and thus, become more perfect than Him.²⁶

Averroes' idea is different from al-Ghazālī about the claims of philosophers on God's knowledge on the particulars. According to him, the claim that God knows particulars in a universal manner is not mean that God does not know particulars. The reason why philosophers use this expression is to draw attention to the fact that God does not know particulars as discursive kind of knowledge. Because eternal knowledge is not a kind of knowledge that succeeds beings, like innovative knowledge. Eternal knowledge is not an innovation of the being, but rather its reason.²⁷ Therefore, this accusation against the peripatetic philosophers is unacceptable. For the peripatetic think that the eternal knowledge of God not only surrounds particulars, but also is the reason for things such as dreams and inspiration.²⁸

2. MAIMONIDES' APPROACH TO THE ISSUE

Maimonides is also of the opinion that God is perfect and that, therefore, all that is perfect should be attributed to Him and all that is imperfect should be excluded from Him. In fact, this situation is one of the first principle (*ma'kul al avval*). Similarly, ignorance is an imperfect attribute, and it is unthinkable that God, a perfect being, is ignorant and does not know things. Likewise, this is also one of the things that are firstly conceived.²⁹ We cannot comprehend the essence of God; but we can obtain some knowledge about Him. Just as we can have knowledge that He is the most perfect of beings, that there is no deficiency in Him, that there is no change in Him, and that He is not subject to any kind of effect, we can also have knowledge that there is no limit of His knowledge on innovation, reproduction, and knowledge. In addition, we can have knowledge that nothing in existence is hidden from His knowledge, and that God's knowledge on

²⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, 151.

²⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, 98 ve 128.

²⁷ İbn Rüşd, "Damīme", 125. See also *Tahāfut at tahafut*, 287 / *Tutarsızlığın Tutarsızlığı*, 525-26.

²⁸ İbn Rüşd, "Damīme", 126.

²⁹ Maimonides, *Dalālat al-hāirīn*, ed. Hüseyin Atay (Ankara: Ankara Universty Faculty of Theology Publishing, 1974), 3: 19, 539.

things does not disregard their nature.³⁰ God is a perfect being, and because He is perfect, He has the attribute of knowledge, which is a quality of perfectness. According to Maimonides, there is neither renewal nor plurality in God's knowledge.³¹ because, when we ground our opinion on the basis that God is omniscient by single knowledge, which does not change or multiply, that He knows changing things, that there is no change or innovation in His knowledge and that the knowledge of a thing before its existence and that of the thing after its existence is single knowledge, we accept that God is not omniscient by a kind of knowledge perceived by us.³² Thus, Maimonides expresses this issue in his work as follows;

“It is generally agreed upon that God cannot at a certain time acquire knowledge which He did not possess previously; it is further impossible that His knowledge should include any plurality, even according to those who admit the Divine attributes. As these things have been fully proved, we, who assert the teaching of the Law, believe that God's knowledge of many things does not imply any plurality. His knowledge does not change like ours when the objects of His knowledge change. Similarly we say that the various events are known to Him before they take place, He constantly knows them, and therefore no fresh knowledge is acquired by Him. E.g., He knows that a certain person is non-existent at present, will come to existence at a certain time, will continue to exist for some time, and will then cease to exist; however, this does not cause any increase. This theory implies that God's knowledge extends to things not in existence, and includes also the infinite.”³³

According to Maimonides, some philosophers thought that God's knowledge did not relate to things that were not present, and that His knowledge did not embrace things that were eternal.³⁴ Those who argue this view pointed out that there was no renewal in God's knowledge, thus, it is not possible for Him to know things that constantly renew. Hence, they claimed that God knew only the unchangeable things. According to the statements of Maimonides, some philosophers claim that God does not know also the unchangeable things. If God has known them, there would be a plurality in His knowledge accordingly with the proportion of the things that are unchanging.³⁵

Roughly summarized, Maimonides believes that based on God's perfect nature, He must be an omniscient being. He also thinks that the plurality of the things that occur does not obstruct God from knowing them as a single knowledge.³⁶ Although existing things change constantly,

³⁰ Maimonides, *Dalālat al-hāirīn*, 3: 20, 546. Maimonides, *Dalālat al-hāirīn*, 3: 20, 544-45. For Al-Farabi's idea on this matter see Mehmet Aydın, *Din Felsefesi* (İzmir: İzmir İlahiyat Fakültesi, 2003), 170. Fehrrullah Terkan, “Does Zayd Have the Power not to Travel” *The Muslim World* 94 (2004): 50.

³¹ Maimonides, *Dalālat al-hāirīn*, 3: 20, 543.

³² Maimonides, *Dalālat al-hāirīn*, 1: 60, 150-51. See also Mehmet Aydın, *Farabi-Ibn Sina Sistemi Işığında Ibn Meymun'un Din Felsefesi* (PhD Thesis, Dokuz Eylül University, 2003), 148.

³³ Maimonides, *Dalālat al-hāirīn*, 3: 20, 543.

³⁴ Metin Özdemir, “Ezelî Bilgi Anlayışının Problematik Yönü” *Cumhuriyet İlahiyat Dergisi*, 6 (2002): 212-213.

³⁵ Maimonides, *Dalālat al-hāirīn*, 3: 16, 524-25. See also İbn Rüşd, “Damîme” 122.

³⁶ See for Saadya Goans' idea on this matter Gaon, *al-amanāt va'l-itikadāt*, ed. Samuel Landauer. (Brill, Leiden, 1880), 108. See also Feldman, “The Binding of Isaac: A Test-Case of Divine Foreknowledge” 107-108.

God's knowledge does not. Therefore, God knows the things that are changing or unchanging, and even the things that do not exist at present.

As is known, one's knowledge on a thing he has done is different from the other's knowledge on that thing that has been done. The existence of a thing that is done is subject to the knowledge of the person that has done it, while the other person's knowledge is subject to what is done. This is the difference between God's knowledge and our knowledge. In order to explain the difference, Maimonides gives the example of a mechanism called time box (clock), like al-Ghazālī. Accordingly,

“An artisan makes a box in which certain amount of weight move with the running of the water, and thus indicate how many hours have passed of the day and of the night. The whole quantity of the water that is to run out, the different ways in which it runs, every thread that is drawn, and every little ball that descends. All this is fully perceived by him who makes the clock, and his knowledge is not the result of observing the movements as they are actually going on. The situation is quite the opposite.”³⁷

The movements of the clock are produced in accordance with the artisan's knowledge. But another person who looks at that instrument will receive fresh knowledge at every movement he perceives, the longer he looks on, the more knowledge he acquires. He will gradually increase his knowledge till he fully understands the machinery. Besides, he cannot know any of the movements before they take place, since he only knows them from their actual occurrence.³⁸ The same is the case with every object, and its relation to our knowledge and God's knowledge of it. Whatever we know of the things is derived from observation. These things that become subject to our knowledge occur by God's knowledge. Therefore, it is impossible for us to know what will take place in future, or what is infinite. Besides, our knowledge is acquired and increased in proportion to the things known by us. This is not the case with God. His knowledge of things is not derived from the things themselves, if this were the case, there would be change and plurality in His knowledge. Hence, God's knowledge is of kind that comes before the existence of knowable things and that determines the existence as is.³⁹

If God's knowledge does not take place depending on objects and particulars take place at a certain time, how does God know particulars? Maimonides holds a similar opinion to al-Ghazālī on God knowing particulars.⁴⁰ According to him, a claim such as "God does not know particulars" is unacceptable. Those who argue that God does not know particulars have acted boldly by stating what God knows and what He does not.⁴¹ According to Maimonides, they have based their claims

³⁷ Maimonides, *Dalālat al-hāirīn*, 3: 21, 547.

³⁸ Maimonides, *Dalālat al-hāirīn*, 3: 21, 547.

³⁹ Maimonides, *Dalālat al-hāirīn*, 3: 21, 547. Seymour Feldman, “The Binding of Isaac: A Test-Case of Divine Foreknowledge” 111.

⁴⁰ Kevin Lim, “God's Knowledge of Particulars: Avicenna, Maimonides, and Gersonides” *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* 5 (2009): 83. See also Adnan Küçükali, *İbn Meymun'un Varlık ve Düşünce Öğretisi (Farabi ve İbn Sina İle Karşılaştırılmalı Olarak)* (PhD Thesis, Ataturk University, 2005), 170.

⁴¹ Maimonides, *Dalālat al-hāirīn*, 3: 19, 539. Yehuda Halevi, *al-Hucce va ad-dalil fi nasr ad-dini az-zalil (Kitābu Huzāri)* (Kahire, 2014), 126.

on the disparity among human beings and have concluded from this that God does not have the knowledge of particulars.⁴² According to the proponents of this idea, some of the righteous and good people suffer in their lives, while some of the bad people live good lives. If God knows that people are virtuous or evil, and He is well able to organize this in the best way, why does He not remove this disparity?⁴³ Then, by his perfect knowledge, He must show mercy to things and must arrange them accordingly. This disparity and evil will also prove that God has no knowledge of the states of human beings, in other words, that He has no knowledge of particulars.

In terms of Maimonides' opinion, such claim is unacceptable because, according to him, the evil and disparity that occurs among humans is not due to God's providence, but because of the extreme desire of humans or the essence of matter.⁴⁴ Therefore, the idea that God does not know the states of human beings, that He has no knowledge of particulars cannot be grounded on the disparity among men.

According to Maimonides, some philosophers attributed the impossibility of God's knowledge on the universe to the lack of God's sense organs because particulars can be perceived not by reason but by senses. God does not have any sense organs, such as eye, ear, etc. Therefore, God cannot comprehend particulars.⁴⁵ Some philosophers say that God only knows species, but not individuals, while some others say "God does not know by any means the things that are outside of His essence."⁴⁶ However, Maimonides opposes all this, and states that God knows everything, that nothing is hidden from Him.⁴⁷ Therefore, God knows all things as well as the state of human individuals. For grace requires the existence of knowledge of things which need mercy. However, the mercy shown to individuals can be at different levels. This difference arises from the preparation and effort of the substance of the human individuals because humans take share from the providence according to its substance and preparation. Hence, divine providence is not equal for all individuals of the human species. Therefore, God's grace is shown differently to the prophets, to the virtuous, and to the ignorant. While the grace for virtuous and the righteous is greater, the grace for the ignorant and the rebellious is less. The abundance that comes from the divine mind makes the prophets speak, regulates the acts of the righteous and matures the knowledge of the virtuous.⁴⁸ Although Maimonides thinks as mentioned on the providence to human individuals, he follows the Aristotelian idea about the animals and inanimate objects in the sublunary world. As he states, there is no grace of God concerning things in the sublunary

⁴² Maimonides, *Dalālat al-hāirīn*, 3: 19, 539. Eliezer Schweid, *The Classic Jews Philosophy*. Trans. Leonard Levin (Boston: Brill, 2008), 347.

⁴³ Maimonides, *Dalālat al-hāirīn*, 3: 16, 522. See also Hatice Doğan, *Maimonides'un Hayatı, Eserleri ve Delāletü'l-Hāirīn Adlı Eseri Üzerinde Bir İnceleme* (PhD Thesis, Selcuk University, 2009), 178.

⁴⁴ Maimonides, *Dalālat al-hāirīn*, 3: 16, 523.

⁴⁵ Maimonides, *Dalālat al-hāirīn*, 3: 16, 523.

⁴⁶ Aristo, *Metafizik*, 519-22.

⁴⁷ Maimonides, *Dalālat al-hāirīn*, 3: 16, 524. Schweid, *The Classic Jews Philosophy*, 347.

⁴⁸ Maimonides, *Dalālat al-hāirīn*, 3: 18, 536. See also *Dalālat al-hāirīn*, 1: 65, 166.

world, according to Aristotle. The occurrences here take place with the influence of forces from destiny⁴⁹ Maimonides explains the issue as follows:

“I agree with Aristotle with regard to all other living beings, and with regard to plants and all the rest of earthly creatures. I do not believe that it is through the interference of God that a certain leaf drops from a tree, nor do I hold that when a certain spider catches a certain mosquito, that this is the direct result of a special decree and will of God in that moment. Divine Providence is connected with Divine intellectual influence, and the same beings which are benefited by the latter so as to become intellectual, and to comprehend things comprehensible to rational beings, are also under the control of Divine Providence, which examines all their deeds in order to reward or punish them. As told by Aristotle, it may be by mere chance that a ship goes clown with all onboard, as in the above-mentioned instance, or the roof of a house falls upon those within, but it is not due to chance, according to our view, the men gets on board, or stays in the house in line with the will of God, and is in accordance with the law of justice in His judgments, the method of which the mind is incapable of understanding. I have been induced to accept this theory as I have not encountered a description of God's Providence of divine grace granted anything other than human beings in any of the prophetic books.”⁵⁰

As can be seen from the statements above, Maimonides follows Aristotle on the subject of animals and inanimate objects in the sublunary world. On the other hand, he has a different opinion than Aristotle on the subject of grace shown to human species and bases its opinion on the expressions in prophetic books.⁵¹ It seems that there is no providence of God concerning the animals and other objects in the sublunary world. Then it cannot be said that God has knowledge of these things, since mercy to something requires knowledge of that thing. Although Maimonides states that God knows everything and that nothing is hidden from His knowledge, the above statements regarding providence disaffirms his narrative.⁵²

In terms of the problems that arise with regard to God's knowledge, Maimonides thinks like Averroes⁵³ and states that the problem arises from the comparison between God's knowledge and men's knowledge. Those who have expressed their views about God's knowledge have explored what is possible in our knowledge and thought that the same is true for God's knowledge, or that it is difficult to explain God's knowledge of these matters. The philosophers who argue this idea have evidenced the argument that God's knowledge is His own essence, and His own essence

⁴⁹ Maimonides, *Dalālat al-hāirīn*, 3: 17, 525-26. Aristot, *Metafizik*, 520-523. See also Carlos A. Casanova, “Is There Divine Providence According To Aristotle?” *Nova et vetera* 14 (2016): 213. Aydın Topaloğlu, “Tanrısal İnâyetin Felsefî Anlamı ve Tarihsel Arka Planı”, *Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 27 (2004): 109-110.

⁵⁰ Maimonides, *Dalālat al-hāirīn*, 3: 17, 532-33. English translation quoted from Pines' translation of Guide.

⁵¹ Maimonides, *Dalālat al-hāirīn*, 3: 17, 532-34. See also Seymour Feldman “Synopsis of Book Four” *The Wars of the Lord II*, 140.

⁵² Ivry, “Providence, Divine Omnisicience and Possibility: The Case of Maimonides”, 149-150.

⁵³ İbn Rüşd, “Damıme”, 124-126. See also İbn Rüşd, *Tahāfut at-tahāfut*, 234/*Tutarsızlığın Tutarsızlığı*, 407.

is His own knowledge, and that our minds are flawed in comprehending the truth of the essence of God.⁵⁴

Maimonides opposes the aforementioned argument about God's knowledge and His essence, and asks the following to those who argue this argument: "If God's knowledge is nothing other than His essence, how can you comprehend His knowledge?"⁵⁵ If we cannot comprehend the essence of God, then we cannot comprehend His knowledge. The limitation of our mind in comprehending God's essence is also valid for the comprehension of His knowledge. If we cannot comprehend God's knowledge and the attribute of omniscience is identical with His essence, then one cannot speak of the comprehension of God's knowledge. God's knowledge is not a knowledge of our kind. Therefore, His knowledge cannot be compared to ours. In fact, there is a complete difference between God's knowledge and our knowledge. God comprehends everything outside Himself and nothing that exists is hidden from His knowledge.⁵⁶ Just as the essence of the earth and the essence of the sky are different from each other, God's knowledge and our knowledge are different from each other in terms of essence.⁵⁷ For this reason, God's knowledge covers many different types of things, it relates to things that does not exist at present and includes all the infinite things and encompasses all the things that occur.⁵⁸

Since there is no parity between the essence of God and that of us, there is no parity between His knowledge and ours. The resulting problems arise from the combined use of the word "knowledge".⁵⁹ Similarly, words *intent* and *providence* are used only by means of participation both for God and for us. However, there is no uniformity or a complete correspondence between these in terms of meaning. For this reason, the words *knowledge*, *intent*, and *providence* denote different meanings when used for God in comparison to us. Such problems arise when the knowledge of God and the knowledge of human beings, the providence of God and the providence of human beings and the intent of God and the intent of human beings indicate the same meaning. But if it is considered that these words indicate different meanings for God and human beings, then the truth will emerge.⁶⁰

As we have seen, Maimonides draws attention to the fact that our minds are flawed at the point of realizing God's knowledge and opposes to the arguments of some philosophers on the issue of God's knowledge. Although Maimonides has such a critique of some philosophers, he adopts a similar approach on the relationship between essence and attribution when trying to base God's simplicity. In fact, according to him, God is the Living without life, the All-Powerful without power, and the All-Knower without knowledge. All of these attributes indicates a single

⁵⁴ Maimonides, *Dalālat al-hāirīn*, 3: 20, 544.

⁵⁵ Maimonides, *Dalālat al-hāirīn*, 3: 20, 544.

⁵⁶ Maimonides, *Dalālat al-hāirīn*, 3: 20, 544.

⁵⁷ Maimonides, *Dalālat al-hāirīn*, 3: 20, 545.

⁵⁸ Maimonides, *Dalālat al-hāirīn*, 3: 20, 545. Feldman, "Synopsis of Book Three" *The Wars of the Lord II*, 78.

⁵⁹ Maimonides, *Dalālat al-hāirīn*, 3: 20, 544-546.

⁶⁰ Maimonides, *Dalālat al-hāirīn*, 3: 20, 546.

meaning without causing plurality.⁶¹ The meaning of the knowledge of God is identical to the meaning of life. God does not consist of two different things as “one who comprehends” and “one who does not comprehend”. Therefore, when we say “God is omniscient” for God, we also mean that “He is the one who comprehends His essence”.⁶²

Well, if our minds are flawed as Maimonides claims, how can we say that the qualities of God, such as life, knowledge, etc. are identical to his own essence? How do we know that His attributes of life and knowledge relate to the same meaning? As we see, Maimonides says that our minds are flawed in realizing God's knowledge and argues that God's attributes are identical with His own essence. If our minds are flawed in comprehending God's knowledge, it is hardly possible to justify that the attributes in general, and the attribute of knowledge in particular are identical to His essence based on the information in the mind. Therefore, the point that he takes as a basis when Maimonides criticizes philosophers does not coincide with the claim that God's essence and the attributes are identical, which he states in another part of his work.⁶³

Even though there was an inconsistency between Maimonides' claims on God's essence and His attributes and the method he had based on his criticisms to other philosophers on the matter of God's knowledge, he thinks that when God knows His unchanging essence, He also knows the existence, which is the result of His actions. Therefore, even if we express that God knows the existence, we cannot demand to know what the nature of this knowledge is. To make such a demand is like wanting to be God and for our comprehension to be as His. According to Maimonides, a person who is merciful accepts that nothing is hidden from God's knowledge and that all things are encircled by God's knowledge, which is His essence. However, knowing how God's comprehension is an act of opposition because such mode of comprehension only pertains to God.⁶⁴ Therefore, when seen from the perspective of Maimonides, it is reasonable to think that God knows everything and that this knowledge also includes particulars, as there is no evidence brought up against this opinion. Therefore, there is no harm in adopting this view.⁶⁵

CONCLUSION

There are many similarities between the views of Maimonides and the views of al-Ghazālī on God's knowledge. Both al-Ghazālī and Maimonides derive their opinion from similar premises and ground the idea that God is an omniscient being based on His perfectness. In addition, according to them, attributes of imperfectness, such as ignorance, should be excluded from God, as God is a perfect being and God must possess the attribute of knowledge, which is one of the attributes of perfectness.

⁶¹ Maimonides, *Dalālat al-hāirīn*, 1: 57, 139.

⁶² Maimonides, *Dalālat al-hāirīn*, 1: 53, 129.

⁶³ Maimonides' idea on this matter see Osman Bayder, “İslam Hukukunun Yahudi Hukukuna Etkisi: Şer'i Hükümler ve İletleri Bağlamında” *Erciyes Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 43 (2017): 302.

⁶⁴ Maimonides, *Dalālat al-hāirīn*, 3: 21, 548. See also İbn Rüşd, *Tahāfut at tahāfut*, 167/*Tutarsızlığın Tutarsızlığı*, 256-57.

⁶⁵ Maimonides, *Dalālat al-hāirīn*, 3: 21, 548.

Both philosophers agree that God knows particulars, and they target and criticize some philosophers who claim that God does not know them. If God is perfect, then He must know particulars because being perfect includes knowing particulars. As we mentioned earlier, al-Ghazālī states that if God does not know particulars, the phenomenon of prophethood, which is the basis of Sharia, is demolished and that this idea will dynamite the basis of religion. Similarly, Maimonides also states that intellectual influence is brought from the divine intellect to each individual and by grace, this intellectual influence is in different amounts and that the amount of intellectual influence from the divine intellect makes the prophets speak, regulates the acts of the righteous and matures the knowledge of the virtuous. If God had no knowledge of particulars, the prophethood, which was the foundation of religion, would have disappeared. Although Maimonides based this claim on the concept of intellectual influence, the result he deduced is the same with that of al-Ghazālī.

Both al-Ghazālī and Maimonides adhere to the traditional theological understanding, and in this context, they state that God has all the knowledge as one; that His knowledge does not change with the occurrences. Therefore, God knows what is temporal without being included in time - in an eternal sense. The example of the arrival of Zayd used by al-Ghazālī was the example of proving that God knows the things that occurred, although He is eternal. It seems that, according to both philosophers, God knows time-based propositions without being included in time and this does not cause any change in His essence. Thus, the idea that God is perfect is also preserved.

Another noteworthy similarity between the two philosophers is the representation of God in His knowledge of things. The clock representation used by Maimonides and the time box representation used by al-Ghazālī are the same. Therefore, although Maimonides does not mention the name of al-Ghazālī, in some of his works, as noted by Griffel, in some respects it is similar to al-Ghazālī. In this context, it is possible to say that Maimonides followed al-Ghazālī on the issue of God's knowledge.

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