

Anticipations in La Mettrie

Post by “Godfrey” of January 25, 2020 at 6:49 PM

Stenger, in *God and the Atom*, chapter 2 "Atoms Lost and Found", gives a very brief account of atomism through the Dark Ages.

He mentions St. Augustine of Hippo in the 5th century as being aware of and condemning atomism. Then: "While the Church did its best to suppress the writings of the Epicureans, medieval scholars of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam showed sufficient interest that knowledge of the philosophy and physics of atomism survived in their writings."

He gives the names Adelard of Bath (1075–1150), Thierry of Chartres (ca. 1100–ca. 1150), and William of Conches (ca. 1090–1154) as thinkers interested in atomism. Also William of Ockham (ca. 1288–1348) and Nicholas of Autrecourt (ca. 1299–1369).

The Karaites were a Jewish sect of atomists who were condemned by Maimonides (1135–1204). Maimonides also mentions Epicurus dismissively: "As for those who do not recognize the existence of God, but who believed that things are born and perish through aggregation and separation, according to chance, and that there is no being that rules and organizes the universe—I refer here to Epicurus, his sect and the likes of him, as told by Alexander—it serves no purpose for us to speak about those sects; since God's existence has been established, and it would be useless to mention the opinions of individuals whose consciousness constructed their system on a basis that has already been overthrown by proofs."

Additionally, some Islamic scholars pursued atomism. For the most part any acceptance of atomism was accomplished by overlaying (or perverting) it with monotheism; it seems this was where things stood when Poggio came across DRN.

This is a summary of a summary. Stenger summarizes other sources and provides footnotes which look like they'd be quite useful for anyone pursuing this topic in detail.