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Sin and Divine Pleasure
in the Atomistic Tradition:
from Epicurus' Theology to Gassendi's
*Syntagma philosophicum**

Abstract

This paper attempts to analyse the distinction between “error” and “sin” in the atomistic tradition, from Democritus' and Epicurus' theologies, to the Christian perspective of Pierre Gassendi. Two points will be highlighted. Firstly, it is argued that even Democritus and Epicurus—who affirmed that gods neglect humanity—recognized an “indirect” form of sin: the sin against the state of blessedness that human beings could achieve by imitating the perfection of divinity. Secondly, the hedonistic aspect of this perspective is recognized. Mutatis mutandis, Democritus, Epicurus and Gassendi agree that sin is avoided in order to feel pure pleasure either in this life, or in the afterlife.

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