

Peter Adamson (München): Abu Bakr al-Razi's Atomism

Abstract

The scandalously innovative philosopher and doctor Abu Bakr al-Razi (d. 925) is well known for putting forth a theory of five "eternal principles" to explain the generation of the universe: God, Soul, Matter, Time, and Place. This presentation will focus on his understanding of Matter, according to which bodies are composed of atoms interspersed through void (which is identified with "absolute place"). Following on the work of other scholars, especially Carmela Baffioni, this theory will be compared to possible Greek sources and discussed in relation to contemporary kalam atomism. It will also be argued that the contrast between atoms and bodies is meant to expose Aristotle's theory of material substance as true in a sense, yet superficial, just as absolute time and place are more fundamental than the merely "relative" time and place acknowledged by Aristotle.