

# In the Name of the Twelve (By Zeus!)

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I compiled a list of instances where Epicureans cite a deity or the divine nature.

Sometimes, the invocations are simply non-religious *expressions* (like saying “**God** bless you” when someone sneezes) or *idioms* (as is the case when an insurance agent declares irreparable storm damage to be “an Act of **God**”; when someone sees something terrible on the news and asks “for the love of **God**...”) or *expletives* (like yelling “**Jesus Christ!**” or “Good **Lord!**” to express shock). Sometimes, they are pious (as is the case when Philodemus invokes “the Savior” in *On Death*). Sometimes, they are intentional, poetic personifications of natural forces (such as we mythologize “Mother Nature”).

Most of the time, the object of piety is simply identified in the genderless plural, as “**the gods**” or “**deities**”.

## EPICURUS:

Usually, Epicurus employs the words “**god**”, “**a god**” or “**the god**”, and “**the gods**” as synonyms for a “**the divine nature**” (and her expressions) that is perfectly untroubled, blameless, and worthy of human veneration. This also extends to making comparisons between human pleasure, and the pleasure enjoyed by gods, both of which are divine.

I note that he published a scroll called “**On the Gods**”, in the plural (according to Diogenes Laërtius).

Epicurus mentions “**god**” or “**the gods**” in *Epistles to Menoikeus* and fragments. He uses the singulars “**god**” and “**the god**” (or “**a god**”), as well as the plural “**gods**”. He never mentions a specific deity, only the general notion of “**deity**”.

We find both “**God**” and “**the gods**” throughout his extant fragments.

He mentions “**Zeus**”, by name in Vatican Saying 33.

In *Menoikeus*, and throughout *Pythokles*, Epicurus refers to deity as “**the divine nature**”, not as a person.

## METRODOROS:

Metrodoros, Polyainos, and Hermarkhos are all attested by Philodemus as having written theological works.

In *On Change* and *On Gods* (as captured by Philodemus in *On Piety*), Metrodoros juggles some of the arguments about "**the gods**" in the plural. He notes that "*that which has no share of the void endures, but that every compound is destructible*".

#### **POLYAINOS:**

In *Against Ariston* and another unnamed work, Polyainos writes that "*of bodies some are | compounds, and others those of which compounds are formed*". Philodemus explains that Polyainos "*considers **the gods** to be neither simple entities nor compounds, since those are completely eternal, while these are destructible. So in no way can **gods** have bodies, since they are | indestructible. But not necessarily for those thinking that only [...] if they inquire accurately, he says, he thinks that it is possible for their nature to exist even with many troubles surrounding it, and that it is possible even for many eternal and immortal gods | to exist...*"

#### **HERMARKHOS:**

In *On the Way of Life of the Gods* (P.herc 152-7), Philodemus describes Hermarchus as having supposed "**the gods**" to respire. Here is at least one example of Hermarchus interfacing with the objects of piety. According to Hermarchus, as Philodemus documents: "*we would not consider **them** more fortunate and indestructible if **they** did not, but rather similar to mute human beings. For since in fact all of us who are not maimed make use of language, to say that **the gods** either are maimed or do not resemble us in this respect (there being no other way either they or we could give shape to utterances) is extremely foolish, especially since conversation with **those like themselves** is a source of indescribable pleasure to the good*".

#### **COLOTES:**

Plutarch accuses Colotes and Epicureans of refecting **Zeus** as the "Author of the Race", **Demeter** as "Giver of Laws", and **Poseidon** as "Guardian of Growth", perhaps implying that Colotes (among Epicureans), would have defended the existences of Zeus, Demeter and Poseidon, but not as interveners in human affairs, nor as givers of life.

#### **DEMETRIOS OF LAKONIA:**

Demetrios writes a treatise called "On the Shape of [a/the] God". He seems to have been a strong advocate for the position that the gods are extra-ordinary extra-terrestrials from the void beyond our kosmos. His expressions of divinity largely deal with "god" in either the masculine or neuter singular, the way we tend to receive it most frequently.

Thanks to [Bryan](#) for this list: [[Demetrius Lacon - Main Biography](#)]

- "4. Because of this, [the mind] possesses a direct reception of similar things, and when these are examined closely, they are not difficult to restore, and by such restorations, we leave **god** in a human form - because clearly we connect [the form of a human] to **a god**.
- 15. Since we do not find reason in any other form apart from a human form, it is evident that we should leave **a god** in an anthropomorphic form so that, even with reason, he may have substance (so that he has a real existence along with the rational faculty). Therefore, we say that [**a god**] is anthropomorphic...
- 16. He [Bion] does not grasp our point even when he leads to it. For they say that if **god** is anthropomorphic because **it** has reasoning and shared vitality, we associate with god many other common properties of forms, such as hands, fingers...
- 17. ...[**god**] has a similar soul [to man]. Therefore, it is not necessary that if any animals have such a form that **a god** also has that form. But it will have the faculty of reasoning and, in addition to these common properties, it will also have many other properties in the highest degree...
- 18. 'If indeed,' he [Bion] says, "it has a human form, it is clear that **it** will have eyes, so **it** will also suffer from ophthalmia, and **it** will be affected similarly by the remaining senses." But this itself is similar to nonsense.
- 20. We say that '**god** is not the universe nor tireless sun or the full moon" but it is not possible to say this to a Stoic or a Peripatetic! For how does that which is spherical have its own form? Otherwise, those saying that [**god** is spherical] do not see that because it is proper for the nature of things...
- 25. But we say that the form of **a god** is not like what other philosophers attribute. Certainly, they would have seen that [**a god**] has shapes that are not spherical nor has judgments or angry dispositions or pettiness, but forms that stand apart in the sublime and dispositions rejecting everything lower - all directed towards its own bliss (μακαριότητα) and imperishability (ἀφθαρσίαν)."

## PHILODEMOS:

Philodemus' usages include a full range of *linguistic idioms*, *personifications*, as well as *expressions of piety*.

Philodemus mentions numerous mythic figures, deities, and divine qualities through his *Epigrams*, including "**Aphrodite's secrets**", "**the heavy wrath of the Muses**", "**The Fates themselves**", "**the girdle of Aphrodite**", "**golden Cypris**", "**Callistion**", "**Perseus**", "**Andromeda**", "**Poseidon**", "**Melicertes**", "**Ino**", "**Leucothea**", the "**Nereids**", "**Poseidon**", "

**Zephyr**", "**Rhea** ... the mother of the gods", "**the Phaeacians**", "born in **the Ram** or **the Twins**, or in both **the Fishes**", "goat-horned **Pan**", "**Heracles**", and "wing-footed **Hermes**". He is no stranger to Greek mythology, and comfortably employs mythic imagery.

In *On Anger* he twice declares "by **Zeus**". He once invokes the name of "**Apollo**" while describing the mistaken gods of the masses, having assigned to Apollo human flaws and failures. Apollo is nowhere else mentioned (to my knowledge).

In *On Death*, he writes "**Let us drink in honor of Zeus the Savior**", and three other times writes "**by Zeus!**" He also mentions "the gods". This is consistent in *On Frank Criticism* as well, mentioning "**by Zeus**" and the "**gods**".

He mentions "**Zeus**" by name a few times in *On Piety*, as well as "**god**", "**a god**", "**the god**", and "**the gods**" hundreds of times. Most of the time, he refers to "the gods". He occasionally refers to "**the divine**" and "**divinity**" as "**the divine nature**". In this work, Philodemus records Epicurus as having participated in "Attic Dionysia", a festival in the name of Dionysius. He also mentions those who "**sacrifice to Athena and Ares**" in an allegorical sense.

He only mentions "**the gods**" once in *On Property Management* and *On Rhetoric*.

He invokes "**god**" and "**the gods**" several times in *On Signs*.

## LUCRETIUS:

Lucretius provides us with a colorful array of examples. Most of the time through *De Rerum Natvra*, he refers to the many "gods" in the genderless plural. However, beyond that, we have dozens of examples of piety and personification, most notably, the proem to Venus (i.e. Aphrodite) that opens the very first book of the poem.

- "**Venus**", "Mother of the Aeneadae", "O, lady", "the goddess" (1.1-40, 225; 2.173, 434; 3.777; 4.1052-1274)
- "**Earth**", "great mother of gods", "the goddess" (1.250; 2.598, 621, 655, 1090, 1093)
- "**Favonius**" (1.10)
- "**Mavors**" (i.e. "Ares", 1.29-40)
- "**the gods**" (1.68, 155, 1014; 2.167, 175, 352, 434, 598, 640, 646; 3.18, 48, 319, 981; 4.590, 1007, 1239; 5.51, 60-90, 124, 146, 156, 181, 306, 1156, 1161-1236, 643-95, 379, 387, 419, 756, 760)

- "**Epicurus**", "**godlike**" (1.731, 734; 3.14; 5.7-52; 6.5)
- "**Earth**", "great mother of gods", "the goddess" (1.250; 2.598, 621, 655, 1090, 1093)
- "**Neptune**", "the sea"(2.471, 655; 6.1076)
- "**Ceres**", "corn" (2.655; 4.1168, 5.13, 741)
- "**Bacchus**", "that liquor" (2.655)
- "**Nature**", "her own mistress" (2.1090)
- "**Tantalus**" (3.981)
- "**Iacchus**" (4.1168)
- "**Silenus**" (4.1168)
- "**Spring**" (5.737)
- "**Zephyr**" (5.737)
- "**Flora**" (5.740)
- "**Voltumnus**" (5.744)
- "**Jupiter**" (6.387, 400) elsewhere called "**Jove**" (2.633)

*I'm sure there are others in that poem that I have missed.*

#### **DIOGENES OF OINOANDA:**

Numerous mentions of "**the god**" and "**god**" in the singular. (Fragments 20, 21, 24)

He also mentions individual deities, including "**Zeus**", "**Demeter**", and "*in the name of **the Twelve***".

- "For indeed, while honouring **supreme Zeus and Demeter** as deities, [we regard human beings] not as [their] slaves, [but as their friends.]" (Diogenes of Oinoanda, fr. 17; translated by M. F. Smith)
- "[T]he crisis comes and passes away in the shortest time; while if it is relieved, it ushers the creature to health. What then, **in the name of the twelve gods**, is terrible about that?" (Ibid., fr. 47)
- "[What advantage then], Dositheus, [attached to] this [desire for your son, **in the name of] Dionysus?**" (Ibid., fr. 128)
- "What [benefit], **father Zeus**, [did he derive] from these [richness]?" (Ibid., fr. 153)