

# Must an Epicurean believe in gods?

Post by “Don” of April 16, 2025 at 7:25 AM

Great discussion, and one that can never be revisited too many times. This topic is always an opportunity to revise, rethink, and refocus. Here's my perspective (as of, checks clock, 7:02 am on a random Wednesday morning):

Epicurus places a correct understanding of the gods in a place of paramount and foundational importance in his philosophy. It is the first Principal Doctrine. It is discussed first in the Letter to Menoikeus. And so on.

However, what is shown to be paramount and foundational is the firm knowledge and conviction that:

- the universe was not created by gods
- the gods neither bestow blessings nor dole out punishment
- Therefore, we have *nothing* to fear from the gods

Epicurus reasons all these out, but this is specifically to get rid of the fear of the gods so prevalent in so many people, both in ancient times and still in our own.

That said, whether you take a realist or idealist position on [Epicurean gods](#) is secondary - in my opinion. David Sedley is the main popularizer of this position, but I believe it was floating around prior to his and A.A. Long's exposition of it. I usually go to Lucretius point about "you can use Bacchus to refer to wine, Ceres to refer to the grain harvest, etc, but know you're using metaphors" kind of thing. I can walk into a cathedral and be awed by the grandeur. That doesn't mean I need to accept the theology inherent in the architecture. I can enjoy religious music but don't need to believe in gods. I probably think of myself as a functional atheist. I find it unlikely there are gods of any kind with an objective physical existence. Are there aliens more intelligent than humans? Sure, I can believe that. But they are not "gods" but simply other beings in the infinite universe.