

Epicurus vs Aristotle: the Role of Reason vs Sensation Seeking?

Post by "Don" of December 11, 2025 at 8:24 AM

Along these lines, I'm going to quote Obbink in his *On Piety by Philodemus* translation and commentary:

Quote

traditional forms of worship are viewed by Epicurus as natural responses to the recognition of divine nature, and are not merely tolerated but recommended to his followers. Numerous acts of worship are attested for Epicurus and individual Epicureans, including sacrifice, prayer, and oaths, 1 adoration of statues, dedications, mystery initiation,• participation in calendrical festivals,s and rites of private and ancestral cult. Their opponents, considering such practices were incompatible with the Epicurean rejection of natural teleology, divine providence, and divination, viewed them as insincere parodies designed to cultivate popular favour. Epicureans, however, maintained

that participation in such practices was intended to illustrate the Epicurean theory of religion and social cohesion, and the degree to which cultural phenomena (including false beliefs) could be accounted for; for Epicurus, like Prodicus and Democritus, viewed cult as a natural

outgrowth of cultural history. Similarly, we find Epicureans, in an attempt to rationalize and thereby vindicate popular belief (thus demonstrating a clear philosophical understanding of even the most primitive of ideas), maintaining the proposition that 'gods' are actually capable of doing men harm (i.e. the wicked, as a result of their own depraved conceptions of the gods).

These practices seem well-attested by the author of *On Piety* (it could have been [Phaedrus](#) or Philodemus, but now traditionally attributed to the latter) but they seem at odds with Lucretius in his scorn for religious practices in book V: 1198-1203: "It is no piety to show oneself / Bowing with veiled head towards a stone, Nor to be seen frequenting every altar, Nor to fall prostrate on the ground, with palms outspread ..." It seems Epicurus himself would have done these and encouraged his school to do so. I'm certain Epicurus ascribed different motivations for bowing, sacrificing, etc than would the hoi polloi but he seems to have taken part in all that.