

Was Lucretius More "Anti-Religious" Than Epicurus Himself?

Post by "DaveT" of December 11, 2025 at 4:35 PM

Admin Note: This thread was split off from an earlier thread regarding the [Role of Reason vs the Senses](#).

[Quote from Don](#)

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.

So, clarify for me, please. Am I correct that neither author above was a true fan of Epicurus? If yes, then Lucretius is more correct? Or is Lucretius off base attributing to Epicurus, and imploring the reader toward either agnosticism or atheism?

Post by "Joshua" of December 11, 2025 at 4:47 PM

Phaedrus was a Scholarch of the Garden, a successor in a long line of leaders of the school of Epicurus. Philodemus was also a devoted member of the school, having studied under the Scholarch Zeno of Sidon.

Lucretius is probably the outlier here--a Roman among Greeks, as it were. He held orthodox beliefs about the gods, and was not an atheist, but he was more critical of cultural religious devotions than Epicurus was.

Post by "Don" of December 11, 2025 at 5:07 PM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

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Excellent summary, [Joshua](#) !!

There's a whole thread on On Piety:

Thread

[Philodemus On Piety](#)

Check out what came in on interlibrary loan this afternoon! I'll share thoughts etc on this thread. Stay tuned... [epicureanfriends.com/wcf/attachment/1550/](https://www.epicureanfriends.com/wcf/attachment/1550/)



Don

December 10, 2020 at 5:14 PM

In addition to it having been referenced elsewhere on a number of occasions.

Post by “Cassius” of December 11, 2025 at 5:48 PM

Quote

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I'd like to see this part of the conversation be very clear. I suppose that it is possible but I am not convinced that it would make sense to tag Lucretius as being significantly different from Epicurus on this. I'd say it is very possible that they are both saying the same thing, that it is ok to engage in religious-associated practices so long as you don't take seriously in your mind what some are saying about those practices. In other words it's perfectly fine to talk about

Venus and Mars and Neptune and Ceres as long as you don't take seriously the idea that those are truly supernatural gods who will respond to your prayers and intervene in human actions.

[Quote from DaveT](#)

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There are a lot of ways to read Dave's question and we probably need to be very clear if someone is inferring that Lucretius' antipathy toward false religion is stronger than that of Epicurus. I see a lot of danger in that direction and very little reason to emphasize it without very strong evidence on which to do so. As far as I know we don't have a lot of specific information at all on Epicurus endorsing any specific mystical practices, and a lot of evidence that he opposed the mystical basis that was being used to justify them.

Post by “Cassius” of December 11, 2025 at 5:55 PM

Note to [Kalosyni](#) and other admins: If the discussion of the religion angle takes off (and that's perfectly fine if it does) - Dave is raising a good issue) we'll probably split that part off into a separate thread to keep this focused on the "reason/sensation issue"