

# Gods Have No Attributes Inconsistent With Blessedness And Incorruptibility

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## 1. Explanation

- In his characteristic commitment to pursuing truth wherever it leads, Epicurus did not stop at denying the existence of supernatural places or gods. Epicurus observed that we see here on Earth that Nature never makes a single thing of a kind, and that things of a kind are distributed over a spectrum of primitive through advanced conditions. Epicurus therefore reasoned that from this that the universe is filled with other Earths, and other types of living beings, some of which are less advanced and some more advanced than humans. Here on earth we see that life struggles to extend its life and its happiness, and Epicurus deduced that throughout the universe there are beings even more successful at this than humans. We should therefore expect that the universe contains beings which are *totally* happy and *totally* deathless, and these beings deserve to be regarded as "gods," when we consider how that term should be accurately defined.
- Even though we do not observe such beings here on earth with our eyes and ears and other senses, our minds are disposed by Nature to realize that such beings are possible. We as humans benefit from identifying these beings as models which we can and do emulate to the extent possible as part of our natural striving to live more happy and healthy lives. Even more importantly, the identification of "gods" having no characteristics inconsistent with blessedness and imperishability enables us to grasp firmly that we have nothing to fear from such beings, as they are exclusively concerned with their own happiness.
- As Epicurus said to Menoeceus, "First of all believe that god is a being immortal and blessed, even as the common idea of a god is engraved on men's minds, and do not assign to him anything alien to his incorruption or ill-suited to his blessedness: but believe about him everything that can uphold his blessedness and incorruption. For gods there are, since the knowledge of them is by clear vision. But they are not such as the many believe them to be: for indeed they do not consistently represent them as they believe them to be. And the impious man is not he who popularly denies the gods of the many, but he who attaches to the gods the beliefs of the many. For the statements of the many about the gods are not conceptions derived from sensation, but false suppositions, according to which the greatest misfortunes befall the wicked and the greatest blessings (the good) by the gift of the gods. For men being accustomed always to their own virtues welcome those like themselves, but regard all that is not of their nature as alien." (Bailey at 123)

## 2. Citations

1. Epicurus to Menoeceus [123] The things which I used unceasingly to commend to you, these do and practice, considering them to be the first principles of the good life. First of all believe that god is a being immortal and blessed, even as the common idea of a god is engraved on men's minds, and do not assign to him anything alien to his incorruption or ill-suited to his blessedness: but believe about him everything that can uphold his blessedness and incorruption. For gods there are, since the knowledge of them is by clear vision. But they are not such as the many believe them to be: for indeed they do not consistently represent them as they believe them to be. And the impious man is not he

who popularly denies the gods of the many, but he who attaches to the gods the beliefs of the many. [124] For the statements of the many about the gods are not conceptions derived from sensation, but false suppositions, according to which the greatest misfortunes befall the wicked and the greatest blessings (the good) by the gift of the gods. For men being accustomed always to their own virtues welcome those like themselves, but regard all that is not of their nature as alien.

2. Lucretius 6:43. Brown: "The various wonders men behold in the earth and in the heavens perplex their minds, trembling and in suspense, and make them humble with the fear of the gods, and press them groveling to the ground; and being ignorant of the cause of these events, they are forced to confess the sovereignty and give up everything to the command of these deities. And the effects they are unable to account for by reason they imagine were brought about by the influence of the gods; for such as well know that the gods lead a life of tranquility and ease, if they should still wonder by what power the world is carried on, especially in the things they see over their heads in the heavens above, they relapse again into their old superstition; they raise over themselves a set of cruel tyrants who, the wretches fancy, can do all things, because they know nothing of what can or what cannot be, or by what means a finite power is fixed to every being, and a boundary immovable which it cannot pass. Such are more liable to mistakes and to be carried widely from the right way. [68] Unless you purge your mind of such conceits, and banish them from your breast, and forbear to think unworthily of the gods, by charging them with things that break their peace, those sacred deities you will believe are always angry and offended with you; not that the supreme power of the gods can be so ruffled as to be eager to punish severely in their resentments, but because you fancy those beings, who enjoy a perfect peace in themselves, are subject to anger and the extravagances of revenge: and therefore you will no more approach their shrines with an easy mind, no more in tranquility and peace will you be able to receive the images, the representations of their divine forms, that form from their pure bodies and strike powerfully upon the minds of men: From hence you may collect what a wretched life you are to lead."
3. Lucretius 3:14-30 (Johnston): "For once that philosophy which arose in your godlike mind has begun to speak about the nature of things, then terrors in the mind disperse, the world's walls fall open, I see what is going on in all the void, the majesty and calm habitations of the gods reveal themselves in places where no winds disturb, no clouds bring showers, no white snow falls congealed with bitter frost to harm them, the always cloudless aether vaults above, and they smile, as far and as wide as the light spreads out. Then, too, nature provides plentiful supplies of all things – their peace is not disturbed by anything at any time. The regions of Acheron, by contrast, are nowhere to be seen, and earth presents no barrier to a full view of all events going on throughout the void lying underfoot. Godlike pleasure and awe take hold of me up there with these things, to think that nature, through your genius, is laid out so clearly, so openly exposed on every side."

### 3. Notes

1. [Discussion Forum](#).
2. *Find out more in our [Physics Forum](#) and our [Wiki](#).*
3. Major Implications:
  1. It is necessary to have a proper view of the nature of divinity in order to live happily.