Activity 2. What role does God play in human existence? A Roman Perspective

Sources: http://liberator.net/articles/SloanGary/Lucretius.html (accessed June 4, 2010); http://classics.mit.edu/Carus/nature_things.html (accessed June 4, 2010).

Background: Titus Lucretius Carus (99-55 BC), better remembered as Lucretius, was a Roman poet and early humanist philosopher who argued for a materialist view of history. In Lucretius' view, the Gods existed in a separate world from humans and did not interfere with this one. The Earth operated according to the laws of nature, and these laws, not the whims of the Gods, shaped history. In *De Rerum Natura (On the Nature of Things)* (http://classics.mit.edu/Carus/nature_things.html, accessed June 7, 2010), Lucretius called on Romans to abandon superstition and adopt a rational and scientific view of nature and human events. The following excerpts are from this poem. Examine the excerpts and answer questions 1 — 3.

On the Nature of Things	Nothing can be create, we shall divine
by Lucretius, 50 BC	More clearly what we seek: those elements
"This terror, then, this darkness of the mind,	From which alone all things created are,
Not sunrise with its flaring spokes of light,	And how accomplished by no tool of Gods."
Nor glittering arrows of morning can disperse,	
But only Nature's aspect and her law, . . .	"Such are the crimes to which Religion leads.
Fear holds dominion over mortality	I own with reason: for, if men but knew
Only because, seeing in land and sky	Some fixed end to ills, they would be strong
So much the cause whereof no wise they know,	By some device unconquered to withstand
Men think Divinities are working there.	Religions and the menacings of seers."
Meantime, when once we know from nothing still	

Questions

1. According to Lucretius, what force can remove "terror" and "darkness of the mind?"
2. How does Lucretius view the impact of religion on human society?
3. This poem was written approximately 50 BC. In your opinion is it a significant historical document? Explain.