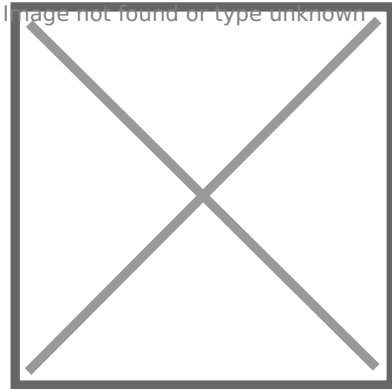


# Article: Epicurus in Nineteenth Century Germany: Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche

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[Epicurus in Nineteenth-Century Germany: Hegel Marx and Nietzsche](#)

and Keywords Epicurus marks a unique point of convergence for three unlikely bedfellows in the nineteenth century: Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche. Each sees a...  
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## Epicurus in Nineteenth-Century Germany Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche

James I. Porter

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### Abstract and Keywords

Epicurus marks a unique point of convergence for three unlikely bedfellows in the nineteenth century: Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche. Each sees a different “Epicurus” in this fourth-century successor to Democritus, the fifth-century co-founder of atomism. Each renders Epicurus and his materialism into a symptom of modernity’s engagement with antiquity, a role that atomism increasingly played from the Enlightenment onwards. Fresh readings of each of these philosophers contribute to a better understanding of their ways of construing the history of ideas, and in particular their bold reinterpretations of Epicurus himself, in addition to correcting a number of misconceptions surrounding their individual readings of Epicurus, be this in Hegel’s *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* and his *Science of Logic*, Marx’s dissertation, or Nietzsche’s sprawling corpus of published and unpublished writings.

Keywords: Democritus and Epicurus, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, freedom, chance, determinism, individualism, self-consciousness, Epicurus and Epicureanism

The attention that Epicurus received among German Romantic philosophers from Kant to Nietzsche is remarkable. This is partly to be explained by the French Revolution, which elevated ancient atomism to a new level of prominence. The worldly materialism of this ancient doctrine, and its amenability to atheism, secularism, science, humanist ethics, and communal values, were obvious attractions. But the ground had been prepared earlier with the rediscovery of ancient materialism by the natural philosophers of the seventeenth century and with the increased focus on Epicureanism that was inaugurated by Gassendi. Earlier still, Renaissance scholars had laid the foundations for this dramatic shift with their renewed philological attention to the principal texts.<sup>1</sup> Being better preserved than the first-generation Greek atomists (Democritus and Leucippus), not least of all thanks to the poem *On the Nature of Things* by his Roman spokesperson Lucretius, Epicurus naturally moved into the limelight. The reception of Epicurus was, however, not

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