

# On Use Of The Term Apikoros / Apiqoros / Bikouros Against Epicureans

Post by "Cassius" of December 17, 2018 at 9:14 AM

## Admin Edit

This thread came back to life in 2024. Unfortunately I can't remember the context in which it was first written. It starts with a paste of a comment from someone else, and I believe that comment itself was in response to the "What if Life Were All About Pleasure?" article. As a result the original thread was a little disjointed, although the intent is clear - to focus on the friction between Epicurean philosophy and certain of its opponents. I am therefore cleaning up the original post by editing it slightly to make it more fitting for a thread-starter, which is turning into a discussion of "Apikoros" and related labeling. Also as to the reference to Tacitus at the end of the post I see that the phrase Tacitus used was "[odium humani generis](#)" which was slightly off from the original thread title, so I am changing that too.

## What if Life Were All about Pleasure?

David Davidson | Thu, October 31, 2013 | Misc.



Paul, in Acts 17:18, addresses adherents to two philosophical schools: Stoicism and the Epicureanism. We already know that the Stoics had much in common with the early Christians; not so the Epicureans, for whom life's highest goal was individual pleasure.

A poster:

Just remember that the Hebrew word for 'heretic' is 'סורוקיפא' or 'Epikoros'. This author of [this blog](#) is much more favorable to Epicureans than many I've read. For example, according to the Catholic Encyclopedia, Epicurean Philosophy "stands for a refined and calculating selfishness [...] a [...] principle, but one which he wrongly applied, since he got rid of what was true [...] The whole philosophy may well be described in a trenchant phrase of Macaulay as 'the silliest and meanest of all systems of natural and moral philosophy'.

These are some of the shittiest ways of saying 'Epicureans just wanna have fun' I'm come across. [<https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=http%3...TXXmQnr1u-pb4xz>]

NEWADVENT.ORG [CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA: Epicureanism](#)

Well. There's a solid billion human beings who (blindly, or otherwise) follow a system that maintains that our outlook is both 'silly' and 'mean'.

Fair enough. I think their system is 'cruel' and 'brutal'. Early proto-Catholic in-fighting, and persecution of Arianists and Chalcedonians, violent crusades against Catharists, vicious wars between Catholics and Protestants, marginalization of Calvinists, persecution of Mormons ... and that's just sectarian in-fighting between people who all believe in Jesus and an afterlife. Not to mention their treatment of Jews and Muslims, who also believe in transcendental powers and an afterlife. They don't know what to do with us. ?

----- end of poster's comments -----

Cassius:

Here is a clip from that page, with a phrase we all know, but which is increasingly significant to me:

## Epicurean ethics

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Philosophy was described by Epicurus as "the art of making life happy", and he says that "prudence is the noblest part of philosophy". His natural philosophy and epistemology seem to have been adopted for the sake of his theory of life. It is, therefore, proper that his ethics should first be explained. The purpose of life, according to Epicurus, is personal happiness; and by happiness he means not that state of well-being and perfection of which the consciousness is accompanied by pleasure, but pleasure itself. Moreover, this pleasure is sensuous, for it is such only as is attainable in this life. This pleasure is the immediate purpose of every action. "Habituate yourself", he says,

to think that death is nothing to us; for all good and evil is in feeling; now death is the privation of feeling. Hence, the right knowledge that death is nothing to us makes us enjoy what there is in this life, not adding to it an indefinite duration, but eradicating the desire of immortality.

FOR ALL GOOD AND EVIL IS IN FEELING.....! And that does not necessarily mean simply what we see, touch, taste, hear, or smell. Because PLEASURE and PAIN are feelings, and our minds process those feelings, yes in part based on current senses, but also on what we have experienced in the past. I believe this means that "all good and evil" are in our emotional feelings / reactions to life. Not in simply the data that our senses present to us, but in our

FEELINGS about that data.

Death is the end not only of what we see and taste and hear and feel, it is also the end of our consciousness' ability to FEEL anything pleasurable or painful. It seems to me that life without feeling - which is what I associated as the goal of Stoicism - is a living death. And that is what some philosophers, some religions, some people - really want - slaves - a living death! In effect they would prefer robots, and you might as well call the Abrahamic religions and the Stoic-like philosophies a form of "robotism." They consider Epicureans heretics, and paraphrasing the sentiment attributed to Tacitus I bet the ancient Epicureans considered them effectively "enemies of the human race."

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## Post by "Bryan" of January 15, 2024 at 9:11 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Just remember that the Hebrew word for 'heretic' is 'סורוקיפא' or 'Epikoros'.

I was reading The Oxford Handbook of Epicurus and Epicureanism (2020) and came to page 549, where it says *"The Term Epicurus, or Apiqoros as it is more often pronounced, is alive and well in contemporary Jewish culture."*

It goes on to state *"Epicurus is a unique figure in Judaism - a Greek philosopher whose name has become a legal category. An Apiqoros cannot give testimony in court (Mishnah Torah 11.11), one may not return a lost object to Apiqorsim (11.3), one is even obligated to kill them" (page 551)*

Here is the quote from the Torah:

(Mishneh Torah, *Rotzeah uShmirat Nefesh*, 4.10) It is a blessing to kill *minim* and *Epikursim*... *Epikursim* deny the Torah and the concept of prophecy. If there is the possibility, one should kill them with a sword in public view. If that is not possible, one should develop a plan so that one can cause their deaths. What is implied? If one sees such a person descend to a cistern, and there is a ladder in the cistern, one should take the ladder, and excuse oneself, saying: "I must hurry to take my son down from the roof. I shall return the ladder to you soon." Similarly, one should devise other analogous plans to cause the death of such people.

Different translation: "The [following are considered] Ha'Epikorsim (מיסורוקיפא): those who worship idols or commit transgressions in order to provoke anger. Even if one eats non-kosher meat or wears garments of mixed fabric to provoke anger, he is considered an Epikoros

(סוֹרוֹקִיפָּא). This includes those who deny the Torah and the Prophets. It is a commandment to kill them. If one has the power to kill them with a sword in public, he should do so. If not, he should employ subterfuge to cause their death. How so? If one of them falls into a pit and a ladder is inside, he should remove it and say, 'I must go and bring my son down from the roof; I will return the ladder to you,' and similarly in such matters."

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### **Post by “Joshua” of January 16, 2024 at 1:17 AM**

I do find the staying power of this usage to be remarkable. The Scottish adventurer Cunninghame Graham wrote this in a book on his travels;

#### Quote

Almost all Europeans in Morocco must of necessity be merchants, if not they must be consuls, for there is hardly any other industry open to them to choose. The [christian] missionaries bought and sold nothing, they were not consuls; still they ate and drank, lived in good houses, and though not rich yet passed their lives in what the Jews called luxury. So they [the Jews] agreed to call them followers of Epicurus, for, as they said, "this Epicurus was a devil who did naught but eat and drink." The nickname stuck, and changed into Bikouros by the Moors, who thought it was a title of respect, became the name throughout Morocco for a missionary. One asks as naturally for the house of Epicurus on coming to a town as one asks for the "Checquers" or the "Bells" in rural England. Are you "Bikouros"? says a Moor, and thinks he does you honour by the inquiry; but the recipients of the name are fit to burst when they reflect on their laborious days spent in the surgery, their sowing seed upon the marble quarries of the people's hearts, and that the Jews in their malignity should charge upon them by this cursed name, that they live in Morocco to escape hard work, and pass their time in eating and In in quaffing healths a thousand fathoms deep.

Which is how Bikouros came to be mentioned as a very minor character in one of Frank Herbert's *Dune* novels.

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### **Post by “Don” of January 16, 2024 at 6:52 AM**

This is all fascinating! Evidently there's maybe more to the Epicurean link to Antiochus Epiphanes than I initially expected. Do we know how far back Apikoros goes in Hebrew? To the time of the Maccabees?

On Dune, Joshua shared this previously and it includes the additional mention of "Bicouros of Shaitan; "a lazy missionary of the devil"

Thread

### [\*\*A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to Arrakis\*\*](#)

So I've been thinking of getting into some light game modding and I've been getting into the worldbuilding side of Frank Herbert's *Dune*, one of the greatest sci-fi worlds ever made. His stories are set in our galaxy, but in a far distant future where Earth is nothing but a faint memory and mankind has spread across the stars. Herbert's narrative texture relies for its effect on extrapolating the development of human language, religion, and folkways across this vast scale of time, and words from...



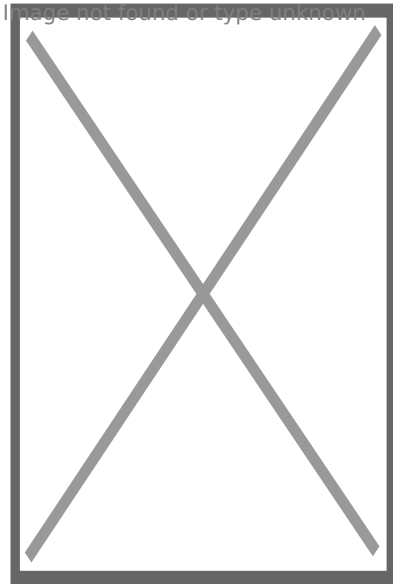
Joshua

September 18, 2022 at 10:05 PM

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### **Post by “Don” of January 16, 2024 at 7:01 AM**

See also:

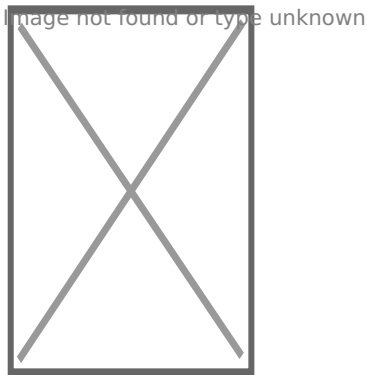


[Apikoros: The Last Essays of Salomon Maimon - Hebrew Union College Press](#)

Before the Enlightenment, before Spinoza had rejected traditional beliefs about the Bible, came the humanistic skeptics of the Renaissance. Alongside such...  
press.huc.edu

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/23509248>

(I'll try and follow-up on that jstor paper)



[Heresy and the Formation of the Rabbinic Community](#)

books.google.com

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**Post by “Cassius” of January 16, 2024 at 8:21 AM**

Wow that looks right on point -

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/631-on-use-of-the-term-apikoros-apiqoros-bikouros-against-epicureans/>

## "Know What to Answer the Epicurean": A Diachronic Study of the 'Apiqoros in Rabbinic Literature

Jenny R. Labendz

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### Post by "Bryan" of January 16, 2024 at 11:04 AM

#### [Quote from Don](#)

Do we know how far back Apiqoros goes in Hebrew? To the time of the Maccabees?

Best I can tell, the word has been around since Epicurus. Yet, it looks like we first have the term attested in text just a generation after the invasion of the Maccabees. The word is used in "the early Tannaitic sources (first century before Hillel)" where it is used "to refer to one who espouses Epicurean philosophy."

There is a tradition of denying that the term comes from Epicurus, while nevertheless understanding that it really does come from him. Happily the handbook even mentions this open deception "It is also worth bearing in mind that the Talmudic etymology of the term may itself be a self-consciously homiletic effort rather than a serious philological one" (pg 567). Meaning the argument that it is unrelated is not even believed by those who make the argument.

Also, the argument that the word means "heretic" in a general sense may also be disingenuous -- at least originally it specifically means "Epicurean."

(Avot 2.14) "know what to respond to an Epikoros"

(Sanhedrin 10.1) "These are they who have no place in the world to come: He who says there is no resurrection of the dead, that there is no Torah from Heaven, an Epikoros"

The advice to, (if legally possible) publicly kill Epicureans (but if not legally possible) to kill them by deception is hardly a unique treatment for those who disagree -- although the bit about leaving us to die in wells by "temporarily borrowing" our ladder (if the opportunity should arise) is a unique little twist!

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## **Post by “Cassius” of January 16, 2024 at 12:23 PM**

I gather that it would probably be more clear how all this developed if we had a more clear article on how Antiochus Epiphanies was specifically Epicurean rather than just generic Greek. And the key there would be his advisor (whose name escapes me at the moment) who was specifically Epicurean. All I have ever seen written up on this was on the Epicurus.net website on their history page under the section about the Judeans.

[Epicurean History](#)

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## **Post by “Bryan” of January 16, 2024 at 1:44 PM**

That section from Epicurus.net has some very speculative content! To quote "There is some evidence that Jesus meanwhile fled to Syria and then eastwards out of the Roman Empire, where he continued his teaching and faith-healing for many decades in Iran and Kashmir. A possible tomb of Jesus is located in Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir."

My goodness!

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## **Post by “Cassius” of January 16, 2024 at 1:53 PM**

Wow. That's a good reason to develop our own summary and not refer to that one!

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## **Post by “Eggplant Wizard” of January 16, 2024 at 3:04 PM**

I remember Epicurus.net being the major online resource in the 1990's. I kept checking to see when the "Beliefs" section would be updated- in 2024 it's still under construction! I think Epicurus.net kind of set a tone for a lot of the online discussions, including the belief that modern egoism/libertarianism/Austrian economics were natural successor movements to Epicureanism. I was one of the few dissenters there.

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## Post by “Cassius” of January 16, 2024 at 4:13 PM

Yes Epicurus.net was always the place I turned to first for the core text, and I regularly still use it for that since the page loads so fast. And I remember the links you refer to as to the Austrian economics. Discussion of some aspects of that would probably run against our no-politics rule but some of it would be ok as philosophical. However going too far there now would derail this thread so if someone is interested in that probably best to start a new thread in the general ethics section.

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## Post by “Don” of March 17, 2024 at 10:32 PM

Just saw this thread listed in "Research Projects" and finally downloaded "A Diachronic Study of the *ʿApiqoros* in Rabbinic Literature" by Jenny R. Labendz. Here are some excerpts and notes (Quotes are from Labendz paper unless otherwise noted):

◡   ◡   ◡

When *tannaim* refer to the *ʿapiqoros* there is little doubt that they have in mind followers of the ancient philosophical school of Epicureanism,<sup>1</sup> flourishing at that time in Palestine and elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> By the third century C.E., however,

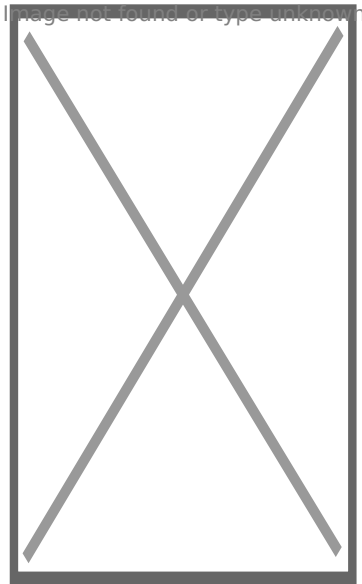
"*Tannaim* were the rabbinic sages whose views are recorded in the Mishnah, from approximately 10–220 CE. The period of the Tannaim, also referred to as the Mishnaic period, lasted about 210 years." - *Wikipedia* (Tannaim)

The paper continues that, although the origin of the name *ʿapiqoros* definitely originally referred to Epicureans, by the 4th century CE the Greek philosophical schools (Stoicism, Epicureanism, Scepticism) had "basically disappeared." The *amoraim* (Jewish scholars of 200–500 CE) primarily in Babylonia and Israel, probably never encountered actual Epicureans. ".these Rabbis were not bound to maintain that *ʿapiqoros* meant Epicurean, even if they understood the historical and philosophical meaning of that term. It was obvious to them... that an *ʿapiqoros* was something decidedly negative, but in the absence of real Epicureans, they could, and did, give free reign to their imaginations to construct new definitions."

as the closest the *tannaim* come to defining the *ʿapiqoros*. The definition they would perceive points to one who rejects the divine origin of the Torah or neglects the study of Torah. Expanding upon this, over the course of subsequent generations, the meaning of the *ʿapiqoros* focuses increasingly upon an irreverence for learning or for teachers.

"Modern philologists are generally in agreement that the word 'apiqoros is a Hebrew transliteration of the Greek word for either Epicurus or Epicurean." It appears that the consensus is that the generic word Epicurean was the one adapted into Hebrew.

"Epicureans flourished in Palestine...and they missionized ardently." The author cites DeWitt, *Epicurus and His Philosophy*, 3, and Howard Jones, *The Epicurean Tradition* (Routledge, 1989), 64, for this information. "Since the Epicureans missionized vigorously, the Rabbis may have encountered them somewhat regularly, and might have been able to read or at least hear the epitomes that encapsulated Epicurean philosophy and theology." The author cites Saul Lieberman's *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (1962) in several places:



[Hellenism in Jewish Palestine : Lieberman, Saul, 1898-1983 : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

231 pages  
archive.org

However, the consensus seems to be that since the tannaim literature doesn't employ any Greek philosophical terms "the Rabbi's knowledge of Greek philosophy was limited." ...

to Greek communities outside of Palestine.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Judah Goldin emphasizes that “the rabbis were not Platos in Hebrew disguise, nor were they students (much less disciples) of Plato.”<sup>12</sup> Consequently, there is no reason to consider the Rabbis’ knowledge of Epicureanism to be any different from that of a beginning Epicurean student who would be familiar only with the general concepts.<sup>13</sup>

Even with this basic knowledge, the Rabbis knew enough to consider the Epicureans "heretical, such as the Epicurean denial of divine providence."

### *Mishnah ḤAbot 2:14*

רבי אלעזר אומר, R. Eleazar says,  
הוי שקוד ללמוד תורה, Be diligent to study Torah,  
ודע מה שתשיב לאפיקורוס. and know what to reply to an Epicurean,  
ודע לפני מי אתה עמל. and know before whom you toil.  
ונאמן הוא בעל מלאכתך And reliable is your Employer  
:שישלם לך שכר פעולתך: to pay you your wages.

The author notes that this *mishnah* presumes the reader knows who/what an Epicurean is... later *amoraim* who inherit the term have to "reconstruct its meaning."

The author posits that the Rabbis encountered the Epicureans would most likely have debated them. The intellectual Rabbis were likely targets for Epicurean missionizing and for the pamphlets the Epicureans distributed. So, the Rabbis goals was to know how to counter these basic Epicurean arguments.

Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:1 (excerpt)

ואלו שאין להם חלק לעולם And these have no share in the world

הבא: to come:

האומר אין תחיית המתים מן The one who says there is no [way to learn]

<sup>22</sup>התורה, resurrection of the dead from the Torah,

ואין תורה מן השמים, and Torah is not from Heaven,

ואפיקורס. and an Epicurean.

Again, it is assumed that the reader will know who/what an Epicurean is, and this person is someone with whom the student will interact. "Here, the student is being warned against the consequence of actually being an Epicurean himself. This may be what motivates Judah Goldin's assertion that '*apikoros* refers specifically to a Jewish Epicurean." (Goldin, *Studies in Midrash and Related Literature* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 1988, 62).

"Several things can be learned from this mishnah about the tannaitic conception of the Epicurean. First...God is the one who punishes the Epicurean. The problematic nature of being an Epicurean is the theoretical or intellectual rather than practical ... the Epicurean, who denies divine reward and punishment, and is thereby excluded from divine reward in the world to come." The mishnah goes on to say that the Epicureans "says there is no way to learn resurrection of the dead...that the Torah is not from Heaven." These are "essential religious truths" according to the Rabbis. So the "salient characteristics of Epicureanism" were the "outright denial of providence" and not their missionary efforts or some metaphysical, philosophical theories.

Tosefta Sanhedrin 13:5 lists a whole list of ne'er-do-wells condemned by the Rabbis: sectarians, apostates, informers, Epicureans, those who have denied the Torah, those who separate from the ways of the community, and those who have denied the resurrection of the dead. "Based on the tannaitic familiarity with Epicureanism discussed above... it is plausible that the Rabbis' disdain towards Epicureanism encompassed more than the single heresy of denial of divine providence."

The author states that "we may characterize the early Rabbis' understanding and use of the term. An '*apikoros* was a member of the missionizing Epicurean school of philosophy which, among other heresies or impieties, denied divine providence. ... Not much later, Rabbis were less sure of the meaning of the word '*apikoros*."

That gets us up to pp. 175-184. The remainder of the paper traces the use of the word in other texts, but also shows that the writers were less and less aware of what an actual Epicurean was and rather more able to foist whatever heresies they wanted onto the term '*apikoros* including disrespect for the Torah or simple irreverence. But there is no denying the term originally referred to our philosophical forebears.

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## Post by “Don” of March 18, 2024 at 7:34 AM

Just a note on 'apikoros coming from Epicurean and not Epicurus, remember that the ancient Greek for "Epicurean" is Ἐπικούρειος (Epikoureios) so both Epicurean and Epicurus end in sigma (ς "s") in Greek. So it seems to me both are viable options although the group name does seem to make more sense.

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## Post by “Pacatus” of March 18, 2024 at 5:53 PM

I recently came across an alternative possibility:

“Even the derivation of the term is not simple. It probably derives ultimately from the name of the Greek philosopher Epicurus, but Rabbinic literature displays no knowledge of the existence of a Greek philosopher by that name. If it were a semitic term, it would be derived from the root **pqr**, which by an apparently fortuitous coincidence means licentious, dissolute, or rebellious. This derivation has been maintained by at least one eminent philologist.”

And: “The fact that the Amoraim derive the term Apikoros from the Hebrew root **pqr** (Sanhedrin 38b) provides some evidence that they were unaware of Epicureans at all. But on the other hand it may only be an example of self-consciously creative homiletic Rabbinic exegesis.”\*

Thus it could be – although Danzig seems to think probably not – originally at least, a “phonetic coincidence.”

\* Gabriel Danzig, “Epicurus and Epicureanism in Rabbinic Literature” in the Oxford Handbook of Epicurus and Epicureanism; Philip Mitsis, Editor.

Classical Hebrew is based on such consonantal roots, and words that are so based -- even with the root letters rearranged and with additions -- are etymologically related.

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## Post by “Pacatus” of March 24, 2024 at 4:08 PM

For those who might be interested in pursuing this topic further, I stumbled on this book in Amazon: *Epicurus & Apikorsim: The Influence of the Greek Epicurus and Jewish Apikorsim on Judaism Hardcover* - August 15, 2007

[https://www.amazon.com/Epicurus-Apikorsim-Influence-Jewish-Judaism/dp/9659115113/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?dib=eyJ2ljojMSJ9.d7u4ebcpeEF2VZBVZbkrscVAMrzSSzxdETHHR7Z2rr8dY](https://www.amazon.com/Epicurus-Apikorsim-Influence-Jewish-Judaism/dp/9659115113/ref=sr_1_1?dib=eyJ2ljojMSJ9.d7u4ebcpeEF2VZBVZbkrscVAMrzSSzxdETHHR7Z2rr8dY)  
1

One of the commentators mentions Humanistic Judaism as a strain that would be *apikorsim*. In the months I participated, as a graciously welcomed guest, in a local mixed-congregation (Conservative and Reform) synagogue, I got the strong impression that many of the Conservative members viewed Reform Jews pretty much as *apikorsim* - even as they were often good friends.

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### Post by “Godfrey” of March 24, 2024 at 6:00 PM

[Pacatus](#) can you summarize the doctrinal differences between the two? If that's too complicated to be reasonable, just say no. 😊

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### Post by “Pacatus” of March 24, 2024 at 6:28 PM

[Godfrey](#)

Just quickly, off the top of my head: Generally, Conservative Jews keep kashrut -- but, unlike Orthodox Jews ordain women, and have other liberal positions. Reform Jews generally reject the need to keep kashrut, take more of the Torah symbolically or metaphorically. An outward example: in the synagogue I was involved in, Conservative Jews tended to wear the kippah (skull cap/yarmulke) all the time, and maybe the fringed garment (tzitzit); Reform Jews donned the yarmulke only during services, and didn't wear the tzitzit at all. They used different prayer books (siddurim). Theologically, there might not be many real differences -- although Reform Jews (like some neo-Hasidim) seemed to tend more toward some versions of pantheism. Humanistic Jews might reject the notion of a supernatural creator God (or any God) altogether, but still keep some of the Torah-traditions as a community-bonding practice.

That is really simplistic, but the best I can do to give maybe a picture. Wikipedia probably has articles, but these observations are based on my personal experience.

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## Post by “Don” of March 24, 2024 at 6:52 PM

### [Quote from Pacatus](#)

Humanistic Jews might reject the notion of a supernatural creator God (or any God) altogether, but still keep some of the Torah-traditions as a community-bonding practice.

That **almost** sounds Epicurean in that they take part in the rituals of the community but don't ascribe to the supernatural elements.

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## Post by “Pacatus” of March 24, 2024 at 6:56 PM

### [Quote from Don](#)

That almost sounds Epicurean in that they take part in the rituals of the community but don't ascribe to the supernatural elements.

Apikorsim. 😊 Although Judaism, historically and broadly, is generally more orthopraxic than orthodoxic.

I had an acquaintance who was a Humanistic Jew. I made the slip-of-tongue (quite innocently) of Saying "atheistic Judaism" -- he just laughed and said, "Yeah, pretty much." 😄

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## Post by “Pacatus” of March 24, 2024 at 7:27 PM

Rabbinical Judaism is almost radically dialogic. When I was participating in the weekly Talmud study, I early on (because I can't quite bite my tongue) said about some passage that I disagreed with what someone else in the class had said. I blushed, and apologized - saying something like, "Sorry: I'm a guest here." To which one of the other students, wagging a finger at me, said: "No, no, no! That's what you're supposed to do: *argue!*"

There is a scene from the film “Yentl”, in which Yentl (in her disguise as a male in order to study Talmud) and her study partner are speaking *sotto voce*, when the rabbi comes around and asks: “Are you agreeing or disagreeing?” Response: “Oh, we’re disagreeing, Rabbi. We’re disagreeing!” Several Jewish commentators I once read said that whole scene was an accurate reflection of Torah study.

Some of this is based on the highly *polysemous* nature of classical (Torah) Hebrew. The Talmuds (there are two: the Bavli – Babylonian Talmud – and the lesser Yerushalmi – Jerusalem Talmud) are essentially a history (up to a point) of Rabbinical argument, and commentaries on the original arguments (the Mishnah). Sometimes the arguments appear to be resolved; sometimes not – and sometimes might give the appearance of resolution by truncation. But the Rabbis continue the process ...

There is a saying in the Talmud (going from memory): “The real Torah is not complete until you have added your [personal] torah to the Torah.” Thus, there is a dynamic open-endedness that derives from a certain hermeneutical freedom. But there is always argument – and you’re expected to make yours. (“Torah,” here, could almost be translated as “Tao” – as I understand the Greek *Logos* is rendered in Chinese Bibles. There is the received written Torah – the biblical texts; the expanded interpretive Torah – the Talmuds and Midrash; and the ongoing Torah.)

[Note: I doubt that I would have been welcome in a strict Orthodox congregation. My background, experience – and interpretations – are personal. I spent some years, on my own, delving into various aspects – and Hebrew (though mostly how that language works: never proficient, though I could recognize a few words if I was reading “pointed” text). It was a great pleasure. But I couldn’t find a home there.]

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### **Post by “Pacatus” of March 24, 2024 at 7:41 PM**

ADDENDUM to previous posts: Maybe my thin thread of Jewish heritage (not enough to be a “halachic” – Torah approved – Jew, but enough that could well have sent me to Dachau\*) explains my tendency to want to argue multiple possible alternative points to any side. 😊 But I think that Epicurus’ insistence on multiple possible causes for any effect ( with the possibility of “over-determination”) goes a long way to cover that ... 😊

[\* My great grandfather on my paternal side married a Catholic woman: and so all their offspring became *de facto* Catholic. Not me, though ...]

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### **Post by “Martin” of March 27, 2024 at 1:57 AM**

\* With two Jewish grandparents, you could have ended up in a death camp. With one Jewish great grandfather, you should have been safe but usually could not join a Nazi organization and not become an officer in the military and possibly not be a civil servant either. One of my grand uncles had to prove that there was no Jew in his family tree up to 5 generations back to become an officer in the army.

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### **Post by “Little Rocker” of April 11, 2024 at 10:35 PM**

This thread reminded me of a [blog post](#) from a while back about the correspondence between the Spinoza scholar Yitzhak Melamed and an Amsterdam rabbi. The rabbi's rejection of Melamed's request was later overruled, but the record of Spinoza as an 'Epicourous' (note the caps like a proper noun) unworthy of a lifetime of study remains.

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### **Post by “briefvacation” of October 31, 2024 at 3:30 PM**

#### [Epicureanism](#)

I think this article is interesting, not sure if this characterization of the points in common with Epicureanism are accurate characterizations of Epicurean beliefs.

#### Quote

Agreements, however, both in content and literary form, between rabbinism and Epicureanism are striking: study for its own sake (Vatican fragment 45 and Avot 6:1); removal of doubt (Life 121b, Doctr. 22 and Avot 1:16); mortality and urgency (Vat. fr. 10 and Avot 2:15); acquisition of a companion (To Menoecus, end, and Avot 1:6); diet of bread and water (Bailey, fr. 37 and Avot 6:4); satisfaction with one's lot (Bailey, fr. 69–70 and Avot 4:1); and avoidance of public office (Bailey, fr. 85–87; Vat. fr. 58; Doctr. 7 and Avot 1:10–11; 2:3; etc.). Epicurus anticipated Judaism's denial of astral divinity and rule. With the general rise of the lower classes he accorded human dignity even to the prostitute, an evaluation continued in the Midrash (Sif. Num. 78; Gen. R. 85:8) and the Gospels (Matt. 1:3; 5, etc.). In Hellenism and Christianity, too, denunciation of Epicurus together with partial adoption of his ethics is frequent. The centrality of the

sage in post-Socratic ethics and rhetoric facilitated such developments.

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## Post by “Cassius” of October 31, 2024 at 4:00 PM

Just for reference below is the rest of that article (the first part). The "Agreements" section is in the context of this list of disagreements which comes first. If one were to take the "Agreements" out of context one would be get a very inaccurate picture of how deeply the two viewpoints diverge -- which I would say could hardly be greater in terms of overall outlook on the nature of the universe and the nature of the best life for human beings.

### Quote

**EPICUREANISM**, a philosophy of adjustment to the social changes after \*Alexander the Great (336-323), founded by Epicurus, 342/1-270 B.C.E., "the most revered and the most reviled of all founders of thought in the Greco-Roman world" (De Witt). Recent scholarship sees in it a "bridge" to certain rabbinic and Christian moods. Epicurus taught freedom from fear and desire through knowledge as the natural and pleasurable life. He endorsed religious observance but denied earthly involvement of the perfect gods and with it providence, presage, punishment, and penitential prayer. The transformation of Epicureanism into a competitive sect celebrating Epicurus as "savior" increased the already existing opposition to it. Rhetorical literature falsely accused Epicurus of materialistic hedonism. Complaints of Epicurean dogmatism, "beguiling speech" (Col. 2:4), and compelling argumentation (of [Avot 2:14](#) "...[know] what to answer the Epicurean") are frequently heard. Rabbinic condemnation reflects knowledge of Greco-Roman rhetoric, experiences with individuals and centers (Gadara, Gaza, Caesarea), and, possibly, the favoritism shown to Epicureanism by \*Antiochus Epiphanes and \*Hadrian. "Epicurean" became thus a byword for "deviance" - ranging from disrespect to atheism - in Philo, Josephus, and rabbinism alike (see \**Apikoros*). An early unexpanded version of the "four who entered 'Paradise'" ([Hag. 14b](#)) may once have signified Epicurus' school ("the garden"), since it fits Akiva's past, Ben Azzai's celibacy and many Epicurean sayings, Elisha b. Avuyah's heterodoxy, and Ben Zoma's gnosticism (Epicureanism and Gnosticism were equated also by the Church Fathers). Akiva's "mystical" admonition ([Hag. 14b](#)) could easily have been a parody on the "apocalyptic"-enthusiastic style of the Epicureans (parallel parody H. Usener, *Epicurea*, fragm. 364; [Gen. R. 1:5](#), Theodor-Albeck, p. 2 mentions "nothing from nothing"; Mid. [Ps. to 1:22](#) the "automatic" universe; cf. Jos., Ant., 10:280).