

Relationship between AI/LLMs and prolepsis

Post by "DaveT" of June 12, 2026 at 8:28 PM

[Quote from Titus](#)

This ChatGPT dialogue was fun to read. Since I lack deep insight to all of Epicurus' teachings or familiarity with various commentaries' supporting for his belief in the existence of Greek gods (the only ones he knew of, perhaps?) I wonder if the following quote from it is correct.

[Quote from Titus](#)

This is why, in Epicurean theology, the argument for the gods is not merely "people have a conception of gods." The stronger claim is that there is a universal and persistent prolepsis of blessed and imperishable beings that survives beneath all the false cultural additions. Whether that argument succeeds is another question, but it is more subtle than simply inferring existence from a concept.

Viewed this way, LLMs may actually illuminate the Epicurean distinction between prolepsis and opinion.

The model's internal representations resemble prolepses.

Its generated outputs resemble opinions.

What it lacks is sensation, the corrective mechanism that Epicurus regarded as essential for separating true opinions from false ones.

At first I thought, well he never experienced a god, so how could he say he knows of them from prolepsis. So I tucked that away and kept reading hoping for an answer to a question I've had for a long time. That is, did he really believe in the gods, or did he know the Greeks would have shut down his school if he disclaimed their existence and not support by evidence from the senses.

And then I came to the ending of the ChatGpt where it said: "For example, all peoples possess some prolepsis of blessed and imperishable gods. Epicurus regarded this as evidence that the gods exist, even if many false opinions are attached to them."

An LLM's internal representations do not have this status. They merely reflect statistical patterns in its training data. If a society collectively believed dragons existed, an LLM would develop a strong representation of dragons without dragons being real."

Did Epicurus then possibly or probably not believe in the Greek gods, but allowed that false opinions of the existence of gods do no harm since they only exist as opinions, and not fact?

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