

Relationship between AI/LLMs and prolepsis

Post by "Cassius" of June 14, 2026 at 7:39 PM

I just saw what Patrikios wrote and i agree with it - seems consistent with what Joshua said.

Beyond that I want to go further, because I think there's a direct analogy between the problem we face today in explaining Epicurus' views of the gods and the problem we face explaining Epicurus' views of Pleasure.

We have SIX LONG thousand-line chapters of an extensive poem that's really nothing more than a literate restatement of a through text on Epicurean philosophy.

When you read methodically through the great detail in which Lucretius explains what Epicurus had to say about the nature of the universe, and his regular complaints about supernatural religion and imputing to the gods anything except deathlessness and blessedness, there's no reason in the world to go any further than Joshua did in this thread, or Velleius did in explaining to Cicero the fundamentals of the nature of gods. There's no reason in the world, and every reason NOT to, infer that Epicurus held that Zeus or Apollo or Venus were anything more than conceptual personifications of what a blessed and imperishable being would be. Anything further --- and you *can* go somewhat further using the isonomia / eternal / infinite universe theory that give us confidence that life on earth is neither the only nor highest in the universe, is very much beyond what Epicurus was telling people was essential to believe.

AND YET DESPITE THAT people look at a couple of lines in the letter to Menoecus that say nothing of the sort and conclude "Epicurus held that Venus was the goddess of love and emerged from the ocean at Cyprus and wrestles with Mars to stop wars and they can't get it out of their minds that Epicurus was likely sacrificing bulls to Zeus every week.

Same goes for Pleasure. Lucretius makes very clear over the better part of 10,000 lines explaining that pleasure is the goal of life, and that if we pursue pleasure intelligently we can be happy, and yet people look at similarly-brief passages in the letter to Menoecus which are incorporated within the same Pleasure-focused orientation as Lucretius, and still they say: "NO! PLEASURE IS NOT THE GUIDE AND GOAL! NO - THE GOAL IS "Tranquility" and "Absence of Pain" so stop talking about Pleasure - That makes us look bad!!"

So this is one place where I depart somewhat from the reading recommendations that Professor Sadler recently gave. It is terrible advice to tell a new student of Epicurus to start with the letter to Menoecus and imply that they can stop there. Granted there are worse examples - Nietzsche comes to mind because it's hard to understand ANYTHING Nietzsche says without lots of background.

But much the same warning goes for Epicurus as with Nietzsche. If you read only the letter to Menoecus and stop you're likely to be hopelessly confused about gods and about the relationship between pleasure and absence of pain. You'll probably be OK on the issues of death and determinism, and you'll know that Epicurus seems to like pleasure, but you won't have a firm idea of what Epicurus means even about something so basic as happiness.

I'd have to think about what percentage to assign, but I'd bet well over 70% of the disagreements people have about Epicurus is that they refuse to go further than the letter to Menoecus. The truth is that the complete picture still does largely exist, but it requires consideration of Lucretius and Diogenes of Oinoanda and the other surviving secondary sources.

After checking back on the title of the thread to remember what we are supposed to be talking about. , I want to add this:

ironically, I think many of the issues we are debating are handled handled *better* by LLM's than they are by people who have focused only on the letter to Menoecus and the collected sayings. The LLM comments in this thread on prolepsis, and now with Patrikios' LLM on the gods are far more balanced and perceptive than what a lot of people get out of the letter to Menoecus. The LLM's seem to be taking into account a much wider context than can be gleaned only from Menoecus.

I wouldn't prefer to take the side of AI in a debate, but at this point I could easily argue that AI is more likely to be the *salvation* of Epicurean philosophy than its *death*. Anything that opens up the discussion beyond Menoecus to include Herodotus and Pythocles and Lucretius and Diogenes of Oinoanda has the potential to revolutionize the study of Epicurus for the better.