

Discussion of New Article - In An AI World, The Epicurean View of Knowledge Is More Important Than Ever

Post by "Cassius" of May 15, 2026 at 7:42 AM

This thread is for discussion of the Blog article:



Blog Article

[In An AI World, The Epicurean View of Knowledge Is More Important Than Ever](#)

Epicurus had important things to say about happiness, pleasure, fear, and anxiety. But before the modern world reduced him to the status of a street-corner therapist, his most important contributions to human advancement were understood to be in a very different field — that of understanding reality, and the true nature of things. The ancient world recognized that Epicurus's account of how knowledge is possible was among the most significant and original contributions any philosopher had ever...



Cassius

May 15, 2026 at 7:40 AM

Post by “Todd” of May 16, 2026 at 10:46 AM

I've noticed in this article, and at least one of your previous ones, you (or the AI) are treating *prolepsis* as preconceptions, following DL, and contra DeWitt.

I assume you must have seen this and chosen to let it stand. Have you changed your views on this issue?

Post by “Cassius” of May 16, 2026 at 11:37 AM

Good to hear from you and I really appreciate your drilling down on the specifics:

If you ask that then it's possible I need to revise that because I didn't really mean to break any new ground from my prior posts.

I recognized while writing that that I was basically incorporating the DL position as to "see many horses and that's how you develop a preconception of a horse."

What I remember wanting to do in the past was to distinguish "preconceptions (prolepsis which does not incorporate opinion) from "conceptions" (the product of rational thought, which involves opinions).

I did not mean to deviate from that in this article, but it's possible I wrote too loosely.

Did you see something specific that you can point me to which you think might differ from that?

Possibly this paragraph is the issue:

Anticipations are the generalized pre-concepts and pattern-recognitions that the mind builds from repeated sensory experience. When you have encountered horses many times, your mind has assembled those experiences into a recognizable pattern — a "preconception" of what a horse is — that allows you to recognize a new horse immediately without having to process each feature from scratch. This is not a rational construction or a definition arrived at through dialectical method. It is an automatic, empirically grounded recognition built by nature through the accumulation of experience.

I think I definitely have been influenced by podcast review of Academic Questions to focus more on the "absence of opinion" and "repeated exposure" aspects as we compare Epicurean prolepsis to Stoic ideas of prolepsis. And from that point of view I am perhaps more sympathetic to DL focusing on the "repeated exposure" as the way of guaranteeing accuracy in opinions.

The point I am seeing new to me is that I think we need to emphasize that no matter how close we get to the tower, and no matter how many angles we use or people we consult, no sensation in itself is ever so clear that the sensation alone "tells us" the final opinion. That's what I think we have to distinguish as being the Stoic kataleptic impression idea.

But I didn't mean this to be anything different from past focus on "intuition" as a means of describing what is going on in the "faculty of pattern recognition," or that I wanted to limit prolepsis to 5-sense exposure to concrete objects (which I remember to have been a good point that Dewitt made).

If it's that last point - that prolepsis is limited to data from the 5 senses - then I see why you ask and I may revise that.

But before I jump to conclusions can you elaborate on your question when you have time?

Post by “Don” of May 16, 2026 at 11:46 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I wanted to limit prolepsis to 5-sense exposure to concrete objects

Doesn't Epicurus also include grasping concepts with the mind as a sense, too?

Post by “Cassius” of May 16, 2026 at 11:51 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

Doesn't Epicurus also include grasping concepts with the mind as a sense, too?

Well that's the three-criteria vs four-criteria debate as I see it, and I'm still firmly with DeWitt in the three camp on that. In fact given my new reading on the stoic view of kataleptic impressions i am more firmly with Dewitt on that than ever.

Now, I'd reject the "grasping through the prolepsis" as objectionable not only because it creates a circular feedback loop (we are talking opinions here, and "grasping" in the Stoic sense seems to be "grasping the truth" of something). I'm also now focusing on the idea that no matter how close to the tower we are, it's never a single sensation, or even a series of them, that "tells us" the truth of the matter. it's always the mind weighing the sensations where truth and error lies,

So I am reading "grasping" as very close to "understanding" and that sounds too much like an opinion to me.

So as per our prior discussions I think you too agree Don that just like the sensations, the "prolepses" are never "opinions."

Post by “Don” of May 16, 2026 at 12:01 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

So as per our prior discussions I think you too agree Don that just like the sensations, the "prolepses" are never "opinions."

Agreed, but I believe Epicurus thought that the mind/soul could receive images/eidolon directly as a sense like taste, touch, etc. Reason then have meaning to those perceived images. That's why, according to Epicurus, we can have a prolepsis of justice and other immaterial or abstract concepts.

In the midst of these conversations, I feel the need to state for myself: modern neurobiology and psychology would appear to show the human brain doesn't work like the ancient Greeks thought. Understanding how Epicurus vs Stoics vs Sceptics thought sensation, reason, prolepsis, katalepsis, etc worked is enlightening in light of their positions, but I feel no need to accept any specific detail that doesn't hold up to modern scrutiny to consider myself an Epicurean.

Post by “Cassius” of May 16, 2026 at 12:03 PM

To add more there the recent podcast episodes on Academic Questions Book 2 are causing me to focus for maybe the first time on this kataleptic impression issue. So if I am reading all this correctly the Stoics seem to have made that the centerpiece of their rejection of radical skepticism. If so, then it was definitely going to have been talked about by the Epicureans after Epicurus, and it's easy to see the temptation to say that "some impressions are so clear that the prolepsis and/or the senses themselves can grasp the truth from them without anything else needed."

If that's what happened and that's what led to the adoption of this "fourth criteria" after Epicurus, then I'd lay that as a corruption entering in from the stoics rather than something truly advanced by Epicurus himself or as consistent with Epicurus' views.

In fact I've been thinking about a new thread on articulating better what is meant by 'true opinion.'

For example when we talk about defeating the "motion is impossible" argument by demonstrating that you can walk across a room, we probably need to be very clear about what exactly defeats the "motion is impossible" claim.

We're talking as if simply "seeing it" alone is sufficient, and I think the truth is that Epicurus would say that -since the sensations alone contain no opinion" it's still important for us to stress that the mind is processing the sight of the person walking across the room before we can say that the "no motion" paradox is conclusively defeated.

Post by “Todd” of May 16, 2026 at 12:10 PM

Quote from [Cassius](#)

Anticipations are the generalized pre-concepts and pattern-recognitions that the mind builds from **repeated sensory experience**.

This is the thing that jumps out at me.

To summarize my understanding of DeWitt, the anticipations must anticipate something. That something can only be experience. To say that they result from past experience removes them as an independent criterion.

Post by “Don” of May 16, 2026 at 12:19 PM

My possibly idiosyncratic position on Epicurean prolepsis, filtered through possibly a modern lens, is that prolepsis is the faculty that allows us to make sense of the ever-flowing flood of sense perceptions coming into our physical and mental senses. Prolepsis picks up or sorts out patterns that correspond to real world phenomena. The senses register colors, shapes, etc to the eye in a kaleidoscopic flood. Prolepsis picks out patterns and reoccurring patterns that can be worked on by reason. The flood of colors random shapes etc come first; this shape holds together, moves together, has some permanence over time - this seems significant. Then reason steps in and names it a *dog* (or *canem* or *cù* or whatever your culture names that shape).

Post by “Todd” of May 16, 2026 at 12:35 PM

[Quote from Todd](#)

To summarize my understanding of DeWitt

To elaborate a bit more (still following DeWitt here)...

The ~~two most well known~~ only positive examples of anticipations from Epicurus himself are justice and the gods. Do we get a prolepsis of justice from repeatedly seeing examples of it (maybe arguable, but seems like a stretch). Do we get a prolepsis of the gods by repeatedly seeing gods?

Post by “Cassius” of May 16, 2026 at 2:24 PM

[Quote from Todd](#)

To summarize my understanding of DeWitt, the anticipations must anticipate something. That something can only be experience. To say that they result from past experience removes them as an independent criterion.

OK now I see what you are saying for sure - that clarifies it.

I'm going to have to think about this before responding further. I'm definitely under the influence of recent reading in Academic Questions.

The point i want to reflect about is this: As Don is saying, I am thinking at the moment that prolepsis is what picks out the patterns. And prolepsis as a faculty exists before the experiences are experienced. I think in the past we've said - and I still think - that prolepsis cannot be performing its function by comparing streams of data to prior ideas (or intelligent patterns). It must be assembling the patterns based on features of the experiences that are repeated over time - and that does make sense to me.

Let me think further.

Post by “Cassius” of May 16, 2026 at 3:53 PM

The psychological hedonism discussion quickly began to overwhelm the original theme of this thread, so I moved that to the existing recent thread below. Let's continue "psychological hedonism" there and the the prolepsis issues here.

epicureanfriends.com/thread/4770/