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Journal

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society, 47(0)

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Publication Date

2025

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Peer reviewed

Do Large Language Models Have a Planning Theory of Mind? Evidence from MindGames: a Multi-Step Persuasion Task

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Abstract

Recent evidence suggests that Large Language Models (LLMs) display Theory of Mind (ToM) abilities. However, experiments with LLMs typically assess only *spectatorial* ToM, where LLMs merely predict other agents' behavior, rather than *planning*. In contrast, ToM in humans also contributes to dynamically *planning action* and *intervening* on others' mental states. We present a novel task of such a 'planning theory of mind' (PToM), which requires agents to infer an interlocutor's beliefs and desires and persuade them to alter their behavior. We find that humans significantly outperform o1 (an LLM) at our task, even though o1 outperforms humans in a baseline condition which requires minimal mental state inferences. The results suggest that LLM performance at other ToM tasks may be attributable to simpler predictive abilities, while people excel at counterfactual planning when reasoning about others' behavior. Our paper is here: <https://jaredmoore.org/mindgames>