

Peer Review

Review of: "Inner Speech, Self-Regulation, and the Modular-with-Feedback Theory of Free Will"

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The manuscript is very ambitious and succeeds quite well in achieving its goal. The text successfully introduces complex concepts in a relatively accessible way, using concrete examples. However, some paragraphs contain too many ideas, which affects readability; for instance, the lengthy paragraph on genetic and social influences could have been divided into two or three subsections. Transitions sometimes lack smoothness or clear explanation, particularly between the critique of hard determinism and the introduction of so-called “ad hoc” determinism, a term that itself could be better defined or replaced. The connection between “emergent phenomena” and the rejection of determinism needs further clarification or supporting references. Currently, it relies heavily on the implicit assumption that if something is emergent, it is unpredictable and therefore not determined (a view that is not a settled consensus).

There is a lack of critical reflection on the nature of free will: unpredictability or irreversibility of consciousness does not guarantee moral, legal, or intentional freedom. The text also does not address how emergent consciousness causally interacts with the physical world or integrates with the concrete decision-making described earlier. For example, the link between the “modular with feedback” theory and the rest of the text remains underdeveloped.

The phrase “What counts is determination, not determinism” is striking but could be expanded. The claim that the emergence of consciousness is incompatible with strong determinism presupposes a very precise definition of “emergent phenomenon.” Philosophically, some argue that emergent phenomena can coexist with a deterministic universe. Overall, alternative perspectives (e.g., phenomenology) receive little attention.

References are sometimes underdeveloped. For example, the “Free Will Index” idea is intriguing but lacks explanation regarding methodology, empirical validity, or who determines the threshold for “sufficient freedom.” Additionally, the text blurs conceptual distinctions between free will, agency, causality, and moral responsibility.

The role of chance is ambiguously integrated. This is compatible with the theory, but its exact relationship to freedom remains undefined. The analogy between neural oscillations and psychic entities (“character modules”) is metaphorical and would benefit from stronger experimental validation. The theory’s predictive or falsifiable nature is unclear. For example, when does a decision become “free”? How is feedback measured?

Crucially, social, cultural, and political dimensions of free will, which influence the “character module,” are not addressed. The notion of inner speech as evidence for free will is interesting but would benefit from confrontation with pathological cases such as aphasia or mutism. Moreover, the idea that free will could be quantified (Free Will Index) raises epistemological and ethical issues not discussed here. The text also does not resolve whether: (1) anendophasia is real and leads to free will deficits, or (2) it represents a different cognitive style, less verbal but not less free (embodied, visual, motor cognition, etc.).

Certain terms (e.g., “information destruction,” “irreversible computation,” “mentalism”) are used imprecisely without clearly defining their ontological or experimental implications. It is unclear how the subjective entropy of a neural system or the “energetic cost” of cognitive processes alone establishes freedom of action or choice. At times, the argument veers toward an ignorance-based reasoning (“we can never fully understand, therefore free will exists”), which might be regarded as weak.

The proposed link between lack of inner speech and reduced free will is plausible but remains speculative, relying on correlational data interpreted causally without direct evidence. A clearer distinction between reflective freedom (with language) and intuitive or embodied freedom (without language) is needed.

Overall, agency should not be reduced to verbalization. Likewise, the absence of inner speech (anendophasia) should be distinguished from nonverbal forms of reflection. Discussion is also needed on the measurability and objectification of free will within legal frameworks. Experimental protocols for stimulating inner speech (e.g., guided self-dialogue, inner narration) should be proposed. Finally, adding a conclusion would help to distill and summarize the main insights of this rich and complex text.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.