

Peer Review

Review of: "No Consciousness? No Meaning (and no AGI)!"

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I found this paper intellectually engaging and timely. The author takes a clear position on a question that's becoming increasingly relevant: can AI systems—particularly large language models—ever achieve genuine understanding, or are they limited to manipulating symbols without grasping meaning? The argument that meaning depends on consciousness is not new, but the way it's framed here—tying it to current enthusiasm around AGI—feels grounded and well-motivated.

One thing I appreciated is that the paper doesn't just dismiss recent advances in AI outright. It acknowledges the impressive capabilities of LLMs while carefully drawing the line between surface-level competence and deeper semantic understanding. The connection to philosophical work, especially Searle's and Harnad's, helps give the argument a solid foundation.

That said, there are areas where the piece could be strengthened. In particular, I think it would benefit from more direct engagement with views that challenge the necessity of consciousness for meaning. For example, some might argue that meaning can be grounded in action or interaction without phenomenal awareness. The paper mentions embodiment but doesn't explore those ideas in depth, and I think that leaves an opening.

I also felt that some sections repeated similar points—particularly around the syntax–semantics divide—which could be tightened a bit. The writing is clear, but trimming a few paragraphs would make the core argument more impactful.

Finally, I wasn't entirely sure how to read the author's position on AGI. Is the claim that AGI is impossible without consciousness, or just that we're currently misled in how we talk about it? That distinction matters and could be clarified toward the end.

Overall, this is a thoughtful paper that raises important concerns, especially for readers who are trying to make sense of what AI systems are actually doing. It challenges us to think carefully about the kinds of

assumptions we bring into the conversation around intelligence and meaning which is, in itself, valuable.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.