

## Peer Review

# Review of: "Free Will: Reality and Perception"

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In the present commentary, the author first revisits the debate on the existence of free will, restating defeats to some well-known accounts that lean towards accepting some form of free will. Then, the author taps into whether people generally believe in free will (regardless of its evidentiary value), connecting the prevalence of this belief to real-world implications (for science, prosocial behavior, etc.)

This is an interesting piece of scholarly work. It covers disparate previous contributions while integrating them compellingly, effectively guiding the reader through the text and convincingly outlining its main premises. It does appropriate work at explaining the core claim of many accounts on the existence of free will, as well as at presenting their primary challenges, simultaneously connecting these two to more tangible examples and/or contexts. I commend the author on articulating the duality between a “normative” angle to the question of free will (i.e., whether it exists or not) and a “descriptive” approach to the same question (i.e., whether people believe it exists, and consequences of said belief, independent of its truth value).

I think that the contribution could be refined, however, by expanding on the demarcation between the two. I acknowledge that this was probably beyond the scope of the work, but the initial presentation frames the discussion of these two dimensions as separate, yet the main text then explores them together (e.g., drawing on “descriptive” aspects to defeat “normative” accounts), sometimes making it more difficult to parse which of them is being explored. Provided that the text reads as a commentary, I take it to be a limitation of its tight/short format. It covers too much ground in not enough words; I believe the contribution could be strengthened if it were more localized, though the present version is plenty interesting and relevant as it is.

What I mean is that the abstract appears to demarcate these two guiding axes, but the text then switches between them in ways that the reader may not anticipate, and thus could struggle to understand, given

the initial focus on outlining clearly distinguishable dimensions focused on separate subsections.

5. I think that the overview the abstract provides does not allow for anticipating some of the content, or that it actually creates expectations for the reader that are not met. This can be easily solved if you do some more hand-holding and just rehash the abstract bits that you are exploring explicitly in the text. The abstract very eloquently sets apart portions of the text dedicated to “normative” and “descriptive” aspects; in the main text, however, the latter are often intermixed when the former are being discussed. Though initially it appears that the author agrees with the idea that they are questions that could be answered independently, I think it ends up being confusing how these aspects of whether people believe in it or not are relevant for answering whether it exists or not, due to their conflation in the main text.

Let me exemplify: In the text, the idea that the existence of free will would be detrimental to science mixes up the two different questions. First, rather than proving the claim above, the author instead claims something different – “science implies/requires/needs determinism” – without showing that the alternative being true would be bad for science. But the overlapping “normative” and “descriptive” considerations are more obvious when the author focuses on theories of volitional action and connects them to compatibilism. Though they could erroneously be taken to mean the existence of free will, I do not think that the author affirms that they advocate for the existence of free will in any way. I am left thinking whether these have any bearing on the question of the existence of free will: Is the author claiming that those models imply any form of compatibilism as an example that these free will beliefs would be detrimental to science?

Finally, though I also understand this to be a consequence of the ‘witty’/‘spirited’ style of the text, I would caution the author against being too one-sided in how the accounts are presented. No arguments in favor of the later defeated accounts are presented, and the author often places the burden of proving them on a third party, even if previous writings being cited as the basis for these accounts certainly include such discussion of proofs. An example: The author predicates the existence of free will on demonstrating a “third force”; I would assume that some of the cited works discuss that, yet that is not included in the text. Again, this was probably a decision intended to ensure conciseness.

Overall, this is great work, and these remarks about the structuring are quite minor! I see this as a meaningful contribution to the field, in particular the highlighting of the importance of setting apart the question of whether free will exists from the question about whether people believe in it.

## **Declarations**

**Potential competing interests:** No potential competing interests to declare.