

Review of: "Free will and the paradox of predictability"

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(Disclaimer: I have not yet completed my Ph.D., but it is on just this topic, so if the standards of Qeios accept me as a reviewer, I can certainly give feedback.)

The article does a very good, comprehensive job of explaining an argument that is simple in principle: Under determinism, prediction or modelling of a system may be impossible in cases where the prediction itself affects the system predicted, since the conjunction of the prediction, existing as part of the predicted system, may be incompatible with its truth. (This is a typical paradox of self-referentiality, like the grandfather paradox in time travel, or the barber who shaves everyone who does not shave themselves. This comparison might be useful to mention, though its absence in the article is not a flaw.) As such, this paradox does not do anything to fulfil incompatibilist requirements for free will. In addition, for similar reasons, for a system to model itself completely in a non-redundant sense is impossible. I find this argument to be quite correct, and I had already formulated almost the same one in my own unpublished work.

A minor problem lies elsewhere in the article, though it could be fixed by merely changing the wording somewhat. The author takes it as a given that free will or free will as we usually understand is indeterministic. Considering that the modern debate is largely about whether it is, that compatibilism is the majority position, that empirical studies about what lay people think of determinism and free will give completely mixed results with respect to (in)compatibilism, and that indeterminism itself poses well-known problems for free will, this gives an impression almost of ignorance. Since this question is not the topic of this article, the author could amend this by simply saying that they are aware of the debate and that it is not considered clear-cut, but that they consider the incompatibilist arguments correct for reasons they will not elaborate here. It will not do to instead act as if incompatibilism is established by the single sentence "Obviously determinism, by definition, means that any compatible definition of "free will" can bear only a superficial semblance to what we normally mean by these words, since our will is determined entirely by factors beyond our ultimate control." *Obviously* this is not obvious in the minds of philosophers on the whole or even lay people, for the reasons I mentioned above. Anyway, the actual point of the article is solid and does not depend on this detail.

While I think the paradox of predictability *can* shed some light on the question of free will and determinism, that is a case I will need to make separately later. This article's point is quite right as far as it goes: the paradox does not give any loophole in determinism allowing free will by incompatibilist standards.

