

Mind & Body Eliminativism

- **Realistic approaches** assume that minds and their content are real features of the world.
- **Interpretational approaches** assume that minds are constructs and need a pre-existing mind to construct it.
- **Eliminative approaches** assume that beliefs, desires, hopes, and fears are theoretical constructs of a theory called “folk psychology”. This theory and all its constructs are of no value and should be eliminated. The theory has to be replaced by a better theory of “neuroscience”. Neuroscience replaces the obsolete categories by a better system of neurobiological categories.

The thesis

- What eliminativism claims is that the intentional states and processes that are alluded to in our everyday descriptions and explanations of people's mental lives and their actions are *myths*.
- Like the gods that Homer invoked to explain the outcome of battles, or the witches that Inquisitors invoked to explain local catastrophes, they *do not exist*. According to eliminativists, there are no such things as beliefs or desires or hopes or fears or thoughts.
- These putative states and processes are the badly misguided posits of a seriously mistaken theory, just like phlogiston and caloric fluid and the luminiferous ether.

Theory reduction and theory replacement

There are basically two ways of making scientific progress in theory formation:

Theory reduction: The concepts of the old theory are mirrored by concepts in the new theory. The older concepts can be said to designate **nothing but** what the new concepts designate.

Examples: Temperature turns out to be nothing but mean kinetic energy of molecules; lightnings is nothing but an electrical discharge.

Theory replacement: A new theory simply replaces the older one. Sometimes, the terms of the older theory persist in language (we continue to talk of the sun's rising and setting, although we know better). to persist. Then we should say "what was called X does not exist; in fact, the effects of X can be explained by Y".

Example: What was called *caloric* in order to explain heat (an impalpable, weightless fluid) does not exist. In fact, heat can be explained as a kind of energy.

Replacing folk psychology

- 'Belief,' 'desire' and other familiar intentional state expressions are among the theoretical terms of a commonsense theory of the mind. This theory is often called 'folk psychology'.
- Folk psychology is a seriously mistaken theory. Many of the claims it makes about the states and processes that give rise to behaviour, and many of the presuppositions of those claims, are false.
- A mature science that explains how the mind/brain works and how it produces the behaviour we observe will not refer to the commonsense intentional states and processes invoked by folk psychology. Beliefs, desires and the rest will not be part of the ontology of a mature scientific psychology.
- The intentional states of commonsense psychology do not exist.

Identity theory and eliminativism

- **Identity Theory:** Mental processes can simply be taken as brain processes. Hence, we can **identify** sensations and other mental phenomena with (physical) brain processes
- **Eliminativism:** Mental states and processes do not exist. Neuroscience will not illuminate our mental categories but replace them. As a consequence, there are no mental causes, only physical causes.

Apparent violations of **Leibniz's Law**¹: After-images, for example, may be green or purple in colour, but nobody could reasonably claim that states of the brain are green or purple.

Eliminativism replaces the equation “X is identical with Y” by “what is called X is identical with Y”. Hence, after-images maybe green but not what is called after-images.

¹ If A is identical with B, then A and B must have in common all of their (non-intensional) properties.

Proponents of eliminativism

- Churchland, P.M. 1981. “Eliminative Materialism and the Propositional Attitudes,” *Journal of Philosophy*, 78..
- Churchland, P.S. 1986. *Neurophilosophy*, Cambridge, MA: Bradford Books / MIT Press.
- Churchland, P.M. 1989. “Folk Psychology and the Explanation of Human Behavior,” in Churchland, *A Neurocomputational Perspective*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

See **S. Stich’s** and **I. Ravenscroft’s** paper *What is Folk Psychology?* in the **Online Reader**

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