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This is Daniel C. Dennett's final draft before publication. It has been modified to reflect the pagination of the published version of the work.

## Why Believe in Belief?

Stephen P. Stich  
From Folk Psychology to Cognitive  
Science: The Case Against Belief  
Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983.  
278 pp. \$22.50

Review by  
Daniel C. Dennett

*Stephen P. Stich is professor of philosophy at the University of Maryland (College Park), currently on leave as visiting professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Sydney (Australia). He is editor of *Inmate Ideas*. · Daniel C. Dennett is professor of philosophy at Tufts University. He is author of *Elbow Room*.*

Behaviorists in their most virulently antimentalistic moments declared that there simply were no such things as ideas, thoughts, beliefs, intentions, dreams, and the like. Now that cognitive science flourishes and behaviorism is history (in the eyes of many), can we go back to using the everyday mentalistic terms—the terms of "folk psychology"—with a clear conscience? Should we be confident that the mental items dimly alluded to in everyday talk will soon be vindicated and credentialed as theoretical entities (states, processes, structures) within cognitive science? Surely, part of the popular appeal and fascination of cognitive science is predicated on an affirmative answer to that question; but Stephen Stich argues in this admirably lucid and well-organized book that this is not in the cards. Stich focuses his attack on the central concept of belief, claiming plausibly that if it cannot be propped up and validated, the other folk-psychological concepts will have even less chance of survival.

As Stich makes clear at the outset, this is not an idle or "merely sociological" question. Not only do we all speak the language of belief and desire when away from the office, but many of us—for instance, historians, economists, literary critics, political scientists (and maybe even physicists, when discussing observation)—rely on the literal truth of claims about the beliefs, desires, perceptions, and other mental states of people in our most serious professional formulations. Just how badly undercut would all of these disciplines be if Stich turns out to be right that "the folk psychological concept of belief ought not to play any significant role in a science aimed at explaining human cognition and behavior" (p. 5)? As badly undercut, presumably, as a biology that presupposed phlogiston or a geology that assumed the earth was not spherical.

Such a dire and revolutionary conclusion needs a forceful argument if it is to be taken seriously and not just written off as an interesting act of intellectual vandalism, and Stich presents his "case against belief" with both verve and precision, both imaginative examples and patient, scrupulous argumentation. Moreover, although Stich is writing primarily about issues that have received their primary definition at the hands of contemporary philosophers preoccupied by in-house technicalities, he manages to convey the course of the arguments very clearly and vividly without sacrificing accuracy or lapsing into impressionistic glosses. If in the end psychologists decide to ignore this set of battles, or just sit back and wait for the philosophers to reach agreement, at least they can now know exactly what the issues are, why philosophers think they are important, and why they might well want to take sides in their professional capacity.

Stich's intricate argument has two main campaigns: the analysis of the folk-psychological concept of belief (getting to know the candidate for admission into science) and the analysis of the conceptual foundations, requirements, and goals of theories in cognitive science (seeing what needs doing in a science of the mind). It can then be shown, Stich thinks, that on the best analysis of the candidate, its flaws disqualify it for the prestigious and demanding role of theoretical entity in cognitive science. These two campaigns require, then, systematic surveys of the possible interpretations of folk psychology and the possible meta-theories or methodologies of cognitive science. These surveys are so excellently done that even though I disagree with the ultimate verdicts, I recommend them highly as being sound, informative, and insightful. (My disagreements primarily concern Stich's finding more favor with a "language of thought" vision of the field than I think is warranted, but these disagreements are contentious and not proper fare for a short review.)

My recommendation must be tempered with one sobering thought. In the past, philosophers of science have often sold their colleagues in the sciences wildly idealized and unrealistic canons of procedure, bearing only the faintest resemblance to actual day-to-day science (think of operationalism and the deductive-nomological model of explanation). We have learned better, and Stich is exemplary in his knowledge of, and attention to, the actual details of working psychology, but in the end he offers us a vision of a purely "syntactic" (de-interpreted) cognitive science that will eschew all reliance on (hopelessly messy) attributions of content to mental representations. But note that there is probably not a single experiment in cognitive psychology that does not rely (implicitly or explicitly) on the literal truth of contentful belief attributions to the subject in the description of conditions of the experiment. For instance, subjects are virtually always prepared for their roles by being informed, verbally, or instructed, verbally. The validity of the experiment depends on whether or not the subjects believe or understand what they are told. I find it just as hard to believe in a cognitive science without belief as I do to believe in a religion without belief. ·