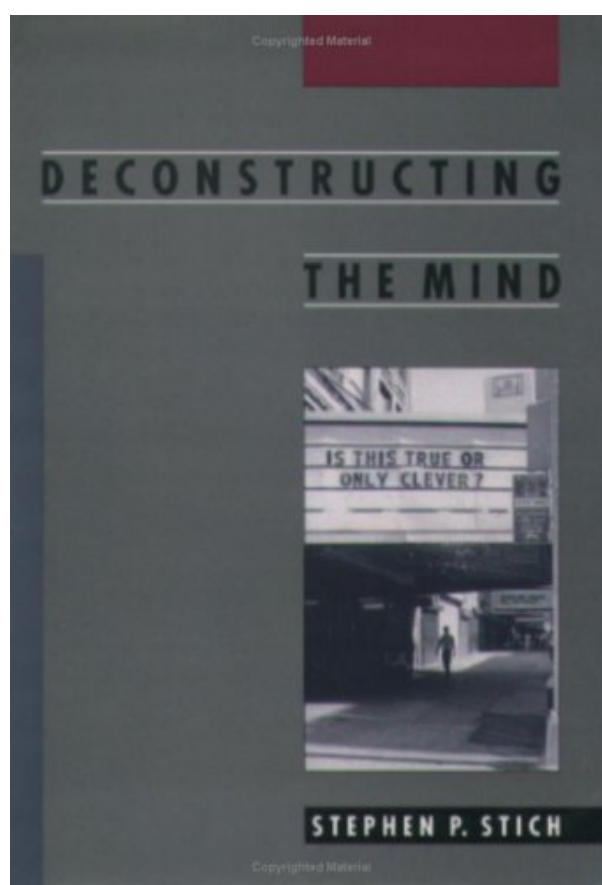
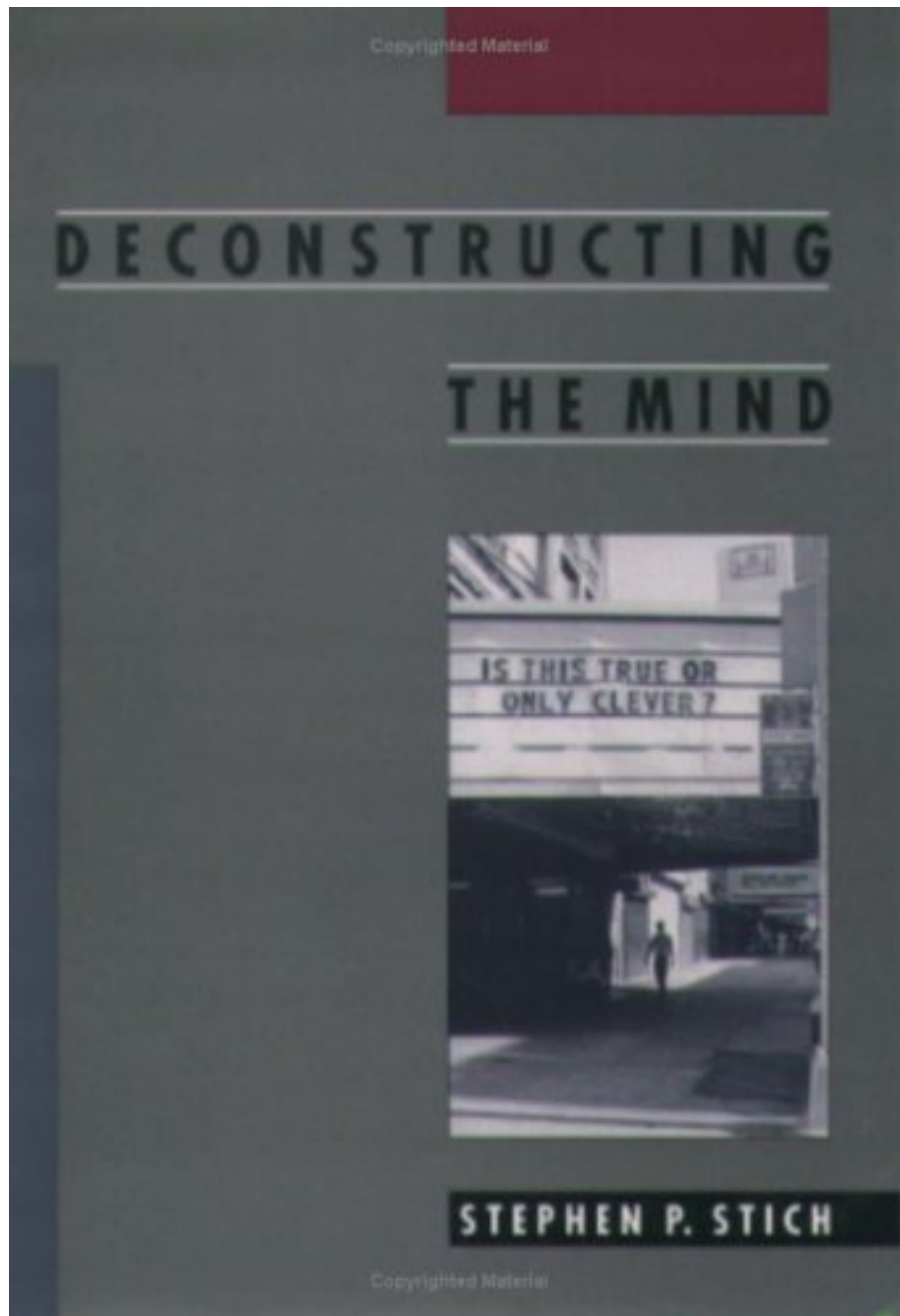


# DECONSTRUCTING THE MIND (PHILOSOPHY OF MIND) BY STEPHEN P. STICH



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## Review

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Over the last two decades, debates over the viability of commonsense psychology have been center stage in both cognitive science and the philosophy of mind. Eliminativists have argued that advances in cognitive science and neuroscience will ultimately justify a rejection of our "folk" theory of the mind, and of its ontology. In the first half of this book Stich, who was at one time a leading advocate of eliminativism, maintains that even if the sciences develop in the ways that eliminativists foresee, none of the arguments for ontological elimination are tenable. Rather than being resolved by science, he contends, these ontological disputes will be settled by a pragmatic process in which social and political considerations have a major role to play. In later chapters, Stich argues that the widespread worry about "naturalizing" psychological properties is deeply confused, since there is no plausible account of what naturalizing requires on which the failure of the naturalization project would lead to eliminativism. He also offers a detailed analysis of the many different notions of folk psychology to be found in philosophy and psychology, and argues that simulation theory, which purports to be an alternative to folk psychology, is not supported by recent experimental findings.

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**A COGNITIVE PHILOSOPHER CHANGES HIS MIND ABOUT "ELIMINATIVE MATERIALISM"**

By Steven H Propp

Stephen Stich (born 1943) is a professor of Philosophy at Rutgers University; he has also written books such as *From Folk Psychology to Cognitive Science: The Case Against Belief*, *Collected Papers, Volume 1: Mind and Language, 1972-2010*, etc.

He wrote in the first chapter of this 1996 book, "Developing and defending a philosophical position is a bit like weaving an intricate piece of fabric. When things go well, each strand of the argument adds strength and support to the others, and gradually interesting patterns begin to emerge. But when things go poorly... it

sometimes happens that the entire fabric begins to unravel. A little gap becomes a big gap, and soon there is nothing left at all. This book is about the unraveling of a philosophical position... The doctrine in question is sometimes called eliminative materialism... In its strongest form, eliminativism claims that beliefs, desires, and many of the other mental states that we allude to in predicting, explaining, and describing each other DO NOT EXIST." (Pg. 3) He adds, "So if the goal of eliminativism is to provide a deconstruction of the mind, one goal of this chapter is to deconstruct that deconstruction." (Pg. 9)

He says, "I don't think that the brief and rather breezy discussion of the previous section comes at all close to establishing my skeptical thesis about normative naturalism. Indeed, the only way to make a persuasive case for (or against) my claim that the naturalist strategy will not produce principles of ontological inference that are powerful enough to assess eliminativist arguments is to do lots of careful historical research and lots of detailed cognitive modeling. And that's a project for scholars with skills very different from mine." (Pg. 71) He adds, "I am not a thoroughgoing skeptic about the normative naturalist strategy---quite to the contrary. I think that over the centuries scientists have developed an increasingly sophisticated and powerful set of strategies for going about the business of reasoning and inquiry in various domains and that conveying these strategies from teachers to students is one of the fundamental functions of education..." (Pg. 73)

He summarizes, "The thesis we have been defending in this paper is that connectionist models of a certain sort are incompatible with the propositional modularity embedded in commonsense psychology. The connectionist models in question are those which are offered as models at the COGNITIVE level and in which the encoding of information is widely distributed and subsymbolic. In such models... there are no discrete, semantically interpretable states that play a causal role in some cognitive episodes but not others. Thus, there is in these models nothing with which the propositional attitudes of commonsense psychology can plausibly be identified." (Pg. 112)

He admits in conclusion, "I don't pretend for a moment that I can deliver the goods. But, of course, I don't have to defend my picture in detail in order to make the point that the naturalists' project might well turn out to be impossible... On the picture I am sketching, the naturalist has gotten things exactly backward. What 'legitimizes' certain properties ... and makes others scientifically suspect is that the former, but not the latter, are invoked in successful scientific theories... On my view, the jury is still out on the question of whether successful science can be constructed using intentional categories." (Pg. 199)

This book may interest students of the philosophy of mind.

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Wonderful overview of some complexities of anti-realism concerning belief

By Leonidas

I particularly enjoyed the long overview of what led Stich to accept, and later reject, antirealism concerning belief. Other chapters will also be of interest to those interested in the foundations of cognitive science and realism/antirealism concerning various 'folk psychological' notions.

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