

## Eliminative Materialism

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- Churchland, Paul M. "Eliminative Materialism and the Propositional Attitudes." *Journal of Philosophy* 78, 2 (1981): 67–90.
- . "Evaluating Our Self-Conception." *Mind and Language* 8, 2 (1993): 211–22.
- Feyerabend, Paul. "Materialism and the Mind–Body Problem." *Journal of Metaphysics* 17 (1963): 49–66.

In the philosophy of mind, "eliminative materialism" is perhaps the most radical thesis that has ever been proposed by philosophers. It is the provocative claim that our "folk psychology" – that is, our commonsense understanding of our own and other people's behavior – is not only a theory but it is a false theory and will one day be eliminated in favor of a future, neuroscientific theory of the mind. The most recent and most vociferous eliminative materialist is Paul Churchland. Churchland argues that we need to overhaul our self-conception and eliminate such mental concepts as "beliefs," "desires," "wishes," and so on. The thesis therefore has grave consequences for ethics and the social sciences (psychology, sociology, history, economics, and anthropology) and their applications (psychiatry, law, politics, etc.), since these fields employ such commonsense mental terms in their explanations. Eliminative materialism has been challenged on the grounds that it is self-refuting: the eliminative materialist, it is argued, cannot believe that "beliefs" are not true. Churchland argues that it merely

shows how deeply entrenched such terms as "belief" are in our self-understanding. Other objections to eliminative materialism include rejecting the claim that folk psychology is a theory or rejecting the view that it is false theory. In any case, successfully challenging or grappling with eliminative materialism can fundamentally change the way we think about ourselves.

Eliminative materialism is the thesis that our commonsense conception of psychological phenomena constitutes a radically false theory, a theory so defective that both the principles and the ontology of that theory will eventually be displaced, rather than smoothly reduced to a completed neuroscience. Our mutual understanding and even our introspection may then be reconstituted within the conceptual framework of completed neuroscience, a theory we may expect to be more powerful by far than the commonsense psychology which it displaces, and more substantially integrated within physical science generally. (Churchland "Eliminative Materialism," 67)

- P1. Folk psychology is a theory.  
 P2. If folk psychology is a theory, then folk psychology is fallible; that is, eliminable.  
 C1. Folk psychology is fallible; that is, eliminable (*modus ponens*, P1, P2).  
 P3. There are good grounds for believing that folk psychology is false.  
 P4. If (C1) and (P3), then folk psychology should be rejected as a false theory.  
 P5. (C1) and (P3) (conjunction).  
 C2. Folk psychology should be rejected as a false theory (and thereby eliminated) (*modus ponens*, P4, P5).