Most of us engage occasionally in the activity of explaining the behavior and mental states of our fellow humans. We hypothesize that Harold is worried because he believes that his job is in jeopardy, and that Mildred took the bus to work because she did not want to drive her car. The background against which we proceed is sometimes referred to as "folk psychology". Two salient features of folk psychology are its reliance on the concepts of "belief" and "desire", and its frequent reference to the content of beliefs and desires as part of its explanations. In short, folk psychology comprises intuitions about explanations in terms of causally efficacious intentional states.

Philosophers who have explored the nature of cognitive psychology have often noted that much progress has been made in that discipline since psychologists abandoned the behavioristic strictures associated with Watson and Skinner, and began talking about information, the content of perceptual beliefs, and other intentionalistic concepts. This has generally been taken as evidence that cognitive psychologists are doing the right thing in importing the intentional machinery of folk psychology into their theories\(^1\) or at least that psychology should make use of some of the intentional idioms associated with folk psychology, albeit perhaps in a modified form\(^2\).

1. STICH'S POSITION

Not everyone, however, has been willing to accept the close alliance of an effective cognitive psychology with the commonplace notions of folk psychology. Stephen Stich has recently offered an extended argument to show that cognitive psychology should reject folk psychology as an adequate starting point\(^3\). Folk psychology, he argues, often refers to the content of mental states and often characterizes them as quasi-linguistic entities which can be placed in correspondence to sentences (p. 28). Thus, folk psychology must rest on some version of a "mental sentence theory" which tells us how to identify the content of mental states. He then attempts to distinguish two sorts

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of "mental sentence" theories, the "narrow causal account" (hereafter referred to as "NCA") and the "content account". After explaining the distinction, Stich argues (a) that the two are not equivalent, (b) that when we do folk psychology the former must be rejected in favor of the latter (pp. 47–9), and (c) that because folk psychology relies on the content account, a mature cognitive psychology cannot be founded on folk psychology.

In other words, Stich seems to think that cognitive psychology as currently practiced, and as praised by philosophers like Fodor, is inherently schizophrenic. On the one hand, its reliance on intentional states allies it with folk psychology, and this entails, according to Stich, accepting the content account of mental sentences. On the other hand, a truly useful and well developed psychology must avoid the limitations imposed by the content account. In order to do so, Stich recommends that cognitive psychology reject the content account, which would entail a total rejection of the folk psychology which depends on it, in favor of something he calls "the syntactic theory of the mind". As its name implies, a syntactic theory does not make reference to the content of mental states (or mental sentences) at all:

cognitive theories which cleave to the STM pattern treat mental states as relations to purely syntactic mental sentence tokens, and they detail the interactions among mental states in terms of the formal or syntactic properties of these tokens (p. 9).

The interactions among these formal structures is still causal, so it is not the case that causal accounts are inimical to the basic projects of cognitive psychology. Rather, Stich wants to claim that too much attention to the content, the semantic aspect of mental sentences, imposes damaging restrictions on the scope and methods of cognitive psychology. The result of all of this is that the STM follows the NCA (now discredited as a possible foundation for folk psychology) in the way it identifies states as tokens of the same sentence type. The difference between them is that the STM does not worry about identifying the content of those tokens and types, while the NCA was explicitly introduced as a means of identifying and analyzing the semantic element of mental states. One consequence of this is that a NCA may identify a mental sentence and an utterance as tokens of the same type, whereas the STM would identify mental sentences only as tokens of some formal language that has a syntax but no semantics.