

LSU PHIL 4941 / Spring 2016 / John Protevi

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Classroom use only.

J J C Smart, "Sensations and Brain Processes," in Chalmers 2002: 60-68. Originally: *Philosophical Review* 68 (1959): 141-156.

Smart begins by sketching the behaviorist position and rejecting dualism: a report that "I am in pain" is just a sophisticated wince (behaviorism); we need to avoid saying that such a report is a genuine report of an "irreducibly psychical something" (dualism).

He wants to avoid dualism as science is allowing us to see organisms as "physico-chemical mechanisms," such that human behavior will one day be explained in mechanistic terms. (Mechanism here = efficient causality of physical elements.)

But consciousness seems to resist such physicalism: qualia / experience may be correlated with brain states, but they are over and above such states – at least so goes the dualist position.

Smart cannot accept this however: everything should be explicable in terms of physics and organization of physical elements: biology is to physics as radio-engineering is to electro-magnetism – biology studies how organisms are apparatuses that make use of physical elements: what are the physical laws of ion transfer at the synapse, for instance.

That is, the march of science works at the level of laws relating ultimately simple constituents and not that of simple constituents plus brains as emergent mechanisms allowing negative feedback. No, brains are composed of simples and the future laws will treat those simples in ways that will fully account for "higher" elements like sensations.

Now Smart admits this is a "confession of faith," but if you adopt this physicalism (or physicalism, as Strawson would put it) then *one position to take* is that there "there are, in a sense, no sensations." Rather there are just behavioral facts about human organisms, such that a sophisticated wince is the report "I am in pain."

But Smart himself has reservations about such behaviorism; he now introduces his identity theory: "why should sensations not just be brain processes of a certain sort?"

The thesis is NOT that of identity of meaning of "ache" and "brain process of sort X." So we are not trying to *translate* sensation statements into brain statements. Nor are we claiming that the logic of those statements is the same.

Rather, the thesis is that a sensation statement reports on brain processes.

In his SEP article, Smart turns to the sense / reference distinction: "I am in pain" and "brain processes of sort X are going on" have different senses, but they both refer to brain processes, just as "morning star" and "evening star" have different senses but same referent, Venus.

From SEP: "The identity theory of mind holds that states and processes of the mind are identical to states and processes of the brain. Strictly speaking, it need not hold that the mind is identical to the brain. Idiomatically we do use 'She has a good mind' and 'She has a good brain' interchangeably but

we would hardly say 'Her mind weighs fifty ounces'. Here I take identifying mind and brain as being a matter of identifying processes and perhaps states of the mind and brain. Consider an experience of pain, or of seeing something, or of having a mental image. The identity theory of mind is to the effect that these experiences just *are* brain processes, not merely *correlated with* brain processes."