

J.J.C. Smart in Defence of Place's Identity Theory of Mind

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Abstract: *In the history of philosophy different philosophers have extended their efforts to give a solution of mind body problem. In modern period Rene Descartes explained the mind –body problem from the dualistic point of view. Behaviourism, on the other hand, does not believe the existence of mind. This theory emphasises only on behaviour. But none could give a satisfactory solution of the problem. Identity theory of mind also attempted to give a solution from the materialistic point of view. This theory is developed by U.T.Place, J.J.C. Smart, H. Feigl and some other thinkers. This theory came into existence as a reaction to the behaviourism. The main thesis of the theory is - the mental states and processes and the brain states and processes are identical. Before the establishment of his own theory Smart tries to answer some of the possible objections that might be raised by the critics against Place's theory. But this does not mean that Smart accepts Place's theory to the full extent. Rather he claims that his arguments for identity theory is very much different from that of Place and this he very sharply stated in his article "Sensations and Brain Processes" (1959). In this paper I shall try to explore some possible objections that might be raised by the critics against Place's theory as well as answers given by Smart and subsequently tries to show the issues on which Smart agrees with Place. Finally, efforts will be made to highlight Smart's difference from that of Place and his own view on the Identity Theory.*

Key Words: *After-image, Brain processes, Identity, Occam's razor, Nomological danglers.*

I. Introduction

Identity Theory of mind came into existence as a reaction to the behaviourism. Originally this theory was initiated by E. G. Boring. But due to some reasons Boring's thesis did not get recognition. After a long duration this theory was introduced by U.T.Place, J. J. C. Smart, H. Feigl and others. J. J. C. Smart developed the identity theory in his paper "Sensations and Brain Processes". In this paper he claims that his argument takes departure from U. T. Place's argument that he put forwarded in his article "Is Consciousness a Brain Process"? Smart admits that he is lucky enough to have the opportunity to discuss Place's thesis in different universities in the United States and Australia and tries to answer the objections to Place's thesis although Place himself did not consider these objections.

II. Smart in defence of Place

Smart mentions the possible objections that may come from critics against the identity theory narrated by Place. With the intention to make Place's theory unobjectionable form he also answered these questions. Among these, the following are the important one.

1) An illiterate man may not know anything about neurophysiology but he can perfectly talk about after-image, or how things look or feel to him or he can talk about his aches and pains. Thus, when someone describes his sensations, the *things* he is talking about cannot be processes in the brain.

In reply to this objection Smart says that a contingent statement of the form "A is identical with B" can be there and that something is an A may be known by a person without knowing that it is also B. Without knowing about brain processes an illiterate peasant might well be able to talk about his sensations as without knowing anything about electricity he can talk about lightning.

2. To say that when someone has certain kind of sensation there is a certain kind of process in his brain is only a contingent fact. But it may be the case that in connecting the mental processes with the going on in our hearts present physiological theories will be out of date as we find in the case of ancient theory, although there is highest degree of impossibility of such an event. Thus to report a sensation is not a report of brain process.

In reply Smart says that this objection means that having an after-image does not mean that someone has such and such brain process. But the fact is that what one reports is brain process. Two propositions – 'I see lightning' and 'I see an electric discharge' – do not mean the same thing. But there is a logical possibility that one day the electrical discharge account of lightning might be given up. But this logical possibility, according to Smart, is highly unlikely. Moreover, the meaning of the 'Evening Star' and the meaning of the 'Morning Star' do not mean the same but these two stars are one and the same thing. Thus Smart believes that the proposition that 'the Evening Star and the Morning Star are one and the same thing' is a contingent one.

Smart apprehends that some of the apparent strength of the second objection a 'Fido-Fido theory of meaning according to which the meaning of a word is an object it stands for. If it were the case that the meaning of an expression is what the expression named then it is obvious that there are different meanings of 'sensation' and 'brain-process' and as such these two terms cannot name one and the same thing.

3) The critics of the identity theory may claim that the above two objections, if fails to prove that sensations are something over and above brain processes, at least prove that the qualities of both sensations and brain processes are not same. The qualities of the former are something over and above the latter. We call 'morning Star' and also call 'Evening Star' and identify them. We call the morning star 'Morning Star' because it has the property of being seen in the morning. Similarly, the Evening star is called 'evening star' because it is seen in the evening. Again, apart from these properties some other properties might be there, such as, 'that of being yellow flash' and these are logically distinct from the former.

In reply to the above possible objection Smart says that it is the strongest one among others with which he has to deal. In this connection he refers property of 'being a yellow flash' and says that this property might lie outside the physicalist frame work and this laying is inevitable. In this connection his suggestion is like this, "when a person says 'I see a yellow-orange after-image,' he is saying like this '*there is something going on which is like what is going on when I have my eyes open, am awake, and there is an orange illuminated in good light in front of me, that is, when I really see an orange*'"¹

Smart believes that to answer the question No.3 is not as easy as it seems to be. The reply of this question depends on the ability to report the likeness of two things but not their respects in which these are alike. By saying this he is also in doubt whether this answer is correct or not and that is why he deals this problem in his subsequent works.

4) The brain-process occurs in physical space but the after-image is not and therefore it is not correct to say that after-image is brain-process.

Smart says that his argument is not like that the after-image is a brain-process rather experience of having an after-image is a brain-process. Our introspective report is about the *experience*. Again, objection may come from the critic that an after-image is yellow-orange but there is nothing yellow-orange in the brain even if a surgeon looks into it. Smart says that here the description is about the experience of seeing yellow-orange and this experience itself is not a yellow-orange something.

5) There is an obvious sense to say that a molecular movement in the brain is swift or slow, straight or circular but the *experience* of seeing something yellow having such characteristics make no sense.

Smart's reply is that he never intended that experiences could be swift or slow, straight or circular. He never claims that the meaning of the term 'experience' and 'brain-process' are same or even these two terms have the same logic. In this connection he says,

"All that I am saying is that 'experience' and 'brain-process' may in fact refer to the same thing, and if so we may easily adopt a convention (which is not a change in our present rules for the use of experience words but an addition to them) whereby it would make sense to talk of an experience in terms appropriate to physical processes."²

6) Another possible objection Smart anticipates is that sensations of someone are purely private to him. These are personal to him. No other persons have it. He is epistemically in a privileged position to access it. But such privilege cannot be ascribed in the case of brain processes which are rather publicly observable. It is not wrong on the part of someone who says that he sees a yellowish- orange after image. There is nothing verbal mistake made in that case. But the same is wrong when says about brain process. It might be the case that the same brain process is observed by two or more people but the inner experience of someone cannot be reported by anyone except the experienter.

Smart says that the logic of the language of introspective reports and the logic of the language of the reports for the material processes are not the same. He admits that the brain process theory has not improved adequately and widely accepted yet and that is why we have no criteria in our hands to say that Smith has an experience of such-and-such sort. Until we get such a fully developed theory we will have to depend on Smith's introspective reports to understand his experience. Thus the rule of language we have adopted normally is the reports of Smith about his experiences.

7) Someone can imagine that he himself is turned into stone and yet he possesses the capacity to imagine, have the feeling of pains, aches and other things.

Smart's reply is that there cannot be any objection to imagine that the electrical theory of lightning is false and it is some sort of purely optical phenomenon. Or it can be imagined that lightning is not an electrical discharge. Similarly, there is no objection to imagine that the Evening Star and the Morning Star are not one and the same object. But actually lightning is an electrical discharge and the Morning Star and the Evening Star

1. Quoted from *The Philosophy of Mind, Classical Problems/Contemporary Issues*, Edited by Brian Beakley and Peter Ludlow , P-248.

2. *Ibid.*, p-249.

are one and the same object. Critics' objection shows that the meaning of the term 'experience' and the meaning of the term 'brain process' are not same. Their objection does not reveal that an experience is, in fact, not a brain process.

Smart's Claim

Smart claims that his own paper (1959) successfully answered the objections of Place's paper and presents his thesis in a more nearly unobjectionable form. He also claims that this paper is meant to supplement the thesis 'The 'Mental' is the 'Physical'' propounded by Feigl. Feigl's paper, according to Smart, argues for much the same thesis as propounded by Place.

Smart explains a report of a visual experience in the following way. If a person reports that he has an after-image which is roundish, blurry-edge in shape, yellowish towards its edge and towards its centre it is orange. In this reporting the person is reporting nothing. In that case the person is actually expressing some sort of temptation and that temptation is to say that there is on the wall a roundish yellowy orange patch. Similarly, when someone reports a pain, he is not really reporting anything; he is doing a sophisticated sort of wince. Smart admits that instead of a pain he prefers to discuss an after image, because pain brings the notion of 'distress' which is irrelevant to this purpose. According to him, to say that 'a person is in pain' is to say that he is in certain agitation condition as because the term 'pain' entails 'distress'. But to say that 'I am in pain' is partly to report and that report is physical something and as such it is irreducible. Thus regarding after- image, Smart wishes to resist the suggestion that it is a report of something physical and as such irreducible.

Smart believes that science is developing day by day and this development will help us to see the organisms as physico-chemical mechanisms. He also claims that day will come when, with the mechanistic terms, the behaviour of man himself will be explicable. It is pertinent to note that in scientific explanation we find the talking about complex arrangements of physical constituents in the world and nothing else. But Smart says that even if all is explicable in terms of physical arrangement, consciousness cannot be so explicable. According to him, to describe fully the happenings of events that are going on in a man, the physical processes in his tissue, glands nervous system and so forth are not sufficient. In that case his states of consciousness: his visual, auditory and tactual sensations, his aches and pains are also necessary. It is not correct to say that these are correlated with the brain processes because nothing can be correlated with itself. Thus to say that these are correlated with the brain processes implies that these are something over and above the brain processes. It is possible to correlate footprints with burglars but Bill Sikes the burglar cannot be correlated with Bill Sikes the burglar. Thus Smart's conclusion is that sensation and states of consciousness are one kind of things which are not included in physicalist picture. But its exclusion does not demand for existence of things other than physical things. He believes that everything except the occurrence of sensations should be explicable in terms of physics. Following Feigl, Smart says that such sensations would be 'nomological danglers'.

Smart firmly believes that sensations are brain processes. But he does not accept the thesis that the meaning of 'after-image' or 'ache' and 'brain process of sort x' are same. He rather believes that 'after - image' or 'ache' is a report of a process and that process happens to be a brain process. He stated that this does not mean sensation statements are translatable into statements about brain processes. It is also not a claim that the logic of sensation statement and brain processes statements are one and the same thing. Nevertheless, the report of sensation statement is in fact a report about a brain process. Over and above brain processes, there is nothing called sensations. Smart compares sensations and brain processes with that of nation and its citizens. We find that there is no existence of nation without its citizens although the logic of nation statements and the logic of citizen statements are very different. As the nation statement cannot be translated into citizen statement, so the sensation statement cannot be translated into brain processes statement. But here Smart does not want to assert that the relation of sensation statement to brain process and the relation of nation statement to citizen statement are very alike. Here he draws one's attention to the truth that there is ontological commitments to citizens only as it is the case with the brain processes.

It is to be noted here that Smart, at least in the beginning, followed Place in applying the Identity Theory only to those mental concepts considered resistant to behaviourist treatment, notably sensations. He attempts to identify sensations with states of the central nervous system and that is why this limited version of Mind - Brain Type Identity also became known as "Central - State Materialism". This analysis of sensation - reports was the main concern of Smart. He analysed this sensation report into as 'topic - neutral' language. His topic neutral language can be roughly stated like this 'there is something going on which is like what is going on when my eyes are open, am awake, and there is something green illuminated in front of me.' Thus for adopting the thesis that sensations are processes in the brain Smart has given explanation and by this explanation he was diverged from Place. Smart points out that to decide between materialism and epiphenomenalism, there is no conceivable experiment. He maintains that the statement 'sensations are brain processes' is not a straight out a statement of a scientific hypothesis. It should be adopted on other grounds. In support of this claim he cited

Occam's razor. He also maintains that even if the brain process theory and dualism are equally consistent with the facts, the former has an edge in virtue of its simplicity and explanatory utility.

Since Smart cited Occam's razor in support of his claim, it is necessary to have an explanation of this principle. Occam's razor is a principle attributed to the 14th century English logician and Franciscan friar, William Ockham. This principle states that in explaining any phenomena we should make as few assumptions as possible and at the same time we should eliminate those that make no difference in the observable predictions of the explanatory hypothesis or theory. In Latin, the principle is often expressed as the *lex parsimoniae* meaning 'law of parsimony', or 'law of economy' or 'law of succinctness'. This roughly means that entities must not be multiplied beyond necessity. An alternative version of this saying is that plurality should not be posited without necessity.

In his article "Sensations and Brain Processes" Smart claimed Occam's razor as the basis for his preference of the mind-brain identity theory over the dualistic theory of mind and body. It is the claim of dualists that there are two kinds of substances that we find in the universe. These are: physical and mental or non physical. In contrast to this dualistic theory, the identity theorists claim that everything is physical, including consciousness.

III. Conclusion

From the above explanation we find that Smart has very intelligently answered the possible objections that may come from the critics of Place's identity theory and presented his thesis in a more nearly unobjectionable form. But from this it is not correct to conclude that Smart only reiterated what Place said. Rather he has his own view on this issue which he outlined in his article *Sensations and Brain Processes*. He defended Place's theory only to resist behaviourism.

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