

Objections to Identity

Below are six of the objections to Identity Theory considered by J. J. C. Smart in his essay "Sensations and Brain Processes." Formulate replies to these objections that a materialist could make. You may consult Smart's essay, and use his replies if you wish, but you must use your own words to formulate your reply. Also feel free to formulate an original response.

Objection 1. Any illiterate peasant can talk perfectly well about his after-images, or how things look or feel to him, or about his aches and pains, and yet he may know nothing whatever about neurophysiology. A man may, like Aristotle, believe that the brain is an organ for cooling the body without any impairment of his ability to make true statements about his sensations. Hence the things we are talking about when we describe our sensations cannot be processes in the brain.

Objection 2. It is only a contingent fact (if it is a fact) that when we have a certain kind of sensation there is a certain kind of process in our brain. Indeed it is possible, though perhaps in the highest degree unlikely, that our present physiological theories will be as out of date as the ancient theory connecting mental processes with goings on in the heart. It follows that when we report a sensation we are not reporting a brain-process.

Objection 3. Even if Objections 1 and 2 do not prove that sensations are something over and above brain-processes, they do prove that the *qualities* of sensations are something over and above the qualities of brain-processes. That is, it may be possible to get out of asserting the existence of irreducibly psychic processes, but not out of asserting the existence of irreducibly psychic *properties*. [Here I deviate somewhat from Smart's example: Suppose you stare at a lightbulb, then look away and see a bluish patch. When you report seeing a bluish patch, you may be reporting a brain process, but the color and shape of the after-image cannot be properties of the brain process. They are mental properties of your experience.]

Objection 4. The [rectangular blue] after-image [from objection 3] is not in physical space. The brain-process is. So the after-image is not a brain-process.

Objection 5. It would make sense to say of a molecular movement in the brain that it is swift or slow, straight or circular, but it makes no sense to say this of the experience of seeing something rectangular and blue [like the after-image in objection 3].

Objection 6. Sensations are private, brain processes are public. If I sincerely say, "I see a yellowish-orange after-image" and I am not making a verbal mistake, then I cannot be wrong. But I can be wrong about a brain-process. The scientist looking into my brain might be having an illusion. Moreover, it makes sense to say that two or more people are observing the same brain-process but not that two or more people are reporting the same inner experience.