The Identity Theory

Smart, “Sensations and Brain Processes”

Like Place, Smart holds the Identity Theory.

I. Smart’s argument for the Identity Theory

1. There are sensations (e.g. pains, after-images and so on).
2. Either sensations are merely correlated with (but not identical to) physical states/processes or sensations are physical states/processes.
3. All states are physical states/processes.
4. Therefore, it is not the case that sensations are merely correlated with (but not identical to) physical states/processes.
5. Therefore, sensations are physical states/processes.

The crucial premise is (3). Occam’s Razor seems to be motivating (3). How so?

II. Objections to the Identity Theory

i. The things we are talking about when we describe our sensations are not states of the brain given that we may describe the former without any knowledge of the latter.

ii. It might turn out that our present scientific theory of mind/brain identity is false. So, sensations may not be brain states after all.

iii. We at least have to admit that properties of brain states/processes are distinct properties. That is, we have to admit property-dualism.

iv. Consider an after-image. After-images are not in physical space. Brain states are in physical space. Therefore, after-images (and other sensations) are not brain states/processes.

v. A brain process can be described as swift or slow. But the experience of seeing something orange cannot be so described. Therefore the experience is not a brain process.

vi. Sensations are private and infallible. Brain states/processes are not private and infallible. Therefore, sensations are not brain states/processes.

vii. It is conceivable that I could turn to stone and still have sensations.

viii. The ‘beetle in a box’ objection.