

Chapter 1.2 : Soul, mind and body

What does it mean to speak of the soul, the mind and the body?

Are the human mind and the human body separate and distinct from each other?

How coherent is the view that the mind is more than just the result of chemical reactions in the brain?

Key Terms

Soul: often, but not always, understood to be the non-physical essence of a person

Consciousness: awareness or perception

Substance: a subject which has different properties attributed to it

Dualism: the belief that reality can be divided into two distinct parts, such as good and evil, or physical and non-physical

Substance dualism: the belief that the mind and the body both exist as two distinct and separate realities

Scepticism: a questioning approach which does not take assumptions for granted

Materialism: the belief that only physical matter exists, and that the mind can be explained in physical terms as chemical activity in the brain

Reductive materialism: otherwise known as identity theory – the view that mental events are identical with physical occurrences in the brain

Category error: a problem of language that arises when things are talked about as if they belong to one category when in fact they belong to another

Specification requirements

- the philosophical language of soul, mind and body in the thinking of Plato and Aristotle
- metaphysics of consciousness, including:
 - substance dualism
 - materialism

Introduction

One of the central questions in philosophy is the question of what it means to be human. This is a metaphysical question. Metaphysics is the branch of philosophy which deals with huge questions about what exists, and the essential nature of things that exist. The existence of God, for example, is a metaphysical issue because it is asking whether God does, or does not, belong in the set of 'things that exist'. The question of what it means to be human is also a metaphysical question, because it addresses issues of the essential nature of human beings as existent things. Are we simply physical, made of material that develops and grows and eventually dies according to the workings of biological processes, and no more? Or do we also have a mind or a **soul**, separate from our physical bodies, which gives us a special kind of essence? These questions are important because our answers to them have significant implications. If everything about us, including our **consciousness**, is nothing more than physical, then it ought to be possible, at least in theory, for us to produce a physical machine which also had consciousness and which could think and feel just as we can. If we are nothing more than physical, then ideas about life after death can be ruled out, as there would be nothing to continue after the death of the body. However, if there is an important part of us which is non-physical, then there are important implications here too. Questions are raised about what exactly that non-physical part is, how it is attached to a particular physical body, whether it is capable of existing separately once the physical body has died and whether it gives human beings some kind of unique status.

In the history of philosophy, there have been thinkers who have argued that the mind and the body are very distinct, separate things. Plato and Descartes are particularly renowned for this view, and it is an idea which has been very influential on Christian thought. However, others such as Ryle and Dawkins have argued that there is nothing 'extra' beyond the physical, and that there is no need to imagine some kind of 'ghost in the machine' in order to understand what it is to be human.

The philosophical language of soul, mind and body

People use the term 'soul' in a range of ways, not always precisely, which can make it difficult for others to grasp exactly what the word means to religious believers. Some people use the terms 'soul' and 'spirit' interchangeably; others talk of the 'body and soul' or 'body and mind' as if the two phrases mean the same thing. However, when people speak of someone having 'a good mind' they mean something very different from when they say someone 'has a good soul'; and to add to the confusion, they talk of people being in 'in good spirits' and mean something different again. This blurring of the use of these terms can often make discussion of the soul, mind and body difficult and confusing.

The soul

Although the word ‘soul’ can be used with a range of meanings in different contexts, in a philosophical sense it is mainly used as meaning the same thing as ‘self’, to refer to the subject of mental states and of spiritual experience. If someone says ‘I had a panic attack in the supermarket’ or ‘when I read that poem, I felt God was speaking to me directly’, the soul would be the ‘I’, the essential person who experienced the mental and spiritual events. Philosophers often refer to the ‘self’ rather than the ‘soul’, as the soul has religious connotations which the philosopher might not want to include in the discussion. However, ‘self’ has a wider meaning than ‘soul’, as the idea of ‘self’ can include the mind and the body as one coherent person, whereas the term ‘soul’ is usually used to mean one particular aspect of the self: the part that (according to many religious believers) is capable of having a relationship with God and which carries the possibility of living after death, perhaps without any further need for a physical body. For some thinkers, the soul is the most important part of human nature, given by God to enable people to develop a relationship with him and to exist in the presence of God after this earthly life. For others, the whole idea of a ‘soul’ makes no sense: the physical, conscious person is simply a sophisticated animal with an impressive range of abilities which disappear at the end of the life of the body.

In the ancient Greek traditions of Plato and Aristotle, there were two very different and distinct understandings of the soul. Plato put forward an idea of a soul which is immortal and which can exist independently of the body, whereas Aristotle’s ideas about the soul were completely different.

Plato on the soul

For Plato, the soul and the body were two separate entities. The body is the temporary, physical, material aspect of the person, and the soul is the essential (in the sense of being the essence of the person), immaterial aspect. In Plato’s understanding, the soul is temporarily united with a physical body, but can leave the body and move on. To use a modern analogy, the soul might be seen as the driver of a car, who inhabits the car for a while and then gets out and goes off elsewhere.

In his work *Phaedo*, Plato puts into the mouth of Socrates his beliefs about the immortality of the soul. Plato wanted to show that Socrates had not failed in his mission to educate people, even though he had been executed, because his soul would continue to immortality after death. It would be released from the body and able to renew its contemplation of the Form of the Good. Socrates argued that the soul continues to live on in a mode where it still has thought and intelligence. After death, it is undisturbed by the distractions of constant bodily demands so that it can reach its highest state. Socrates also argued that the soul necessarily must continue living, because life is the essence of what a soul is. The soul animates the person by giving it life; so if a soul is a life-giving essence, then it was obvious (to Socrates and Plato) that it must always have life. It would be contradictory for a soul to die.

Plato gives (through the mouthpiece of Socrates) arguments to justify the view that the soul is immortal.

He argues that every quality comes into being from its own opposite, or at least depends on its opposite, to have any existence at all. Something is 'big' because there are smaller things; something else is 'bright' because there are duller things; something else again is 'hot' because there are colder things. Qualities, then, depend on their status relative to each other. Plato uses this notion to draw the conclusion that, therefore, life comes from death, and death comes from life, in an endless chain of birth, death and rebirth.

Plato also uses an argument from knowledge to support his belief in the immortality of the soul. In the dialogue 'Meno', a slave-boy with no education is given a geometry puzzle to solve. Through questioning, the boy is able to work out the answer to the problem, which (to Plato) illustrated that the boy must have been using knowledge he already had, from before birth, because his status in life meant that he could not have had the education necessary to help him solve such problems. Plato thought that our intuitions were evidence of knowledge attained before birth. This, to Plato, showed that our souls had once lived in the world of perfect Forms.

Plato was convinced that people have eternal souls which connect them to the world of the Forms

When Plato wrote about the soul, he used the metaphor of a chariot being pulled by two horses. The two horses are 'appetite' and 'emotion', basic needs which pull us along and motivate us; they are controlled by the charioteer 'reason', who holds the reins and makes sure that the appetite and the emotion work together in a rational direction. Without the guiding hand of reason, we can be led astray: for example, if we let our emotions get the better of us, we could say or do something inappropriate, and if we let our appetites take the lead then we can find ourselves over-indulging in pleasures rather than making progress. People who let reason guide the other aspects of their mental lives are wise.

See Chapter 1.1 for more on role of reason in Plato's thought.

Plato's view of the soul is called a 'tripartite view' as he saw the soul consisting of these three elements, appetite, emotion and reason.

For Plato, because the soul is immortal and the body very clearly is not, the soul and the body had to be two different and distinct things. He did not question the means by which the mind and the body might be joined together and work together in the same person, in the way that Descartes did in the seventeenth century, but he did consider how an immortal soul might become attached to a particular individual person's temporary physical body.

At the end of *Republic*, Plato introduces a story known as the 'Myth of Er', in which he raises some ideas about the immortality of the soul. In the story, told through the mouth of Socrates of course, a soldier called Er died on the battlefield. At least, he appeared to die, but ten days later, when the fighting was over and it was safe for the bodies to be recovered for funerals, there was no sign that Er's body had decomposed at all. On the twelfth day, when Er's body had been placed on the funeral pyre, he

suddenly came back to life, and was able to tell everyone all that he had experienced of the afterlife.

Er told his listeners that, once he had died, he set out on a journey in which he encountered judges who rewarded and punished the souls of those who had died. Those who had lived morally good lives went upward into a place where they were rewarded for all their good deeds; those who had been immoral were punished with pain equal to ten times the amount of pain they had inflicted on earth. Some had committed crimes so bad that they could never be released from underground punishment. Er also witnessed the way in which souls choose for themselves a new life on earth, either animal or human, before being reborn. Sometimes, those who had been rewarded chose new lives of great power and dictatorship, without considering the sorts of deeds they might have to commit in order to achieve such power. Those who had been punished sometimes chose more wisely, having learned from their experiences. Only the philosophical, who understood the importance of choosing a new life of peace and justice, benefited from the cycle of life and death. The others simply ricocheted between happiness and misery, reward and punishment.

According to many scholars, the 'Myth of Er' is meant to demonstrate the necessity of seeking wisdom through philosophy in order for the soul to benefit. They come to understand what makes a good life and leads to reward, and what to avoid. Each person has a conscious choice to make about the next life, and therefore carries all the responsibility for it.

Once the souls had chosen their destinies, they were given some special liquid to drink, which made them forget their previous life and their afterlife experiences; except for Er, who was freed to return to his funeral pyre and educate his friends.

Plato, when considering the nature of the soul, was thinking in the context of his dualist understanding of reality. He was trying to work out what was temporary and subject to change, and what was eternal; he was also exploring how humans can relate to the world of the Forms, and how reason can give the best route to certain knowledge and wisdom, as part of his argument that society would be better run by philosopher-kings.

Aristotle on the soul

Aristotle disagreed with Plato. Aristotle was asking himself questions which were rather different; while Plato was interested in the best ways to run society and the importance of philosophical reasoning for the gaining of wisdom, Aristotle was more interested in this physical world and the things that could be learned about it by scientific, empirical observation. When Aristotle considered the nature of the soul, it was in the context of trying to discover the essence of things. What is it, that makes us essentially human? What distinguishes a living person from a dead one?

Plato thought that the soul was distinct from the body, a dualist view

In Aristotle's view, the soul was a '**substance**', which was a term he used in his own way to mean the 'essence' or 'real thing'. Aristotle saw a problem: how can we say that the newborn baby, the toddler, the child, the adolescent, the adult, and the elderly man are all the 'same person'? His answer to this question, one which has puzzled philosophers for centuries, was that the physical body is in a continual state of change, but the 'substance' remains the same, in terms of the continuing identity. This continuing identity, or 'essence' was what Aristotle understood to be the soul, for which he used the term 'psyche'.

Aristotle is often considered to be the founder of psychology as a science, although the topics he chose to investigate are quite different from those chosen by modern psychologists. Modern psychologists concentrate on consciousness, subconsciousness and various mental states, whereas Aristotle turned his attention to giving an account of the features which distinguish the essence of living things.

Aristotle took a much more materialistic attitude towards the soul than Plato had. He considered it to be not just some kind of invisible part of the person, but include the matter and structure of the body along with its functions and capabilities – its 'form', using the word 'form' in the same sense that he uses it when talking about a 'formal cause'. The soul is that which gives a living thing its essence, so that it is not just matter but has all the capabilities and characteristics that it needs in order to be what it is. His starting point for thinking about the soul is still used in modern biology classes, where students are taught the characteristics of living things: that they feed, move, breathe, grow, excrete, reproduce and are sensitive. Living things are distinguished from non-living things by what they can do, their capabilities, and it is these capabilities that for Aristotle define the 'soul'.

In his treatise *De Anima* ('On the Soul') he began by saying that 'the soul is in some sense the principle of animal life'. His idea of the soul, or 'psyche' was that it is that which distinguishes a living thing from a dead thing.

Aristotle thought that there were various kinds of soul. Plants have a vegetative or 'nutritive' soul, in that they have the capabilities to get nourishment for themselves and to ensure the reproduction of the species, but they have no ability to reason or to make plans. Animals have 'perceptive' souls, because they have senses with which to experience the world around them, and they react to different stimuli. They have enough intelligence to distinguish between pleasure and pain. Humans have a higher degree of soul because they have the ability to reason, and they can tell right from wrong. For Aristotle, then, the soul was not some separate entity, distinct from the body. The soul is the capacities that the body has, to do whatever it is meant to do. In this way, Aristotle's thinking about the soul is linked with his ideas about causality; the soul is that which gives the matter its form, its efficiency and its final purpose (telos).



Aristotle used the analogy of wax with a stamp in it to illustrate his idea that the soul could not be separated from the body

Aristotle believed that the soul was inseparable from the body, and that the soul was that which gives the body its 'essence'

Aristotle tries to explain what he means by giving some examples.

“ ‘Suppose that a tool, e.g., an axe, were a natural body, then being an axe would be its essence, and so its psyche [soul]; if this disappeared from it, it would have ceased to be an axe, except in name ...’ ”

Aristotle, 'De Anima.'

In *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, ed.
Jonathon Barnes, 1995, p. 172

Apply your knowledge

1. What do you think Aristotle would say would be the soul, or psyche, of a pen, or a chair, or a chimney, if we could imagine that they had souls?
2. What do you think is the difference between a living and a non-living thing – how would you explain it?
3. Both Plato and Aristotle would agree that, at the point of death, the soul leaves the body. Explain in your own words the different things that each of them meant by this.

The soul of an axe, if we can imagine it to be a living thing, then, would be its capacity to chop. A toy axe is not a 'real' axe, because it does not have the capacity to chop wood, so it is just called an axe for the purposes of a child's imagination; it is only an axe in name.

Aristotle also gives the example of an eye, where, if it were an animal, its soul would be its capacity to see. He says that if the eye is unable to see then it is nothing but matter, 'no more than the eye of a statue or painted figure'. He did not think that inanimate objects actually had souls, as he thought that souls distinguished living things from non-living things, but he used non-living examples to clarify what he meant, by asking us to imagine what their souls would be if they were living beings.

For Aristotle, the soul was inseparable from the living body in the same way that the shape stamped into a block of wax is inseparable from the matter of the wax.

The capacity to chop could not have an existence on its own, without the axe, and the capacity to see could not exist without the eye.

Because Aristotle believed that the soul and the body could not be separated, his view did not allow for the idea that the soul could survive

the death of the body in any way. His view was a much more materialist one than Plato's, and has been very influential, especially among non-religious philosophers. However, as his thought developed, Aristotle began to wonder if perhaps the reason might be able to survive even when the body had died; but his thoughts on the nature of human reason and the extent to which the reason requires a physical body are among the most difficult and obscure of his writings. He did not seem to think that the reason could continue in the sense of it still being an individual personality, and it is not likely that Aristotle believed people could live after death in any personal sense.

“ To attain any assured knowledge of the soul is one of the most difficult things in the world. ”

Aristotle, Book 1, *De Anima*

Consciousness as a mystery: the mind–body problem

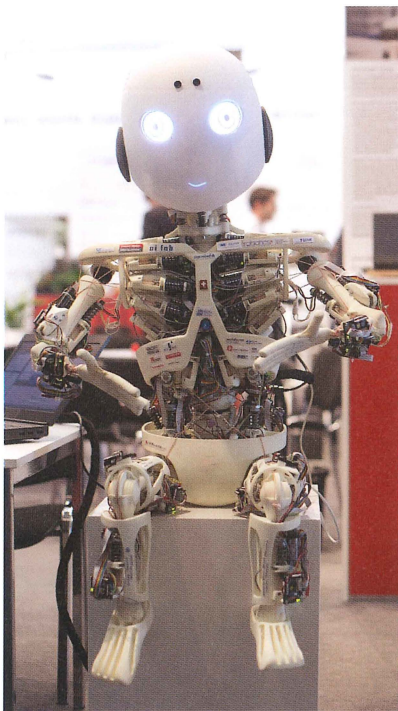
Machines are increasingly sophisticated as technology advances. Not only can they perform some tasks more quickly and efficiently than humans, but they are also becoming more adaptive and responsive. People use cameras with a setting which adjusts automatically to the light levels without the photographer needing to work them out; cars can have parking and reversing sensors to judge the proximity of other objects to help the driver avoid hitting things; ventilators for premature babies can automatically adjust the pressure they use so that the new baby is encouraged to learn to breathe independently. We often use figurative terms that suggest such machines are in some way thoughtful: they ‘know’ the right light setting, they ‘perceive’ obstacles, they ‘judge’ the pressure. However, most people believe that machines are fundamentally different from human beings. People have consciousness whereas machines have nothing more than sophisticated design and programming. The camera might adjust its aperture, but it does not really ‘see’ the scene around it as a sense perception, and it has no ‘mind’s eye’ where it knows in advance the effect it would like to achieve in the photograph. The reversing sensor might set off a warning noise when the car is approaching a wall but it does not really ‘feel’ alarmed or anticipate that the car might be damaged and hope to avoid this. The ventilator might regulate its functions but it does not ‘know’ about the baby to which it is attached, nor care whether the baby survives.

People seem different from machines because we know what it is like to have consciousness. We don’t just respond to stimuli in a rudimentary way, as plants do and many non-human animals do; we are also subjective and self-aware. We can talk in terms of ‘I have a mind’ and ‘I have a body’, and we mean something by the word ‘I’. We even talk about our own thoughts

Most people think that humans are different from machines because humans have consciousness whereas machines do not

Think question

Do you think that machines could ever be developed to a point where they had minds like ours? What reasons would you give to support your opinion?



Roboy is a robot. While one day his inventors hope he will be able to help humans with daily tasks, he does not have consciousness

and feelings as if somehow we are witnesses to them as conscious selves; we don't simply feel happy or feel frightened, but are aware of ourselves feeling emotions and sensations; we know we enjoy feeling happy, and we can remember the last time we felt frightened, and imagine what it might feel like to have an experience we have not yet had. When other people tell us about their 'inner lives', we can relate to the experiences they describe.

The nature of consciousness remains a great mystery to scientists and to philosophers. How, if at all, can we explain our 'inner lives' in scientific terms? Do we all experience consciousness in the same way?

Some people, then, argue that machines differ from humans because machines lack the consciousness that humans have. They might extend this to argue that everything machines can do is capable of being explained in physical terms, whereas in contrast, human beings are more than just physical and there are some aspects of human existence which cannot be explained physically. As well as being made of matter, human beings also possess a faculty known as a 'mind' which enables us to think, to interpret our experiences and to have emotions; in other words, to have an 'inner landscape' which machines could never have because, in this view, the mind is non-physical.

The view, that a human being can be thought of as consisting of two separate things: (1) the physical body; and (2) the non-physical mind, is known as **dualism**. (Dualism is a name given to any belief system which proposes that there are two distinct categories of things. Belief that there are two forces, one of good and one of evil, is a kind of dualism, as is Plato's belief that there is a world of physical things and a separate world of Forms.)

In this dualist view of human nature, the mind and the body are different components of a human person, one a non-physical component and the other a physical component. The physical body, which includes the brain matter, is where physical activity takes place, such as eating, sitting, walking and so on. The mind, in contrast, is the part of the person which is non-physical and which does the thinking and feeling. So although it is my physical body which walks into the kitchen, makes the tea, drinks it and digests it, it is my mind which decides to have a tea break, which chooses the mug I want to use and which enjoys the taste of the tea. This dualist view, although common, is not without its problems.

The mind

Many people understand the mind to be the part of a person which has intelligence and emotions. It enables us to interpret the data we get from our senses so that we experience them; our minds form judgements, make choices and hold memories. However, the question of the nature of the mind is a thorny problem for philosophers, psychologists and scientists. Some argue that the idea of the mind being a 'part of a person' is nonsense; for them, the mind is the activity of physical matter, and not a separate 'part'. It would be like saying that a sneeze is the part of the

body that expels irritants from the nasal cavity, when of course a sneeze is something a body does, it is not a part or an aspect of a body.

The body

The human body consists of the physical stuff of which human beings are made. People agree that we all have bodies, but there is even a difference of opinion about the nature of the body in relation to what it means to be human. For materialist philosophers, we are simply our bodies and nothing more; our bodies are not 'the physical part' of us, because there are no other parts. But for others, the body might be understood as a kind of vehicle which the 'self' or 'soul' inhabits for a while but which is in some way less real than the self.

Substance dualism

Substance dualism is the name given to the view that the mind and the body are separate substances which both exist. Philosophers make a distinction between substances and properties. A substance is a subject which has various properties: for example, my mug is a substance, and it has the properties of being patterned, breakable and nonporous. The rug on the floor is a substance and it has the properties of being soft and red. Properties cannot exist on their own, without a substance which has those properties. There is no such thing as the property of being soft, existing separately from soft things.

The question arises, for philosophers of mind, whether the mind is a substance which has properties or whether it is something else. Substance dualists hold the view that the mind is a substance, and that thoughts, intentions, feelings and emotions are properties of the mind. If I am angry, for example, then the substance that is my mind would have the property of anger.

According to substance dualists, the other substance of a human person is the body. The body is also a substance in the same sense of being a subject which has properties. It could have the properties of being tall, or young, or freckled, for example. It has the property which philosophers call 'extension', which means that it takes up space and has measurements. In substance dualism, the mind is not physical and is not extended (does not take up space) but it does have the properties of thought (mental capabilities); and in contrast the physical body does have extension but does not have the properties of thought.

Somehow, according to substance dualism, these two distinct substances are attached to each other and form the human being, a person with both physical and mental capabilities who can have a height, a weight and all other aspects of physicality, while at the same time having an inner, mental life as a 'self' which is quite distinct from anything physical.

This view has had many supporters throughout the history of philosophy. Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato, for example, all held the view that we have an essential non-physical self which could be capable

Apply your knowledge

4. How would you define the terms 'consciousness', 'mind' and 'self'?
5. Which do you find more appealing: the view that we are no more than physical, or the view that there is a part of us that is distinct from the body? Give reasons for your choice.

Substance dualists claim that the mind and the body are two distinct and different substances

of existing without the body. Some people also describe having had ‘out-of-body experiences’ in which they feel as if their ‘essential self’ somehow left their physical body. The idea that people are made of more than just their physical bodies has been taken up and developed by many different religious world views, mainly because it leaves open the possibility of continuing life after a person’s physical, bodily death.

Descartes’ dualist understanding of consciousness and the body

Probably the most famous defence of a dualist understanding of human nature comes from René Descartes (1596–1650). Descartes lived in the seventeenth century and was profoundly influential in what was known as the ‘Scientific Revolution’. This was a time when the conventional medieval traditions of thought were losing their popularity and were being replaced by experimental methods and more rigorous processes of reasoning. Descartes’ background in mathematics made him want philosophy to have the same kinds of certainty and precision as mathematics has; he believed that all human knowledge had the scope to be interconnected in some way. According to many stories of his life, he had a series of visions which showed him how the whole scope of human knowledge, including philosophy, could be reworked into a coherent and unified system of truth, based on mathematics and logical reasoning.

In one of Descartes’ earliest works called *Le Monde* (1629–33) (translated as ‘the world’ or ‘the universe’) which was about physics and the universe, he suggested that all the matter in the universe was essentially the same kind of thing. There were no ‘earthly substances’ in contrast with ‘heavenly substances’ as the medieval thinkers had supposed; and the earth was, in Descartes’ view, not uniquely special in its construction, but just one small part of a whole universe which all operated on the same fundamental physical laws of nature. This insight is one which is commonly accepted in modern physics.

Descartes had to be careful with the things he said. In 1633, Galileo Galilei was condemned by the Catholic Church for saying that it was the sun, and not the earth, that was in the centre of the universe – Descartes privately agreed with Galileo and quietly withdrew *Le Monde* from public circulation. He released his next book anonymously in 1637. It was a book primarily about science but it had a preface called ‘Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting Reason and Reaching the Truth in Sciences’ which went on to become one of Descartes’ most famous pieces of writing. Commonly known just as ‘Discourse’, the work discussed, amongst other things, ideas about questions of knowledge, the existence of God, and the relation between the mind and the body.

What were the limits of human knowledge, what could be known for certain and what should be treated with **scepticism**? Could the existence of God be demonstrated through the use of reason? What is the mind, and is it distinct from the body?

Having introduced these ideas and questions in 'Discourse', Descartes went on to explore them in more detail in his masterpiece *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), commonly known as *Meditations*. Descartes declared his aim that the book should demonstrate that there is a clear distinction between the 'soul' (or mind) and the body.

Descartes set out on a quest to work out what could be known with certainty. He realised that this was not going to be easy, as our senses can sometimes be mistaken, and so he decided to adopt a method known as 'hyperbolic doubt'. ('Hyperbolic' is used in the sense of being extreme or exaggerated.) He decided to think about all the things he thought could be known, and reject them if there was any doubt at all of their certain truth. By using this method he might be able to establish which beliefs have both endurance and stability.

He started by testing all of his beliefs with sceptical arguments, questioning how he could be sure that his belief was true. Could he trust his sense experiences? Not entirely, because there are times when our senses deceive us and it turns out that the thing we thought we saw or heard was not really there at all. Perhaps all the things he thought he could sense around him were illusions, or perhaps he was dreaming.

Descartes wondered whether he could be certain about the basics of mathematics, such as that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points; but he rejected mathematical axioms too, on the basis that our reasoning could turn out to be wrong, or perhaps God could be deceiving us. From this point, Descartes began to wonder about the possibilities of an evil demon existing, who had the power to deceive us about everything we held to be true. Descartes did not seriously believe in the existence of such a demon, but his point was that we cannot be 100 per cent certain that we are not being deceived about everything.

By the time he had reached this stage of his thinking, Descartes was feeling overwhelmed by the implications of scepticism. However, he then realised that there was one fact, the 'first certainty' which he could not possibly doubt and which could lead him back onto the path of establishing some truths: this was the fact that here he was, thinking sceptically. He could not doubt his own existence as a thinker, because he would have to exist as a thinker in order to be able to do the doubting; and so Descartes arrived at probably the most famous of all his conclusions: 'I think, therefore I am.' (This 'First Certainty' is often referred to in Latin, '*cogito, ergo sum*' or 'the *cogito*' for short.) Later, Descartes revised his 'First Certainty' to 'I am, I exist' because he did not want to sound as though his own existence was a conclusion of an argument but instead he wanted it to sound like a basic fact; but it is 'I think, therefore I am' that has captured people's imaginations and is the phrase that is remembered when they think of Descartes.

Descartes knew for certain that he had a mind, because he could not possibly doubt it without a contradiction; but he could not be certain that



Descartes rejected the idea that sense perception can give us certain knowledge of the world, because our senses can easily be misled

Descartes adopted a system of extreme doubt in an attempt to identify what could be known for certain

Think question

Some films and other works of fiction explore the idea that everything we perceive is an illusion and it is possible that we are being tricked – can you think of any examples of such works?

he had a body (we could, in principle, be deceived into thinking that we had bodies when actually we were some kind of disembodied thinking thing). Therefore, it seemed for Descartes that the mind and the body had to be two distinct substances. The mind has something peculiar about it which means that we cannot doubt its existence, whereas the existence of the body can be cast into doubt.

Descartes followed the thinking of Augustine, in saying that it is possible for us to imagine being without a body, but impossible for us to imagine being without a mind

“ I saw ... that from the mere fact that I thought of doubting the truth of other things, it followed quite evidently and certainly that I existed; whereas if I had merely ceased thinking, even if everything else that I had ever imagined had been true, I should have had no reason to believe that I existed. From this I knew I was a being whose whole essence or nature is simply to think, and which does not require any place, or depend on any material thing, in order to exist. Accordingly, this ‘I’ – that is, the soul by which I am what I am – is entirely distinct from the body, and indeed is easier to know than the body, and would not fail to be whatever it is, even if the body did not exist. ”

René Descartes, *Discourse*, 1637, 1:127

For Descartes, therefore, it made sense to speak of a human person as being made of two distinct substances: the physical body, and spiritual mind. He decided that the mind and the body cannot be the same thing, because they have such different properties: thought and extension respectively. There are many other differences too; Descartes was particularly interested in the idea that the body has different parts (the head, the leg, the ribs and so on) whereas, in his view, the mind could not be divided into parts. For Descartes and for other thinkers, it seemed obvious that two things could not be identical if they had different properties.

This left Descartes with some further puzzling questions to address: how are the mind and the body attached to one another and how do they interact so closely?

As well as being interested in mathematics and philosophy, Descartes was also very keen on anatomy. He thought that the pineal gland, which is a very small organ located in the centre of the human brain, had something to do with the connection between the soul and the body. In contrast with the views of modern medicine, and also with quite a lot of the science that was understood by his contemporaries, Descartes thought that the pineal gland contained air-like ‘animal spirits’ which controlled imagination, sense perception, bodily movement and memory. In a letter of 1640, he put forward the view that the pineal gland was ‘the principle seat of the soul’ although he was not entirely clear about how this worked. He had come to this conclusion because other parts of the head are ‘double’: we have two eyes, two ears, two hemispheres of the brain and so on, but just the one pineal gland, which is central. To Descartes,

the singularity of the pineal gland strongly suggested that it could be the connecting point between the material person and the immaterial soul.

Property dualism

Many thinkers have not wanted to go quite as far as Descartes in considering that the mind and the body are two completely different and separate substances. They have instead developed different ideas which can be grouped under the heading of 'property dualism'.

According to property dualism, there is only one kind of material, physical substance, but there are two distinct kinds of properties: mental properties, and physical properties. The physical matter of the brain has physical properties (such as size and mass and shape) but also has mental properties (such as opinions, emotions and memories).

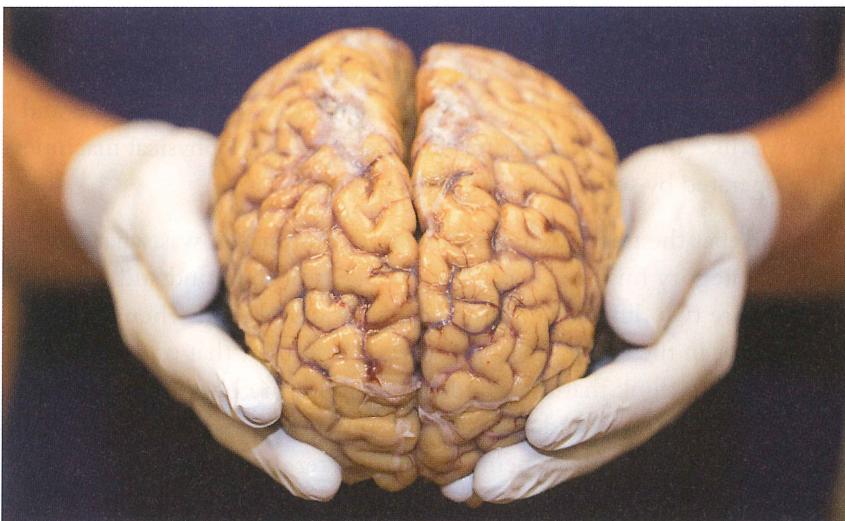
One popular kind of property dualism is known as 'emergent **materialism**', which is the idea that as physical things become more and more complex, new properties 'emerge' from them, which cannot be reduced simply to the material. The mind, in this view, has its own existence in some sense but is not a completely separate substance from the physical. This is a view which was held by John Stuart Mill, amongst others.

Property dualists hold that the mind and the body have different properties but the same substance

Reductive materialism

Reductive materialism is a theory of mind which has a lot of different names, including 'identity theory' and 'type physicalism'. It is a theory which says that the mind is not distinct from the physical brain but is identical with it.

According to this theory, mental states can be classified into different types, such as memory, pain, happiness, desire and so on, and these different types correspond to activities in different parts of the brain. When chemical reactions are happening in a particular part of the brain, we feel an



For reductive materialists, mental states are identical with physical events in the brain

emotion or we make a decision or we remember a fact, depending on the type of mental event that corresponds to that part of the brain. As one psychologist with the unfortunate name of Boring asserted, mental events and physical events in the brain are identical; it is not just the case that when X happens in the brain, the consequence is that we feel Y, but it is the case that X and Y are the same thing. Particular reactions in the brain are identical with feeling angry, or with choosing a biscuit from the tin, or having a political opinion. The chemical reactions do not just cause the mental events, but are the mental events. Supporters of reductive materialism recognise that neuroscience does not yet understand exactly how the physical functions of the brain work, but they are convinced that there is nothing more to the human person than physical material.

Reductive materialism, therefore, allows no room for any concept of life after death. There is no way in which the 'self' or consciousness could leave behind the physical body at the point of death, because the consciousness is physical and is nothing more than physical, and therefore when the body dies the consciousness ends.

Gilbert Ryle and the 'ghost in the machine'

Gilbert Ryle (1900–76) made an important contribution to the debate about the relationship between the mind and the body, in his book *The Concept of Mind* (1949). Taking a materialist view, he criticised the notion that the mind is distinct from the body, or that mental states are different from physical states.

In this book, he argued that any talk of a 'self' or 'soul' existing beyond the physical body is a mistake in the way we use language. He used the example of someone watching a cricket match, seeing all the players and the different tactics used during the match but then asking where the 'team spirit' was, as if it is something to be found as an extra to the other observable elements of the game. The 'team spirit' is a term which denotes the way the observable people in the game interact with one another. In the same way, he thought, the mind should not be considered to be something separate and extra, apart from the body. He made fun of the kind of ideas suggested by Descartes, saying that a separate mind and body was like 'the ghost in the machine', as if we were physical machines being operated by some kind of invisible mind.

Ryle said that the traditional mind and body distinction was what he called a 'category mistake', because it tries to treat the mind and the body as if they are two different things of a similar logical kind when in fact they are not in the same logical category. He thought that traditionally, people tend to think that the mind and the body are both things that a human being possesses and that they are somehow 'harnessed together' but that they are capable of being separated after death. However, Ryle argues that this view is not at all sound and does not fit with what we know about psychology and neuroscience.

Ryle argued that treating the mind and body as if they were two things of a similar logical kind was a 'category mistake'

Ryle was not rejecting the idea that people have minds or personalities or consciousness (which some people might call the 'soul' in an Aristotelian sense), but he was rejecting the idea that it was a separate part or aspect of a human being. Just as the team spirit is not found in addition to the team but is a way of describing how the team works, the 'soul' or 'mind' is not an addition to the physical person but a way of describing a person's functions.

Richard Dawkins' materialist views

Modern materialist views, such as those held by Richard Dawkins, assume that there is no part of a person that is non-physical. Following the traditions of Aristotle, materialists believe that the consciousness cannot be separated from the brain, because for the materialist, nothing exists except matter. The materialist view, then, rules out the possibilities of any form of conscious life after death, since consciousness is caused by purely physical phenomena: so once the brain has died, the consciousness must also end.

Richard Dawkins, in his book *The Selfish Gene* (1976) proposes that humans are nothing more than 'survival machines', and he completely discounts the idea that humans have any kind of soul to distinguish them from other species. Humans, like other living creatures, are the vehicles of genes, which are only interested in replicating themselves in order to survive into the next generation. Of course, Dawkins understood that genes do not have the capacity to think and to have intentions in any literal way, so that to speak of what they are 'interested in' or of their 'selfishness' is to use metaphor and analogy; his point was that human beings do not have immortal souls and instead are simply a mixture of chemicals: 'survival machines – robot vehicles blindly programmed to preserve the selfish molecules known as genes' (Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 1976, p. vii).

Dawkins wrote about 'soul one and soul two', by which he meant two different ways of understanding the soul. 'Soul one' is the viewpoint which claims that the soul is a distinctive spiritual supernatural part of a person, capable of knowing God and of surviving death. This is the understanding that Dawkins rejects. 'Soul two' in contrast is a more Aristotelian understanding of the soul, which refers to someone's personality and individuality, to the fact that they have a life and are motivated to make choices. Dawkins accepts 'Soul two', which does not include any notion of the possibility of life after death or any idea that people have some kind of connection with anything divine or supernatural.

In his book *River out of Eden* (1995, p. 18), Dawkins asserts: 'there is no spirit-driven life force, no throbbing, heaving, pullulating, protoplasmic, mystic jelly. Life is just bytes and bytes and bytes of digital information'. For Dawkins, this does not mean that life has nothing awe-inspiring about it. He finds the whole evolutionary process awe-inspiring, as well as the achievements of great men and women. However, he does not believe that we need any additional supernatural 'soul' to explain this, nor any belief in life after death to make sense of what we are as humans.

Dawkins argues, as did Bertrand Russell before him, that religious belief in ideas such as the immortality of the soul have no sound basis. They are beliefs based on wish-fulfilment for those who lack courage, who fear death and who cannot cope with the idea of their own mortality. For the materialist, the consciousness is no more than electro-chemical events within the brain, and therefore the individual person is incapable of surviving brain death.

Discussing soul, mind and body

How might the materialist criticise a dualist approach to questions of consciousness?

With a dualist approach to questions about the nature of consciousness and its relation to the body, the body is seen as a kind of vehicle which the person lives in. When a dualist approach is taken, there are possibilities for belief in life after death, because if the mind and the body are separate, then perhaps they could exist separately, with the mind or soul continuing on after the death of the physical body.

Not all thinkers, however, have agreed about this relationship between the mind and the body.

Descartes' view of substance dualism, in particular, has often been criticised. It could be argued that Descartes has done nothing to demonstrate that the mind is a substance; he has merely asserted it. It could be argued that his views create big difficulties, such as how the mind and body interact in the way that they do.

- We do not just notice that our bodies are damaged, when we hurt ourselves, in the same way that we might notice a dent in the car: we actually feel the pain, and it causes mental consequences such as distress.
- Substance dualism cannot explain how mental thoughts can cause physical responses, such as how my mental decision to go over there can result in walking, or how my feelings of embarrassment can cause me physically to blush.
- Also, substance dualism creates what is known as the 'problem of other minds': if the mind is separate from the body, then we can only perceive that other people have bodies but we have no way of knowing whether they have minds.

In his book *Merely Mortal: Can You Survive Your Own Death?* (2001), Antony Flew argues that talk of life after death, where the soul outlives the body and carries on by itself, is nonsensical. He compares it with the humorous nonsense of which Lewis Carroll was fond, where, in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), the Cheshire cat slowly disappeared until there was nothing left of it but its grin: an idea which appeals to our sense of humour because obviously it would be impossible for there to be a grin on its own, without a face to put it on.

Carroll is playing with the idea that a grin could be a 'thing in itself', a substance. Flew writes:

“ The absurdity here arises from the fact that 'grin' is not a word for a substance. It makes no sense to talk of grins occurring without the faces of which grins constitute one possible kind of configuration. ”

Antony Flew, *Merely Mortal: Can You Survive Your Own Death?*, 2001

Flew uses this analogy, and others, to demonstrate his opinion that to speak of someone's mind, or soul, or personality, as if it were a 'substance' is (in his view) a misuse of the term. For Flew, to refer to a mind or a soul or a personality is to refer to the behaviour of the material, physical person, and no more – so there could not be a survival of the mind or soul or personality after the death of the physical body, because the physical body no longer has any behaviour. This is a very Aristotelian view that is echoed by other philosophers too, such as Daniel Dennett, and by some scientists, such as Richard Dawkins.

People often feel naturally drawn to substance dualism; but this attractiveness on its own does not demonstrate that the theory is true. We talk as though we have minds and bodies as separate things, but this does not prove anything. In their book *The Philosophy of Mind* (1986), Peter Smith and O.R. Jones give examples of how we might talk about somebody's 'sake' or somebody's 'build'. For example, we might say that we were going to have supper later than usual for Jill's sake, as she missed the train; or we might say that Jack needed a shirt with longer sleeves because of his build. However, this does not mean that Jill could be separated from her 'sake' or Jack could go out without his 'build'.



Flew argued that just as a grin is not a substance, neither is a soul without 'it'

The distinction between mental and physical properties is not always as clear as substance dualists suggest. Someone who is skilled at hand-eye coordination, for example, seems to be using both physical and mental capabilities in combination, making mental judgements about the right time and speed and direction to move while simultaneously physically moving. Sometimes emotions can give rise to physical symptoms, for example we can feel sudden physical adrenalin rushes when something frightens us. Dualism does not seem to have a satisfactory answer to questions of how the mind and the body interconnect; how does a decision to greet a friend result in physically smiling and waving, if the mind and the body are so distinct?

If people are going to try and find out whether we have minds which are separate from our bodies, this is a more difficult task than it might first appear, as they are looking for something immaterial and it is not at all clear how they would know when they had found it. Hume raised this difficulty: even when we are personally aware that we are individual thinking beings, this does not help to establish that our thinking nature is separate from our physical nature.

How might the dualist respond to materialist criticisms?

Other thinkers, however, disagree with Flew's materialist view of the soul. Those who believe that the soul is linked with, but not identical to, a person's physical body, maintain that it can make sense to speak of a soul or a personality surviving death and continuing to live in a new mode of existence. Thinkers such as Plato and Descartes, and modern scholars such as Ward and Swinburne, argue that the soul is more than just a word for physical behaviour, and can be capable of independent continued existence after the death of the body.

Some people might argue that we can see a flaw in reductive materialism if we think about the way we use language. We might talk about 'Emily' and also about 'Emily's body' but the terms are not used in exactly the same way. We would not say 'Emily's body went to the theatre' because this would imply that her mind was elsewhere, and if we were told that 'police found Emily's body in her back garden this morning', we would assume that Emily was dead rather than that she was doing the weeding. Perhaps this demonstrates that when we are living, thinking, feeling beings, we are more than simply bodies. However, our use of language does not establish anything more than that we use language sloppily. We might talk as though a living human being is more than just a physical body, but our use of language does not prove anything one way or the other, it shows only our traditional way of thinking.

Perhaps a stronger criticism of materialism comes from Descartes' views about the distinctive properties of the mind and the body. Descartes argues that the mind and the body cannot be identical, because they have such different properties. The mind does not have extension, but the

body does. The body does not have thoughts, but the mind does. If two substances are identical, then surely they should have the same properties, not mutually exclusive ones.

It could also be argued that although substance dualism raises questions which we cannot answer, materialism, too, cannot explain how an opinion or a logical chain of reasoning or a strong emotion can be no more than a physical chemical reaction. Neuroscience has a long way to go, and at the moment neither side of the argument can claim to have the total support of science.

The theologians and philosophers Richard Swinburne and Keith Ward both defend, from within the Christian tradition, the idea that human beings have souls which are distinct from physical bodies and which are capable of survival after death. Swinburne, in his book *The Evolution of the Soul* (rev. edn 1997), explains his beliefs that the soul and the body are distinct from each other, so that the soul is capable of surviving even when the body is destroyed. He argues that there are fundamental truths about us as individuals which cannot be explained in purely physical terms, and also that the most important and significant aspects of us which give us our identity are not to be found in our physical bodies. In Swinburne's view, the human soul is unique in that it is capable of logical, ordered and complex thought. The soul is aware of its own freedom to make choices, and also aware of moral obligation. It is because we have souls that we recognise goodness when we see it in other people. It is because of our souls that we have consciences, letting us know when we are right or wrong.

Keith Ward's book *Defending the Soul* (1992) is written as a response to scientists who claim that humans are, in the end, just physical beings:

“ Richard Dawkins, Jacques Monod, Desmond Morris and many others have all written popular and influential books, proclaiming that science has now entered the secret citadel of the human soul, and found it empty. Human persons, they say, are not free spiritual agents with a special dignity. They are physical organisms for reproducing genes; and as such, they have no more intrinsic dignity than walking bags of chemical compounds. ”

Keith Ward, *Defending the Soul*, 1992, p. 8

In his book, Ward focuses on the problems he foresees for humanity if belief in the soul is abandoned. He argues that without belief in the soul, morality becomes simply a matter of personal choice and taste, whereas we need the moral claims that the soul recognises as coming from God in order to progress and to achieve that special dignity of being human rather than simply animal. Without the soul, humanity lacks any sense of final purpose.



Ward attacks the materialist position of those who claim that we are nothing more than physical organisms, by returning to the account of the creation of man in Genesis. He writes:

“ The Bible puts it supremely well when it says, ‘The Lord God took some soil from the ground and formed a man out of it; he breathed life-giving breath into his nostrils, and the man began to live.’ Man is made of dust; but he is filled with the spirit of God. He emerges from the simplest material forms, but finds his true kinship in the goal and fulfilment of his existence, the supreme Goodness. ”

Keith Ward, *Defending the Soul*, 1992, p. 147

For Ward, then, it is important that people do not abandon the idea of the soul, because, in his view, if we take the materialist view that we are no more than physical matter, then our moral currency is very much diminished and we no longer think of each other in terms of the sanctity of life.

Brian Hebblethwaite, an Anglican priest, considers the implications for Christianity of developments in the production of artificial intelligence:

“ Does it follow that Christian theology is bound to oppose the very idea of artificial intelligence? Not necessarily. Granted, only ‘soft’, carbon-based, matter has proved itself capable of evolving organisms with brains of sufficient complexity to give rise to consciousness, rationality, and volition [making deliberate choices]. Only through the procreation of human beings have subjects or selves, of whom the language of mind, soul, and spirit can appropriately be used, in fact appeared upon the scene. ‘Hard’, silicon-based matter, despite the awesome calculating power of digital computers, and despite the possibilities of simulating neural networks through ‘sophisticated’ feedback mechanisms and built-in randomisers, has shown no signs whatsoever of manifesting even rudimentary forms of awareness, still less affection, imagination, rational thought, or volition. As far as our present knowledge and skill go, artificial ‘intelligence’ is no more than a metaphor. But if, in the more or less remote future, it were discovered that hard as well as soft matter did, after all, have the capacity to become the vehicle of inner life, including subjectivity, reason, and will, then such artefacts would have acquired selfhood, soul and spirit, and would require to be treated and related to in just the same way as our children. It does not look as if God has made the world that way, but we are not in a position to rule the idea out a priori. ”

Brian Hebblethwaite, ‘Soul.’

In *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, 2000, p. 683

Apply your knowledge

6. Which do you find more convincing: substance dualism, or materialism? How would you defend your choice?
7. What evidence, if any, do you think would be needed to settle the dispute one way or the other?
8. How far would you agree with Keith Ward’s claim that our ethics depend on our continuing to believe in the existence of the human soul?

Is the concept of 'soul' better understood metaphorically, or as a reality?

Possibly, problems arise in the distinction between the soul and the body because the idea of a soul is being taken too literally when applied to human persons. We can speak of a 'soul' metaphorically; we might talk of an empty house, with no furniture and no artwork in it, as having no 'soul'; or we might say that someone had put her 'heart and soul' into a project. We would be using the term 'soul' metaphorically, to refer to warmth or to effort. Perhaps, then, the whole concept of soul is better understood as a metaphor, a pictorial way of trying to capture what it means to be human, the special importance of human life and the impressiveness of human endeavours. If talk of the soul is understood as being metaphorical then this could avoid some of the problems that arise when the idea is taken literally, of exactly where the soul is located or how it is attached to the body or where it comes from.

However, if the idea of the soul is understood metaphorically, then this still leaves difficulties. With a metaphor, it can be difficult to know how it is meant to be understood. If it means different things to different people, there is no way of telling whether either is correct, or even whether there is such a thing as the 'correct' way to understand. It can obscure understanding rather than enlighten it.

Does discussion of a mind–body distinction always involve category error?

According to Ryle, people who make a distinction between the mind and the body make a '**category error**' because they think that the mind is a thing in the way that the body is a thing. As well as giving the example of team spirit at a cricket match, Ryle also gave the example of someone being shown around the various colleges and faculties of Oxford, and then that person asking 'but where is the university?'; not realising that the University of Oxford was not a separate and distinct thing in itself but was the whole collection of colleges and faculties. Many people would support this view, and say that to think of the mind and the body as distinct things is just the result of taking the metaphor of the 'soul' or 'mind' too literally.

Others, however, would disagree. There is a saying that 'the whole is more than the sum of its parts', and perhaps this is true of the human person. It could be argued that a village is more than just the buildings and the number of individual inhabitants, but that there is also something extra, a community spirit and a history perhaps, which are intangible but nevertheless part of what it means for a village to be a village. Perhaps people who speak of humans being something more than just the physical body are not just making a mistake, but are trying to express something intangible which is, nevertheless, real and important.

Apply your knowledge

9. In what circumstances do people use metaphors rather than literal language? Does this help understanding, or make it more difficult, in your view?
10. Would you argue that the soul is better understood literally, or metaphorically, or neither? How would you support your view?
11. If the soul is understood as a metaphor rather than as a literal substance, what implications might this have for ethical ideas such as the sanctity of life?

Apply your knowledge

12. How far would you agree that talk of a mind–body distinction is just 'category error'?

Learning support

Points to remember

- » There are many different opinions about the relation between the mind and the body. Some argue that they are completely distinct (substance dualism), some that they are completely identical (reductive materialism), and many others argue for positions which are somewhere between these two.
- » Whether we are just physical beings and no more might have serious implications for our understanding of life after death and of ethics.
- » Most people acknowledge that there is a long way to go before scientists understand consciousness, and perhaps they never will; be sceptical about points of view which seem to suggest that the question has been settled.

Enhance your learning

There is a huge amount of literature available on the mind–body problem; this chapter gives just a small selection of possible points of view.

- » The substance dualism ideas of Descartes can be found in Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy*, 1.60–65.
- » The vocabulary associated with the mind–body problem is often quite daunting, but make an effort to learn the specialist terminology as it will help you to understand the different perspectives you encounter when undertaking wider reading.
- » Ideas about artificial intelligence and about the relation between the soul and the body are popular themes for novelists and film-makers. They can be useful, as well as entertaining, ways of developing your own thinking and questioning.
- » You could extend your thinking about the nature of consciousness by exploring the ideas of Alan Turing and his 'Turing test' intended to help resolve questions of whether machines can think.
- » John Searle's thought experiment commonly known as 'the Chinese Room' would be interesting to research and to think about.

- » Chapters 1, 2 and 17 of Susan Blackmore's *Consciousness, An Introduction* (2010) are a useful source of further information on this topic.
- » Ryle's ideas about category error can be found in Chapter 1 of Ryle, G. (1949) *The Concept of Mind*.
- » The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* is an excellent online resource, although often quite demanding. The section on 'Ancient Theories of the Soul' is useful for this topic.

Practice for exams

AS questions and A level questions look identical; the difference between AS and A level assessment is seen in the different proportions of marks awarded for two different skills: the skill of demonstrating knowledge and understanding (Assessment Objective 1, or AO1), and the skill of constructing a critical argument (AO2).

At AS, half the marks (15 marks) are available for knowledge and understanding, and the other half (15 marks) for the quality of your analytical and evaluative argument. You should aim to use your knowledge in order to support the argument you are making throughout the essay, rather than presenting descriptive knowledge in the first half and then an opinion in the second.

At A level, your demonstration of knowledge and understanding is awarded a maximum of 16 marks, and your analytic and evaluative skills are awarded a maximum of 24 marks. You should aim to concentrate on constructing a lucid argument, making use of your knowledge to add weight to the conclusions you draw.

Critically assess the view that human beings have immortal souls.

To tackle this question well, you first need to decide what you think of the view that humans have immortal souls. Do you agree or disagree with the view? You may be undecided, and this is also an acceptable position to take if you support it by saying that neither side is entirely convincing. Notice that the question is asking about 'immortal souls', not just 'souls', so you will need to think about views that say the human soul is immortal.

Practise your skills for AS level

If you are answering this question at AS level, you need to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of different thinkers and their perspectives; you could include Plato, Aristotle, biblical ideas and the views of materialists such as Dawkins. You could include the thinking of Ryle and his ideas about category error. When you present different views, make sure that you comment on them to show your analytical and evaluative skill.

Practise your skills for A level

If you are answering this question at A level, you need to make sure that you have a clear line of critical argument, supported by your knowledge and understanding. Explain where you think the strengths and weaknesses lie in different perspectives, so that the examiner can clearly see that you have dealt with counter-arguments and can see how you reached your conclusion.

Discuss critically the view that the mind and consciousness can be fully explained in terms of physical, material interactions.

For this question, you need to demonstrate a confident understanding of materialist positions in the debate and of contrasting views, and you should be able to justify your opinion by showing its strengths compared with alternative positions.

Practise your skills for AS level

If you are answering this question at AS level, you should be able to explain clearly and accurately different positions on the issue of whether the mind and consciousness are entirely physical. You should be able to give a critical assessment of each position, weighing up their relative strengths and weaknesses and making it clear why you hold your views.

Practise your skills for A level

If you are answering this question at A level, you should start by deciding the position you wish to argue. Do you think that the mind can be explained entirely in physical terms, or do you have a different point of view? You are likely to want to demonstrate your understanding of materialist

positions, with careful explanation and reference to thinkers who hold materialist views. Make sure that you include your assessment of their ideas rather than just presenting them in a descriptive uncritical way, and make sure that you have a clear conclusion that follows logically from the arguments you have given.

Chapter 1.3

Arguments based on observation

Can the existence of God be demonstrated through drawing conclusions from our observations?

Does the natural world provide evidence for the existence of God?

How successful are the traditional teleological and cosmological arguments for the existence of God?

Key Terms

Teleological: looking to the end results (telos) in order to draw a conclusion about what is right or wrong

Cosmological: to do with the universe

Natural theology: drawing conclusions about the nature and activity of God by using reason and observing the world

Contingent: depending on other things

Principle of Sufficient Reason: the principle that everything must have a reason to explain it

Sceptic: someone who will not accept what others say without questioning and challenging

A posteriori arguments: arguments which draw conclusions based on observation through experience

Necessary existence: existence which does not depend on anything else

A priori arguments: arguments which draw conclusions through the use of reason

Logical fallacy: reasoning that has a flaw in its structure

Specification requirements

- The teleological argument
- The cosmological argument
- Challenges to arguments from observations