

'Religious philosophy can offer no firm evidence for a distinction between body and soul.' Discuss.

Humans appear to have both a body and a mind, the body which is related to physical movements and appearances. And the mind which relates to feelings and emotions, qualia. Many philosophers therefore make a distinction between the mind and body, the dualist view that a person is made of two separate substances. On the other hand, some philosophers take a monist/ materialist view that the mind and the body are the same substance. This is a contentious area of philosophy, and has created a debate known as "the mind, body problem".

Such philosophers as Plato take a dualist view and try to offer evidence to suggest a distinction between the body and soul. Plato saw the body and soul as two separate entities. The soul that most closely resembles the divine and immortal. While the body resembles the human and mortal, which is endlessly changing and can be broken down. Plato was not trying to suggest the soul was perfect as it joined the body which it is inhibited by, however, he explains that by taking care of the soul the person can develop knowledge. Plato used evidence such as the "world of the forms". He suggested that by taking care of the soul and ignoring physical pleasures the soul can return to the world of the forms when the body dies. The evidence of Plato's theory can be seen everyday. For the body to survive it must meet its basic needs such as food, reproduction and physical pleasure. On the other hand for the mind to be stimulated it has other needs that are met through deep thought and learning. However, there is a flaw to Plato's theory, how can you have two completely different substances that are the same thing? Plato's theory suggests the body and soul can work together to achieve a higher level of existence, but if the body and soul are completely different there is no evidence to suggest they would be compatible.

Another dualist, Aquinas took a more religious view of dualism. He believed that the body and soul were separate and described the soul as that which animates the body or 'anima.' According to Aquinas, the soul operates independently of the body. Aquinas believed the only things that are divisible into parts decay. The soul is not divisible and therefore on this basis of Aquinas' argument it is able to survive death. However, through the link with a particular human body the soul becomes an individual so even when the body dies the soul that departs has an immortal existence. Evidence for religious views on the soul come from

the bible. Within the new testament, there are stories of Jesus' resurrection that suggest dualism. Within one particular story Jesus' disciples are walking to Emaus. Along the way they are joined by a man, it is only when they arrive at Emaus and offer the man a place to eat and stay that he reveals himself as Jesus. This supports the dualist view as firstly, it proves that the soul is immortal and lives on after death, and secondly that the soul is separate from the body as the man who claims to be Jesus appears to be unrecognisable implying he has a different physical appearance. For Christians this will act as firm evidence that there is a body soul distinction, however for those who are not Christian the evidence may not be so reliable.

Cartesian duality formed by Rene Descartes, describes the mind and body as being separate and is based on the phrase "I think therefore I am." Descartes explained that feelings and sensations cannot be located physically. He accepted that everything non physical is in the mind and therefore must be distinct from the body. The mind according to Descartes is non - spatial and is distinct from material and bodily substances. He suggested that everything has characteristics and that the mind and body's characteristics are different therefore they must be separate. For example a property of the mind may be consciousness, whereas the body has more aesthetic qualities such as height breadth etc. Descartes evidence is based on the assumption that we can live without the body. He concluded that the body has the job of performing physical activities however, it is the mind that contains our identity. For Descartes the mind is I, that we can live without the body as the mind makes us who we are. Descartes took the religious view that after our death the soul is able to continue and be with God.

"A man's soul is that to which the pure mental properties of a man belong." Richard Swinburne developed a dualist view based on the soul being indestructible and indivisible. Swinburne suggested that is a logical possibility for a person to exist after the body dies, as the soul lives on. The soul according to Swinburne is linked with mental processes and activity and it's independent from the body. Evidence for Swinburne's theory comes from near death experiences. In many instances people have claimed to have had near death experiences whereby their hearts have stopped during surgery and yet they have reported detailed accounts of what happened during the time they were clinically dead. For some this is evidence for consciousness, however if the body and soul is one entity this would be impossible. This therefore implies that there is

something that lives on when the physical body is dead, for dualists this would be the soul. On the other hand although the details of the experiences seem to be accurate there is no proof that the experiences may not be caused by another physical phenomena.

On the other hand Dawkins, a biological materialist would disagree with the opinion that the soul and the body are separate substances. Dawkins bases his theory on evolution and genetics. He would reject any concept of an eternal soul and therefore rejects dualism. Some of Dawkins work includes the "selfish gene" and the "blind watchmaker" Within these he rejects any idea of the religious view of dualism and within the "selfish gene" he explains that humans are a lucky accident and that all life is opportunistic and humans are merely genetic mutations with the need to mindlessly replicate. Dawkins does not deny human dignity and accepts the complexity of human life to be able to contemplate the origins of human life. The evidence for Dawkins theory of biological materialism is based on DNA. Dawkins explains DNA as a code of instructions that is made up of millions of strands of genetic information. Genes according to Dawkins program who a person is, and it is DNA that singly creates what a person looks like as well as their personality. For Dawkins both the mind and body are controlled by the DNA and therefore he suggests that there is no need for a soul. Although Dawkins theory is based on empirical evidence and it has been proved that certain genes decide certain parts of a persons characteristics there is yet no proof to suggest that genes make up the whole of a someone's personality and therefore it could be seen that there may be something else, this may be the soul.

John Hick has formed a view of religious materialism. He stated that humans are one composite being, one substance. His theory the "replica theory" he realised from a religious point of view the problem was continuity. In life after death how can someone be the same person without their body. Therefore Hick suggests that there must be some kind of replica. This replica is the same person however, whilst they cannot exist at the same time. According to Hick at the same time that when a person dies a replica of them is created by God. This is a way of preserving personal identity after death. The evidence for religious materialism is based on the resurrection of Jesus. Some accounts during the new testament describe Jesus after the resurrection and was recognised by followers before ascension. From a religious view this is evidence for the replica theory as it appears that Jesus died and when he

came back had the same physical appearance as well as the same personality.

Identity theory puts forward a materialist view of the soul. Identity theory is against behaviourism and suggests that the mind and the brain are in the same place. In the brain, consciousness is generated as well as the other physical processes we link with the brain such as movement. Evidence for this is put forward in "the philosophy files". Within the book an analogy explains how if you were to look in the brain you would be able to locate an area that is stimulated and that thoughts must be generated in this area. We already know only 10% of the brain's capacity is used consciously and therefore it is a logical assumption that our mind is located within the brain. An analogy for this is that a woman can be a mother, a daughter and a sister etc. The same person can have many functions, it is therefore the same for the brain which as well as having the functions we already recognise such as controlling physical activity, speaking and controlling bodily functions it can also control the mind.

Overall, although religious philosophy offers an explanation for the body-soul distinction it is based on little empirical evidence. For those who already follow the religion it may fit in with their beliefs however, for those who are atheist or follow another religion the evidence that it uses makes little logical sense. Such dualist views as Plato where the assumptions are based on everyday life may be more appropriate, however there is still little empirical evidence to prove the theory. On the other hand materialists put forward convincing arguments based on scientifically testable theories i.e. Dawkins. But neither arguments yet put enough evidence forward to either prove their views or disprove that of others. Therefore the statement Religious philosophy can offer no firm evidence for a distinction between body and soul may be considered as correct, however there is not yet enough evidence to suggest that religious views of dualism cannot be true.