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Dualism and Materialism at a Glance

A-level Religious Studies
OCR H573/01 · Soul, mind and body

Sample factfile

IN A NUTSHELL **Is the mind a separate, non-physical thing, or is it what the brain does? This is the central debate in soul, mind and body.**

1 Key terms

Substance dualism
mind and body are two different substances

Materialism
only physical things exist

Qualia
what an experience feels like

Category mistake
a concept put in the wrong type

2 The dualists

- Plato: an immortal soul of reason, spirit and appetite, imprisoned in the body (Phaedo 82e).
- Descartes (Meditations, 1641): mind is thinking and indivisible; body is extended and divisible, so they differ.
- Aristotle is not a dualist: the soul is the form of the body (De Anima II.1).

3 Against dualism

- Interaction problem: Elisabeth of Bohemia (1643) asked how a non-physical mind moves a body.
- Phineas Gage (1848): brain injury changed his personality.
- Ryle (1949): dualism is a category mistake, "the Ghost in the Machine".

4 The materialists

- Identity theory: Place (1956) and Smart (1959): mental states are brain states.
- Eliminative materialism: the Churchlands: "belief" and "desire" will be replaced by neuroscience.
- Ockham's razor: one substance is simpler than two.

5 Against materialism

- The hard problem (Chalmers, 1995): why is there experience at all?
- Mary's room (Jackson, 1982) and Nagel's bat (1974): physical facts leave out what experience is like.

6 Exam tip

Use Aristotle as a middle view: the soul is real but not a separate thing. It helps you avoid a false choice between dualism and materialism.

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