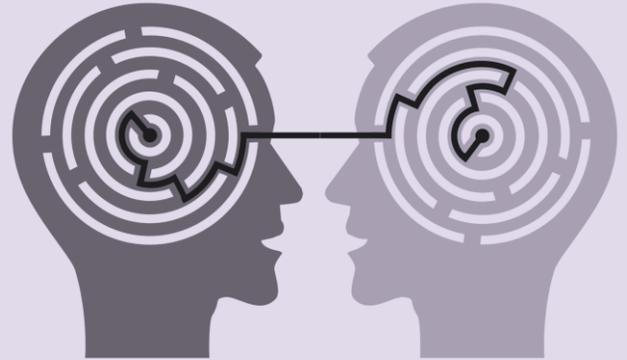


Edexcel GCE A level Religious Studies

A Spotlight on...

Replica theory

This section of the specification requires students to explore Replica Theory, which suggests that a person can die in one body and continue to live in another while remaining the same individual. This includes the notion of life after death and its implications for identity.



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Introduction

Topic 6.1 explores the influence of developments in religious belief regarding life after death. Abrahamic faiths such as Christianity often believe in the resurrection of the body at the end of time. This poses a philosophical problem as bodies decay and it would therefore be impossible to them to be immortal. Some Christians prefer to argue for the immortality of the soul and view the afterlife as a disembodied spiritual state. In the Dharmic traditions, ideas of reincarnation of souls in different bodies, or ideas of rebirth without a continuous personal identity are more prevalent. John Hick's Replica theory recognises some of the philosophical issues that are present in the ideas above and offers a way in which someone may be said to be the same person as the one who died despite the continuity of the same body

Topics	What students need to learn	
6 Influences of developments in religious belief	6.1	d) Replica theory: notion that one can die in one body and continue to live in a different body while being the same person, including after death.

6.1 (d) Replica theory

Hick's rejection of the soul

John Hick (1922-2012) suggests that religious ideas of the soul are incorrect. He argues that human identity is mainly physical. Our character and personality are heavily dependent on our genes, our unique DNA. He argues that dualists such as Plato are quite wrong to suggest that everything that is important about us comes from this mysterious non-physical soul. It can all be explained by our physical make-up.

He argues that the idea of the soul has got more to do with how early Christians such as Augustine read the works of Plato rather than anything found in the Bible. Hick suggests that when we examine the Bible carefully, it seems to use the word soul to refer to the whole person. Similarly, when we speak about the soul, the words we ascribe to it are really mental characteristics or personality traits: it is a way of speaking about ourselves and others that gives value. Hick notes that the SOS call (literally 'save our souls') is not asking that our rescuers preserve only our non-physical aspect!

Hick's idea of psycho-physical unity

Hick states that the self is 'a package of genetic information that has programmed the growth of a living organism in continuous interaction with its environment'. Our uniqueness is due to the random arrangement of our genetic material, so Hick is more of a materialist than a dualist in this aspect of his views. He notes that some Christians may worry that a materialistic view of identity may bring our 'uniqueness' as being made by God into question. However, Hick does not think that this needs to be the case. Our genetics are incredibly complex, and this makes us both unique and beyond prediction. Hence it is not contrary to religious teaching as whether we are physical beings or whether we have a soul, our uniqueness suggests we are ultimately dependent upon God

However, although Hick rejects the soul in its dualistic sense, he does not completely rule out the possibility that we are more than just physical beings. His position is sometimes referred to as a kind of 'soft materialism'. The mind and brain are not the same thing. He suggests some unusual evidence to support this non-physical aspect such as experiments in parapsychology and telepathy as well as the success of some subjects in predicting the symbol held on an unseen Zener card. (there are 5 symbols so statistically a person stands a 20% chance of guessing accurately, some subjects who claim to have telepathic powers have produced results that seem far too high to be attributed to chance) Hick also offers the phenomena of crisis apparitions or premonitions that a close relative is in danger which some people have had. He accepts that these types of evidence may not satisfy most thinkers but believes they point to something in addition to the physical, hence we are best understood as a psycho-physical unity.

6.1 (d) Replica theory

Hick on Replicas and Life after Death

Hick is keen to challenge the common misconception that life after death in some way depends upon the existence of a separate soul. Even if mind is the same thing as the brain, this does not rule out life after death as all powerful God is able to resurrect the psycho-physical person. He notes that Biblical Christian teaching references a bodily resurrection.

His examples using John Smith suggest that life after death is possible without the usual understanding of the soul. Hick states that provided the re-created John Smith has continuous memories, we would have to say that he is the same person. If as Christians we believe in an all-powerful God, surely it is logically possible for this God to re-create us in a new world (heaven) when our body dies.

He gives 3 thought experiments to establish this as a possibility.

1. Imagine that John Smith suddenly disappears whilst in the USA and an identical replica of him appears in India a few moments later. He looks identical, has the same mannerisms, identical fingerprint, he has the memories of John Smith, has the same stomach contents etc. If this happens, we would have to say that the new replica is the same John Smith.
2. Having accepted this, imagine that John Smith suddenly dies whilst in the USA and a replica appears a few moments later in India. He looks identical, he remembers feeling unwell earlier, and tests and questions seem to confirm he is the same person.
3. Finally, if we can accept that the new replica would be the same John Smith in the first two cases, Hick asks us to consider a final case. John Smith dies in the USA and a replica of John Smith appears in another world – complete with physical likeness, memories, personality, stomach contents etc. If we are able to accept that this new replica is indeed the same John Smith, then essentially, we have accepted that it is theoretically possible for God to recreate human beings – exact psychophysical replicas – in another realm e.g. heaven.

Discussing the Replica Theory

Hick's Replica Theory does not prove life after death and certainly does not prove the resurrection of the body. In fact, Hick is well aware of this: proof in this area of philosophy cannot be achieved, all Hick is aiming to demonstrate through his thought experiments is that the concept is logically possible – particularly if you believe in an all-powerful God.

Some thinkers argue that a replica is just a replica. It is not me but merely an exact copy of me. For these thinkers, a key to personal identity is bodily continuity, so the miracle that God would have to perform at the end of time is the reanimation of our dead bodies so that this original body is the one that comes to life. Either that, or believers have to be prepared to accept an afterlife that is disembodied.

6.1 (d) Replica theory

Discussing the Replica Theory

A further criticism put by Peter Vardy poses the question of multiple replicas. If God is able to recreate us molecule for molecule – a bit like a photocopier for documents – then what is there to prevent God from making multiple replicas in the afterlife, and if they are identical, which one of them would be me?

Resource

In order to understand John Hick's views on personal identity and life after death, the best sources are his own writings. His chapter on the topic in his 1983 work 'Philosophy of Religion' provides a good overview. His views are unpacked in much more detail in 'Death and Eternal Life' (1976)



Summary of key ideas

- Hick rejects the traditional religious view of the soul: he argues it is unscientific, and it is not biblical.
- Hick accepts that human identity is primarily physical: he is a soft materialist
- This does not necessarily out some psychological aspect to our identity. Telepathy, and parapsychology suggest that we are not completely explained by the physical
- The lack of a soul does not logically rule out life after death
- It is logically possible that an all-powerful God could recreate an identical psycho-physical replica of us in the afterlife
- The 3 thought experiments regarding John Smith are intended to show that there is no logical contradiction in what Hick is suggesting.



Discussion Questions

1. Why does Hick rule out belief in a soul in the traditional religious sense? Do you think that he is right?
2. What does it mean to say that Hick is a 'soft materialist'? How does he differ from other thinkers who reject the soul?
3. What is Hick aiming to show in his thought experiments involving John Smith?
4. What criteria are used to decide whether the replica John Smith is the same as the original John Smith? Which of these do you think are most relevant? What criticisms can be made of the replica theory? Do these criticisms work?