

Descartes' Scientific Work (II)

Descartes' interest in human anatomy proceeded partly from his interest in perception, and partly from his desire to understand the relation between mind and matter- a dichotomy which Descartes formulated, and which has been uncritically accepted by much of the world since. His understanding of optics allowed him to unravel the some of mechanisms involved in visual perception, as we see in the drawings taken here from his "Treatise on Man". Notice also his interest in the brain as the organ connected with Perception, memory, etc (but not the 'soul'). His main object in this work was to show how one could give a mechanistic understanding of physiological processes- although most of these processes, from respiration and digestion to reproduction, were already known in some detail, they had been explained in terms of 'souls', instead of mechanically. This was an important step forward.

