Throughout the ages scholars had argued about how the mind or mental qualities could be distinguished from the body and all other physical qualities. The basic, deceptively simple question was this: Are mind and body—the mental world and the material world—distinct from each other? For thousands of years, scholars had taken a dualistic position, arguing that the mind (the soul or spirit) and the body had different natures.

Descartes was an early dualist, who argued that the body was machine-like, such that touching a hot fire would produce a reflexive withdrawal. The mind controlled the mechanistic properties of the body to make it perform actions. Thus, the body influenced the mind, and the mind influenced the body as distinct systems.

Today, psychologists see the mind as a product of the body.

This means that our thoughts are a physical (brain) processes.

This means that emotions are physiological (brain) processes.

A drawing above is from Descartes' writings, depicting his ideas on the mind-body relationship.

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