

## Readings for Tutorial 3

### Descartes

#### Extracts from the Dioptrics

This extract was very interesting, mainly because I hadn't read it before. It is, to summarise, Descartes' writings on the science of Optics. A number of things about it were particularly interesting...

Firstly, the homunculus problem. Descartes realised that the notion of the homunculus leads to an infinite regress, and so in a number of places explicitly states that he doesn't think that the homunculus is a useful idea. This is although other passages might seem to indicate that he was a supporter of the homunculus analogy. I think that the Dioptrics is a little unclear on this point, which I guess is what makes it interesting...

Also interesting was how Descartes worked basic anatomy into his theories. He obviously knew a fair bit about what the eye looked like inside, and had some idea of how the various parts of the eye worked together, as you can see from his example of the eye from the dead man, which sounds like he has done the experiment himself. The other major point that I found interesting was the point about having a finite number of receptors and how that can lead to certain artifacts.

Also interesting was the discussion of distance perception. Descartes identified many cues to distance perception correctly, which is interesting given that the people who teach vision in the Psych dept imply that the distance perception cues have only recently been discovered. The cues Descartes got right were the shape of the eyeball (the focus), the light intensity, and the pictorial cues. He got the parallax bit wrong, though, but only in the mechanism, not in the actual idea that the presence of both eyes is an important distance cue.

I thought this reading was very interesting indeed.

#### Extracts from the Meditations

I'd read this before, but every time I read it I can't help but be impressed at what Descartes achieves in this work. Within his framework, he does create absolute certainty from his cogito argument.

#### Extracts from the Discourse on Method

The thing I found most interesting about his reading was the continuation of the homunculus thing from the first paper. In this reading again, Descartes makes it very plain that he thinks a homunculus is, well, stupid. 'I showed, too that it is not sufficient that it [the rational soul] should be lodged in the human body like a pilot in his ship...'