

Wrapping Up Descartes: What Bodies Are Like

For our 9/22 meeting:

- wrap up the circle (handout from last time, 9/17)
- look at the proof of bodies (last page of 9/10 handout)
- talk a bit about what Descartes thought bodies were like (below)
- start Berkeley

Clear and Distinct Understanding and the Properties of Bodies

- Immediately after proving the existence of corporeal things, Descartes warns us that they might not be exactly like we ordinarily think they are (52.8)
- Descartes says that corporeal things “contain everything I clearly and distinctly understand” 52.9 – and then goes on to give a good hint as to what kind of properties these are.
- This I think is where Descartes is laying the groundwork for his physics (recall his letter to Mersenne from our first handout, 9/1)
- See Adams, esp. pp. xv-xvi for the world (for our world?) of Secondary Quality Anti-Realism (or what Adams calls “Primary Quality Realism”)
- For Descartes, what’s wrong with “secondary qualities”? Focus on the “understand” part of “clearly and distinctly understand,” and look back to the first two paragraphs of M6. Where our translation has “pure intellection” (47.9), better (at least for our purposes) translations have “pure understanding.” Secondary qualities aren’t “clearly understood” because they aren’t “understood” (“intellected”??) at all, but are conceived by means of imagination: by calling up sensory images.
- Going beyond what’s in the Meditations, what is behind Descartes’s “Secondary Quality Anti-Realism”? I suppose it’s his mechanism (Adams, p. xiv.4) together with something like what we might call a Principle of the Causal Relevance of Perceptible Qualities.

~~Proof of the Real Distinction between Mind and Body 9th par. of M6 (pp. 51.6-9)~~

- ~~-Brief riff on the subtitle of the Meditations?~~
- ~~-Brief riff on omnipotence, mild and wild?~~
- ~~-Clear and distinct understanding is taken to show (some sort of) possibility. (I’m regimenting Descartes’s terminology a bit here.) The existence of an omnipotent being means that everything that’s possible (in that relevant sense) really can be made true.~~
- ~~-Similar to the proof of the the possibility of “material things” at the very start of M6 (47.7) – though D isn’t careful to use ‘understand’ there~~
- ~~-This proof is clarified in the Replies to Objections (see below):
Whatever I can c&du can be the case
I can c&du myself as existing without my body [& vice versa]
So, I can exist without my body [& vice versa]~~
- ~~-I suppose for the purpose of characterizing the nature of the mind, as opposed to providing as much hope for surviving the demise of our bodies as Descartes can get us here, the real work is done in Meditation Two, where Descartes seeks to build up the kind of conception of himself as a thinking thing without a body that serves as a proof of the “metaphysical” (we might call it) possibility of his so existing. The proof of “the real distinction” in M6, then, is supposed to take us from that mere metaphysical possibility to some “real” possibility (some “heavy ‘can’”) of post mortem survival?~~

Descartes on the Relation between Mind and Body

- interactionist dualist. A bit about how perception works is at & around 56.9-58.2; mind → brain causation seems to consist in voluntary actions: 55.7
- ~~-The “union” of mind and body and Descartes’s sincerity 3 formulations on p. 3 of the 9/3 handout~~