

**UNIVERSITY OF LONDON**

**M.Phil. EXAMINATION**  
for Internal Students

**PHILOSOPHY**

**Descartes**

Tuesday, 9 May 2006: 10.00 – 13.00

Candidates should answer **THREE** of the following **TWELVE** questions, avoiding overlap in their answers, also between papers.

1. 'Descartes' system of natural philosophy is not generated from first principles, but has been established quite independently of these first principles. In structuring his system around first principles, what Descartes hopes to achieve is a particular kind of legitimation of the whole project.' Discuss.
2. How does Descartes support his claim that the cosmos consists of interlocking vortices? How successful is he?
3. What, according to Descartes, is a passion? What role, if any, do passions play in the acquisition of knowledge?
4. How coherent is Descartes' reconciliation of human error with divine perfection?
5. Assess Descartes' motivations and arguments for the claim that mind and matter are distinct substances.
6. In what sense is the Cartesian will free?
7. Critically assess Descartes' reasons for denying souls to animals.
8. What does Descartes mean when he claims, regarding the piece of wax, 'the perception I have of it is a case not of vision or touch or imagination [...] but of purely mental scrutiny'? (Descartes, *Second Meditation*). Is he right?
9. 'When someone says "I am thinking, therefore I am, or I exist", he does not deduce existence from thought by means of a syllogism, but recognizes it as something self-evident by a simple intuition of the mind' (Descartes, *Second Replies*). Discuss.
10. In Descartes' opinion, could God make a contradiction true?
11. 'All the reality or perfection in an idea merely objectively must be present in its cause either formally or eminently' (Descartes, *Second Replies*). Why does Descartes believe this principle, and what use does he make of it?
12. 'Descartes treats the union of mind and body in a human being as a third kind of substance.' Discuss.

**END OF PAPER**