

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
M PHIL EXAMINATIONS 2003
for internal students

DESCARTES

Candidates should answer THREE of the following questions. Please avoid overlap in your answers.

1. Explain what Descartes means by 'clarity and distinctness'. How much confidence does he have in his clear and distinct judgements? How much confidence should he have?
2. To what extent is Descartes vulnerable to the objection that his struggles with scepticism are the result of setting unreasonably high standards for knowledge?
3. Why does Descartes focus on thinking rather than some other property in his attempt to establish with certainty that he exists?
4. How successful is Descartes in arguing for the innateness of some of his ideas?
5. How is an idea related to its object according to Descartes? How does his account of this relationship figure in the demonstration of the existence of God in the *Third Meditation*?
6. Explain and assess Descartes' account of the relation of the will to the understanding. How far does he succeed by means of this account in reconciling God's perfection with his own vulnerability to error?
7. 'The mathematical truths which you call eternal have been laid down by God and depend on him entirely no less than the rest of his creatures' (Letter to Mersenne, 15th April 1630). What does Descartes mean by this?
8. What role (if any) is allocated to observation and experiment in Descartes' conception of physical science?
9. How, and how well, does Descartes argue against the apparent possibility that this is all a dream?
10. What work is done by the doctrine of true and immutable natures in the *Meditations*?
11. Is Descartes' attack on Aristotelianism consistently reflected in his own philosophy?

TURN OVER

12. According to Descartes, how far do our passions impede moral virtue?
13. According to Descartes, are passions mental or physical? Does he adequately justify his answer?

END OF PAPER