



What Am I?: Descartes and the Mind-Body Problem

Joseph Almog

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In his *Meditations*, René Descartes asks, "what am I?" His initial answer is "a man." But he soon discards it: "But what is a man? Shall I say 'a rational animal'? No: for then I should inquire what an animal is, what rationality is, and in this way one question would lead down the slope to harder ones." Instead of understanding what a man is, Descartes shifts to two new questions: "What is Mind?" and "What is Body?" These questions develop into Descartes's main philosophical preoccupation: the Mind-Body distinction.

How can Mind and Body be independent entities, yet joined--essentially so--within a single human being? If Mind and Body are really distinct, are human beings merely a "construction"? On the other hand, if we respect the integrity of humans, are Mind and Body merely aspects of a human being and not subjects in and of themselves?

For centuries, philosophers have considered this classic philosophical puzzle. Now, in this compact, engaging, and long-awaited work, UCLA philosopher Joseph Almog closely decodes the French philosopher's argument for distinguishing between the human mind and body while maintaining simultaneously their essential integration in a human being. He argues that Descartes constructed a solution whereby the trio of Human Mind, Body, and Being are essentially interdependent yet remain each a genuine individual subject.

Almog's reading not only steers away from the most popular interpretations of Descartes, but also represents a scholar coming to grips directly with Descartes himself. In doing so, Almog creates a work that Cartesian scholars will value, and that will also prove indispensable to philosophers of language, ontology, and the metaphysics of mind.

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