



THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI®

Department of Philosophy and Religion

Philosophy Forum Series, 2021-2022

Thursday October 7th, 4:00-5:30 on Zoom

Dr. Alison Peterman

The University of Rochester



Margaret Cavendish on materialism and metaphysical structure

Abstract: Margaret Cavendish is a materialist: she thinks that the only thing that exists is matter. It is easy to think that we know what this means and that we know what motivates a person to believe it: it means that there are no immaterial objects or properties, and it is motivated because restricting explanations and ontological posits to material things is naturalistic, parsimonious, or explanatorily beneficial in some other way. In this paper I argue that this is not the best way to understand the primary meaning and motivation of Cavendish's materialism.

Instead, it is first and foremost a commitment to a single-category, nonhierarchical ontology, which is to say, for her, an ontology of parts and wholes. As a part of this ontology, Cavendish eliminates all substance-property structure - a radical reductionist project that I briefly contrast with Spinoza's reverse reductionist project. As usual with Cavendish, her metaphysics is fascinatingly unique but results from drawing out some of our deepest implicit metaphysical commitments. So on the way, I hope to shed a little light on materialism and physicalism more generally, as well as on the relationship between mereology and property metaphysics.

The format of this event will be a workshop of Dr. Peterman's paper. Requests for an advance copy of the paper, as well as the Zoom link, can be directed to Dr. Neil Manson (namanson@olemiss.edu).

More information about future UM Philosophy Forum events can be found on the department calendar at www.philosophy.olemiss.edu.