

RESEARCH STATEMENT

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I have embarked on a few different research projects during the last decade, all more or less in later medieval philosophy, and all more or less contributing to our less gappy understanding of its history. In graduate school, I was most interested in various problems connected to causation. What do we mean precisely when we say that the fire is cracking in the fireplace *because* I lit it? Or what is happening when the fire *ignites* the newspaper I threw in it? Is this merely a way of everyday talking, to be abandoned after some philosophical reflection, or are these things really acting on each other? Would our answer be different if there were some higher agent (God) who is responsible for every being in the universe at every moment of their existence? In my dissertation, “[Medieval Problems of Secondary Causation and Divine Concurrence](#),” I focused on some specific debates about reconciling created causation with an omnipresent sustainer of the universe, spanning from the mid-thirteenth to the early fifteenth century (roughly between Thomas Aquinas and Gabriel Biel). My research following it were various offshoots of this common stem: [a paper](#) on Ockham’s theory of concurrence, [one](#) on how Peter of Palude (an early fourteenth-century Dominican) criticized his contemporary confrère, Durand of St.-Pourçain on divine concurrence; [one](#) on theories of impassible bodies after the Day of Judgment and what they imply with regard to our general notion of causal powers; and most recently, one on *sine qua non* causation as considered in the context of the sacraments.

At Indiana University, I was primarily involved with the [Richard Rufus Project](#), in the last stages of the edition of the first six books of Rufus’s commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. Apart from the usual labors that such critical editions involve (checking transcriptions and collations; helping with writing the Introduction; preparing a camera-ready copy of the volume, etc.), I was also one of the principal developers of the Latent Semantic Analysis program package that is meant to help with the subsequent editions. The LSA program is designed to help comparing large chunks of texts based on a matrix of word frequency, in order to help establishing authorship, and especially to discover parallel passages in other works of the same author. During the development, I worked closely with various people in different fields (the friendly developers of the [Classical Language Toolkit](#), as well as of the [Newton’s Chymistry Project](#)). My work on Rufus resulted in a [paper](#) (on the principles of corruptibility) and a co-authored paper (on the powers of the soul and the formal distinction) in a volume dedicated to early Franciscan thought.

My current project, “[Studying Medieval Hylomorphism Whole](#)” (project no. C14/20/007 at KU Leuven, directed by Russell Friedman), is aimed at just that: studying medieval hylomorphism whole, roughly between the years of 1300 and 1330. While various issues of this metaphysical framework in the vibrant early fourteenth century have seen some recent scholarship, most of this scholarship has focused on individual authors, or have tended to split along the lines of the medieval higher educational system (Franciscans, Dominicans, philosophers or theologians, in Paris or Oxford, etc.). In contrast to this compartmentalized approach, we propose to look at “hylomorphism whole” in a relatively short time period,

by examining some chosen aspects of the theory in as much extant literature as possible, both theological and philosophical. This way, the project promises to give a comprehensive overview of the early fourteenth-century hylomorphic debates, while also addressing the question of whether there was one unified discussion of hylomorphism, or there were rather several parallel discussions that split along the usual lines (or perhaps some new lines).

In particular, I am focusing on [early fourteenth-century theories of matter](#), which will form the basis of a book. While the most general concept of matter – more specifically, prime matter – seems relatively straightforward in an Aristotelian framework, the details are messy. How many kinds of prime matter are there? Are the celestial bodies composed of the same kind of matter as we are? What is matter like? What about its potency? Does it essentially have its potencies or are those accidental to it? These are just a few of the questions medieval thinkers addressed in various works. I have now assembled a full [list of questions](#) that authors in our period discussed, with the [appropriate sources](#) where they discussed them (some of these have modern critical editions, some have early modern ones, some none at all). The book is planned to consist of three parts: So far I have mostly been working on the questions connected to [the problem of celestial matter](#) and universal hylomorphism, which are but questions about the extent of the hylomorphic theory. In the remainder of the project I am planning to focus on the question of the actuality of prime matter (the usual question in this context was whether God could create matter without form), and its potency (whether prime matter is identical to its potency). Along the way, we are also preparing some [working transcriptions](#) of our sources, and perhaps a few critical editions, as well as a set of translations into English of some of the most significant texts studied.

Once this project is completed, I plan to continue looking at hylomorphic debates in the late fourteenth and fifteenth century. One characteristic of most of the current medieval scholarship is that it focuses, almost without exception, on authors between Aquinas (d. 1274) and Ockham (d. 1347). The next major figure who appears on the scene at least if one's compass is the contemporary scholarship, is Francisco Suárez, a quarter of millennia later. Although most of my earlier and even current research follows this general trend, I think it is worthwhile to look into what exactly was going on in the gap after Ockham's time, especially since it was precisely this gap that resulted in the kind of scholastic philosophy with which, for instance, Descartes and other early modern authors were mostly familiar. Having worked on some parts of Pierre d'Ailly's and Gabriel Biel's philosophy (as connected to their theories of sacramental causation), I am planning to examine what thinkers such as Nicholas Oresme, Thomas de Vio Cajetan, Luis de Molina, or the Coimbra commentators said on specific issues of hylomorphism.

There are some general characteristics that tie these various projects together. First, on the methodological side, I have been able to consult, and have greatly enjoyed consulting, the relevant medieval manuscripts in all these projects. During my graduate student years, I participated in a Manuscript Studies program organized by the PIMS, and subsequently published a [critical edition](#) of a question of Peter of Palude's *Sentences* commentary. I have been working with manuscripts ever since, and having this skill has enabled me to choose my sources regardless of the status of modern editions – which, unfortunately, does not always seem to be true of the contemporary scholarship. Second, connectedly, while there has been a boom in the amount of medieval scholarship in the last century or so, our understanding of the medieval developments is still gappy. In my research, I tend to look at either rarely studied time periods (as in my planned research), or at rarely studied authors (such as in the

Rufus Project), or look at traditional topics in a new way (such as in the current project), and thus hope that all this work, past, present, and future, contributes to our “less gappy” understanding of medieval philosophy, and also of its connection to the early modern period. My further hope is that even some relatively obscure figures in the history of philosophy can say something interesting to contemporary readers, and can be full-right participants especially in the contemporary neo-Aristotelian debates. A comparative medieval and early modern account of causal powers and hylomorphism could also shed some light on how the most fundamental scientific concepts changed during the Scientific Revolution — but these are issues that I aim to return to later.