Sample modern philosophy reading response type 1 – Cavendish

Section 1

In *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, Cavendish argues for and defends organic materialism. On this view, every part of nature has a sensitive and rational aspect to it. Each piece of nature like a stone, tree or cat, in other words, has sense and reason. Unlike Descartes, she thinks matter has life and perception. One of her arguments for this theory is that there is a certain kind of providence in nature that proves that nature as a whole has sense and reason and as a result each part of nature – including material objects – has sense and reason (*Observations*, p. 72). This is in contrast to Descartes’s thesis that matter is bare extension and nothing more.

Section 2

Organic materialism says that material objects such as tables and chairs, sticks and stones contain sense (a sensitive component) and reason (a rational component). This means that matter is animate in a very rich way, to the extent that a stone has a soul. However, this thesis goes against common sense and science. Common sense does not consider a stone a thinking object with sense and reason. Ordinary people think of stones as lifeless, with no sensitive or rational faculties; whereas ordinary people think humans sense things and reason about them. Science has not discovered any soul-like components in matter. Our philosophical theories should not disagree with what common sense and science says. Therefore, we should reject Cavendish’s organic materialism.