

# JOAN BAPTISTA VAN HELMONT AND THE QUESTION OF EXPERIMENTAL MODERNISM

Ducheyne, Steffen (2006) JOAN BAPTISTA VAN HELMONT AND THE QUESTION OF EXPERIMENTAL MODERNISM.

Full text available as:

[Microsoft Word](#) - Requires a viewer, such as [Microsoft Word Viewer](#)

## Abstract

In this paper, I take up the question to what extent and in which sense we can conceive of Johannes Baptista Van Helmont's (1579-1644) style of experimenting as "modern". Connected to this question, I shall reflect upon what Van Helmont's precise contribution to experimental practice was. I will argue - after analysing some of Van Helmont's experiments such as his tree-experiment, ice-experiment, and thermoscope experiment - that Van Helmont had a strong preference to locate experimental designs in places wherein variables can be more easily controlled (and in the limit, in relatively closed physical systems such as paradigmatically the vessel, globe or sphere (vas, globus, sphaera)). After having reviewed some alternative candidates, I shall argue that Van Helmont's usage of relatively isolated physical systems and a moderate degree of quantification, whereby mathematical procedures mainly refer to guaranteeing that quantities are conserved by roughly determining them, are the characteristics that best captures his contributions to "modern" experimentation.

**Keywords:** J.B. Van Helmont (1579-1644), Ortus Medicinae, Dageraad, controlled experimentation, scientia operativa, quantification, (relatively) closed physical systems, scientific methodology

**Subjects:** [Specific Sciences: Chemistry](#)  
[General Issues: Experimentation](#)  
[General Issues: History of Science Case Studies](#)

**ID Code:** 2701

**Deposited By:** [Ducheyne, Steffen](#)

**Deposited On:** 10 April 2006