
“Mechanical” Agent in Renaissance Matter Theories

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Abstract

The present paper aimed to give a new light on the notion of “mechanical” (*mechanicus*) agent, which was often used in the tradition of Renaissance natural philosophy and especially in Paracelsian chemistry. It traced the evolution of this notion from Marsilio Ficino until the time of Joan Baptista Van Helmont and its impact on the natural philosophers of new generation such as Pierre Gassendi and Robert Boyle. By doing this, it suggested a reconsideration of the accepted interpretation made by historians of science in the past. The paper, was based on the author’s book, *Le concept de semence dans les théories de la matière à la Renaissance* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005) treated in particular the idea of “archeus” of Paracelsian chemists.

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