The Melancholy of Henry More

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Abstract: This article treats Henry More’s philosophical approach to melancholy and his personal experience of the disease. Koen Vermeir argues that, in approaching the imagination philosophically, More was performing a ‘balancing act’ between addressing the subject as a medium between soul and body, and regarding it as a non-corporeal vehicle of reason and the spirit. ‘In his life’, Vermeir adds, ‘More was also performing a balancing act’: both an opponent of and subject to enthusiasm. In this article, I give closer scrutiny to that balancing act, charting the points of distinction and overlap between More’s philosophy of and encounters with melancholy. In the search for relief for his symptoms, I argue, More deployed two significant (and related) techniques: practicing philosophy and engaging in epistolary correspondence.

My arguments grow from two basic starting observations: first, that Henry More’s philosophy is much concerned with the matter of melancholy and its deleterious effects and, second, that More himself was a melancholic. Although the humour recurs in More’s work, it receives its fullest treatment in his treatise on religious fanaticism, Enthusiasmus Triumphatus (1656), in which More describes the power of melancholy to induce delusions in its sufferers, some fancying ‘themselves Cocks, some Nightingales, some one Animal, some another; some entertain[ing] conference with God or his Angels, others conceit[ing] themselves bewitched, or that a black
man or Devil perpetually accompanies them, others fancie[ing] themselves persons of honour, Dukes, Princes, Kings, Popes, and what not’ (Enth. Tri., p. 9). More troubling still, ‘the very nature of Melancholy is such, that it may more fairly and plausibly tempt a man into such conceits of Inspiration and supernaturall light from God, then it can possibly do into those more extravagant conceits of being Glasse, Butter, a Bird a Beast, or any such thing’ (Enth. Tri., p. 10).

Although More leaves no diaries or memoir to posterity, sufficient examples of his writing about his own life (predominantly, but not exclusively, personal letters) survive to establish that, throughout his life, the philosopher struggled himself with a series of illnesses that he regarded as stemming from his naturally melancholic temperament. These I will come to; at the outset it is important to note that, as a melancholic writing philosophically about melancholy, More had important scholarly precursors in Marsilio Ficino and, of course, Robert Burton. Ficino (whose arguments More draws on in his own treatments of melancholy) argued for melancholy’s potentially irreligious effects, although, on Ficino’s account, it was not melancholy itself that was the cause of religious madness, but the ‘overly curious’ behaviour melancholics tended to display. Knowing that ‘Ficino himself was a melancholic who believed himself to be under the influence of Saturn’, James Hankins speculates that ‘he had early in life a period of disbelief in religion perhaps under the influence of Lucretius and pagan versions of Plato, and that he later recovered his commitment to Christianity’. Burton similarly struggled with melancholy, conceiving The Anatomy of Melancholy, he announced, in an attempt to ‘scratch where it itcheth’, to ‘comfort one sorrow with another, idlenes with idlenes’ and to ‘make an Antidote out of that which was the prime cause of my disease’.

Of course, More did not seek to interrogate melancholy concertedly or comprehensively in the way that Burton did, but he did give the humour significant treatment in Enthusiasmus Triumphantus and returned to the matter at various points
in his philosophy. He also, as I will show, took refuge in philosophical activity during his melancholic episodes. Sorana Corneanu has described early modern experimental philosophy as engaged in a process of curing and conditioning the human mind through the acquisition of moral and natural knowledge. More’s religious programme for natural philosophy lies outside the scope of her research, but, as More reveals in the ‘Preface General’ to his Philosophical Writings, he regarded his philosophical endeavours as both spiritually and psychologically self-improving:

For to heap up a deal of Reading and Notions and Experiments without some such noble and important Design, had been, as I phansied, to make my Mind or Memory a shop of small-wares. But having this so eminent a scope in my view, and taking up that generous resolution of Marcus Cicero, Rationem, quò ea me cunque ducet, sequar; I make account I began then to adorn my Function, and amongst other Priestly Habiliments, in particular to put on the Λόγον or Rationale, the Sacerdotal Breast-plate, which most justly challenges place in that region which is the seat of the Heart; the simplicity and sincerity of that part being the Root or Well-spring of the soundest and purest Reason. (‘Pref. Gen.’ pp. iv–v)

More regarded it as the duty of philosophy to attend to matters of religious import and, by doing so, he was putting on a ‘Sacerdotal Breast-plate’, protecting the heart, which was ‘the Root or Well-spring of the soundest and purest Reason’. In Enthusiasmus Triumphatus, More applied that general premise more specifically to the problem of enthusiasm, arguing that ‘the most soveraign Medicine that I know against it is this Diatron, or Composition of Three excellent Ingredients, to wit, Temperance, Humility, and Reason’ (Enth. Tri., p. 36). I will present various examples of More administering these medicines in his own case through the exercise of scholarship.

In doing so, he was entering uncertain terrain. Mary Ann Lund has argued that Burton’s desire was ‘not solely to recommend remedies for the reader to apply, but to effect a cure through the text itself’, demonstrating his intention, in his text, to ‘quiet the minde’. But a dominant cause of melancholy, explained at length by
Burton and others, was 'Love of Learning or overmuch Study', which Burton said was 'one of those five principall plagues of Students', reporting that it 'weakens their bodies, dulls the spirits, abates their strength and courage'. Peter Porrmann observes that 'it was through Rufus of Ephesus that the link between intense thinking and melancholy became known in the later medical tradition'. Rufus gave various examples, including that of a man whose melancholic condition was caused by 'the constant contemplation of geometrical sciences', such that, among other things, 'in his sleep accompanied by a lethargic wakefulness he saw vicious delusional images'. And, in Burton's case, Angus Gowland notes that while the Anatomy's advice may have held good for readers of well-balanced temperament, 'for Burton, who in his own account had indeed “liv’d a silent, sedentary, solitary private life, nihi & musis, in Christ Church”, it amounted to an admission that his unending intellectual and literary enterprise was in fact an experiential immersion in melancholy that could never have been a means of completely counteracting it'.

As Burton, anatomising melancholy, was administering a therapy that threatened to inflame the condition it sought to treat, More too has been accused of slipping into several of the habits he excoriates in his critiques of enthusiasm. In particular, Koen Vermeir argues that, in his philosophical treatment of the imagination, More was performing a 'balancing act' between addressing the subject as a medium between soul and body, and regarding it as a non-corporeal vehicle of reason and the spirit. 'In his life', Vermeir adds, 'More was also performing a balancing act': both an opponent of and subject to enthusiasm. In what follows, I will give closer scrutiny to that balancing act, charting More’s philosophical and personal approaches to melancholy, and the points of distinction and overlap between them.
MORE’S PHILOSOPHY OF MELANCHOLY

Enthusiasmus Triumphatus gives an account of melancholy’s wide-ranging powers and its dangers. Melancholy, says More, ‘is so various and Vertumnus-like that it will supply the place of almost all particulars’. Harking back to the association of melancholy and genius that was complicated by Rufus, he cites Aristotle’s example of ‘one Maracus a Poet of Syracuse, who never versified so well as when he was in his distracted fits’ (Enth. Tri., p. 8). But examples of melancholy occasioning poetic inspiration are far fewer than instances of it producing harmful effects:

But it is most observable in Melancholy when it reaches to a disease, that it sets on some one particular absurd imagination upon the Mind so fast that all the evidence of Reason to the contrary cannot remove it, the parties thus affected in other things being as sober and rational as other men. And this is so notorious and frequent, that Aretæus, Sennertus and other Physicians define Melancholy from this very Effect of it. (Enth. Tri., p. 8)

Melancholic delusions take various forms. In developing this case, More takes his lead from the Anatomy of Melancholy, quoting the example of a French poet who, treating a fever with Unguentum populeum, formed an aversion to the medicament’s smell and suffered olfactory hallucinations: ‘many yeares after he imagined every one that came near him to sent of it; and therefore would let no man talk with him but aloof off, nor would he wear any new clothes, because he fancied they smelt of that ointment’ (Enth. Tri., p. 8). In another case a Frenchman, ‘was perswaded he had but one leg, affrighted into that conceit by having that part struck by a wild Boar’ (Enth. Tri., p. 8); and, in an example from the Swiss physician Felix Platter (though More is still quoting from its description in Burton), a man believed himself to have ‘young Frogs in his belly, that for many yeares following he could not rectifie his conceit’, even studying medicine in search of a cure (Enth. Tri., p. 8). More invokes the cases of a man who believed himself made of glass, ‘and though he loved to be visited by his friends, yet had a speciall care that they should not come too near him,
for fear they should break him', and that of another moved by melancholy to believe he was 'compos'd of butter, and therefore would not sit in the Sun nor come near a fire, for fear he should be melted' (Enth. Tri., p. 9). Further troublesome side-effects of melancholy are found, More says (still drawing on Burton), in the German physician Daniel Sennert: the delusions of having committed a crime, of being eternally damned and 'already tormented with hell-fire', of imagining oneself dead. Religious delusions include entertaining 'conference with God or his Angels', or thinking oneself 'bewitched, or that a black man or Devil perpetually accompanies them' (Enth. Tri., p. 9).

These severe cases resist treatment by rational thought: each sufferer 'sets on some one particular absurd imagination upon the Mind so fast that all the evidence of Reason to the contrary cannot remove it'. Indeed, More is keen to dispel any suggestion that such enthusiasts could be rationally sound. The tactic gains him intellectual ground. Although, as Daniel Fouke has shown, More sometimes argued for spiritual revelation alongside reason,14 he nonetheless sought to put logical reasoning free of delusion or distraction at the centre of his philosophical method. His Antidote Against Atheism went so far as attempting to prove God's existence by logical deduction, announcing:

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though I cannot promise my Reader that I shall entertaine him with so much winning Rhetorick and pleasant Philology, as hee may find else where, yet I hope hee will acknowledge, if his mind be unpreiudic'd, that he meets with sound and plain Reason, and an easy and cleare Method. (Ant. Ath., p. 2)
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The Antidote has much to say about religious enthusiasm and melancholy, but for now it is enough to observe More distinguishing between his own philosophically reasoned conclusions and the psychosomatic delusions of the enthusiast. These stemmed, More believed, from heated melancholy. He attempted to lay bare the physical process from which such fantasies arose.
The Spirit then that wings the Enthusiast in such a wonderful manner, is nothing else but that Flatulency which is in the Melancholy complexion, and rises out of the Hypochondriacal humour upon some occasional heat, as Winde out of an Æolipila applied to the fire. Which fume mounting into the Head, being first actuated and spirited and somewhat refined by the warmth of the Heart, fills the Mind with variety of Imaginations, and so quickens and inlarges Invention, that it makes the Enthusiast to admiration fluent and eloquent, he being as it were drunk with new wine drawn from that Cellar of his own that lies in the lowest region of his Body, though he be not aware of it, but takes it to be pure Nectar, and those waters of life that spring from above. (Enth. Tri., p. 12)

Vermeir observes that this appears to represent a momentary reversal of More's usual scheme by which soul governs body, instead treating 'the body as an agent that affects the mind by means of the imagination'. By allowing the body to work upon soul in these aberrant cases, More enabled himself to take up the Restoration critique of Puritan fanaticism: as Jeremy Schmidt has it, '[w]hat the devout nonconformist thought was grace or abandonment, or the prophet thought was the voice of God, could not, the anti-enthusiast argued, be distinguished from the wanderings of the human imagination and movement of fluids in the brain'. As well as belittling enthusiasts with the charge that their visions and inspirations amount to no more than bodily 'Flatulency', More places the eloquence of melancholy fervour in contrast to his own claim to 'plain Reason, and an easy and cleare Method'.

It was the nature of melancholy to lead its sufferers to religious deviance; More characterised the melancholic complexion as 'the most Religious complexion that is, and will be as naturally tampering with Divine matters (though in no better light then that of her own) as Apes and Monkies will be imitating the actions and manners of Men' (Enth. Tri., p. 11). At times, in fact, it led its sufferers into blasphemous delusion. Often, he says, men of this complexion encounter 'Nature confidently avouching her self to be God, whom the Apostle calls Love, as if it were
his very Essence; whenas indeed it is here nothing else but Melancholy that has put
on the garments of an Angel of light' (Enth. Tri., p.13). Melancholy, like wine, 'makes
men *amorous*, and 'assuredly it was the fumes of *Melancholy* that infatuated the
fancie of a late new-fangled *Religionist*, when he sat so kindly by a Gipsie under an
hedge, and put his hand into her bosom in a fit of devotion, and vaunted afterwards
of it as if it had been a very pious and meritorious action' (Enth. Tri., p. 14). 'The
quaking which Quakers take to be an infallible sign they are inactuated by the Spirit
of God', he claimed, was 'onely an Effect of their *Melancholy* [...] For none have so
high *Paßions* as *Melancholists*; and that *Fear, Love*, or *Veneration* in the height will
cause great Trembling, cannot be denied' (Enth. Tri., p. 18). And the melancholic
'Ecstasie' of some sufferers in sleep, caused 'the deliration of the party after he
awakes, for he takes his Dreams for true Histories and real Transactions' (Enth. Tri.,
p. 19).

More invokes several cases in point, not least David George, the Dutch
Anabaptist who claimed immortality, leaving orders that his body be exhumed three
years after his death in 1556. George so captured the popular imagination that he
was still receiving opprobrium in print late into the seventeenth century. Richard
Baxter found him especially fascinating, remarking, 'Satan's Hand was notorious in
the delusions of David George in Holland, and of Hacket, Coppinger, and
Arthington here'.17 In 1652, the historian Alexander Ross described George's
movement, the Familists: 'so called from the love they bear to all men, though never
so wicked; and their obedience to all Magistrates, though never so tyrannical, be
they Iewes, Gentiles or Turks. Their first Founder was one David George of Delfe,
who called himself the true David, that should restore the Kingdom to Israel'.18

More gave George detailed attention, speaking of him equably as 'a religious
visiter of the sick, obedient to the Magistrate, kind and affable to all persons, discreet
in all things, very cunning in some, as in his closenesse and reservednesse in his
Doctrine to those of Basil, where he liv’d, to whom he communicated not one iota of it, but yet he sedulously dispersed it in the furthest parts of Germany both by Books and Letters’ (Enth. Tri., p. 23). His purpose was to demonstrate George’s predominantly sanguine complexion, arguing, ‘it is very hard to find an healthy body very comely and beautifull, but the same proves more then ordinarily venereous and lustfull’ (Enth. Tri., p. 25). George was a classic case: More had already established that ‘it is a mere naturall flatuous and spiritous temper with a proportionable Dosis of Sanguine added to their Melancholy, not the pure Spirit of God’ that usually inspires enthusiasm (Enth. Tri., p. 15). And George was no exception: ‘Enthusiasm is not without a mixture of Melancholy, and we are speaking now of Enthusiastick Sanguine, in which the fiercer Passions will also lodge; and therefore this Self-denial and Mortification maybe nothing else but the Sanguine’s conflict and victory over the most harsh and fierce Melancholy’ (Enth. Tri., p. 25). More’s diagnosis offered physiological precision, enabling a distinction between idolatrous enthusiasm caused by the combination of sanguine and melancholy, and the more straightforward effects of pure melancholy.

But, as Vermeir and others have demonstrated, More’s philosophical scheme was not consistent. In order to defend the soul’s divine nature against the reductive treatment by materialist philosophers, More attempted, Vermeir writes, to integrate ‘a Cartesian-style dualism and a particular attention to the functioning of the body with Neoplatonic tradition and with Christian doctrine on the soul’. The Antidote argued for the immateriality of spirits, speaking of ‘a Spirit’ as ‘a notion of more perfection then a Body, and therefore the more fit to be an Attribute of what is absolutely perfect, then a Body is’. ‘The parts of a Spirit’, More argued, ‘can be no more separated, though they be dilated, then you can cut off the Rayes of the Sunne by a paire of Scissors made of pellucide Crystall’ (Ant. Ath., p. 16).
Vermeir points out that in general More’s metaphysics could not sustain the conventional view of reason as an immaterial principle deployed to treat diseases of the imagination, with More speaking of ‘Reason’ as being ‘so involved together with Imagination, that we need say nothing of it apart by itself’. But that is not to say that More does not, at times, hold up reason as a religious faculty, deployed to control base, bodily inclinations. In the preface to his Conjectura Cabbalistica (1653), he averred, ‘[b]ut for mine own part, Reason seems to be so far from being any contemptible Principle in man, that it must be acknowledged in some sort to be in God himself’ (Conj. Cab. p. 2). Indeed, failure to apply reason in devotion might be a symptom of melancholy: ‘to exclude the use of Reason in the search of divine truth, is no dictate of the Spirit but of headstrong Melancholy and blinde Enthusiasme, that religious Phrensie men run into, by lying paßive for the reception of such Impresses as have no proportion with their Faculties’ (Conj. Cab., p. 2). More’s text sought to put an Atomist philosophy of nature into a metaphysical religious context and, in this case, he insisted he was no enthusiast, passively receiving revelation: ‘[n]or came it to me by Divine Inspiration, unlesse you will be so wide as to call the seasonable suggestions of that Divine Life and Sense that vigorously resides in the Rational Spirit of free and well-meaning Christians, by the name of Inspiration’. Such inspiration, born of the rational spirit, says More, has a psychophysiological effect, being ‘no distracter from, but an accomplisher and an enlarger of the humane faculties’ (Conj. Cab., p. 2).

But melancholy threatened to plunge this rational enlarging of the human faculties into chaos. In his Immortality of the Soul (1659), More speaks of ‘Phrensy and Melancholy, and such like distempers, that deprave a mans Imagination and Judgment’. He later dismisses an argument for the soul’s mortality as ‘nothing but the impostures of Melancholy, or some other dull and fulsome distempers of blood that corrupt the Imagination’, adding witheringly that 'Fancy proves nothing, by
Axiome’. Particular danger lay, More believed, in the possibility of mistaking melancholy for reason:

But if they will call any hot, wild Imagination or forcible and unaccountable Suggestion, the Light within them, and follow that; this is not to keep to Reason and Conscience, but to be delivered up to a reprobate sense, and to expose a man's self to all the temptations that either the Devil or a man's own Lust or a sordid Melancholy can entangle him in.23

In the preface to his Explanation of the Grand Mystery of Godliness (1660), More develops the relationship between physiology and imagination, referring to 'Melancholy that calls the thoughts inward'.24 This commonplace early modern scepticism of self-will is developed by More into a claim for introspection as a symptom of humoral disorder. Melancholic self-regard sets off the chain in which man becomes enthralled to 'a reprobate sense' and is consequently vulnerable to 'all the temptations that either the Devil or a man's own Lust or a sordid Melancholy can entangle him in'. Rather than allow malign humours to call his thoughts inward, More falls back on devotion:

The second reward is in a man's Body; for Strength, Health and Beauty. Fear the Lord and depart from evil, so health shall be to thy navel, and marrow unto thy bones. Prov. 3. Envy, Anger, Hatred, and discontented Melancholy, which reign in either proud or pusillanimous Souls, weaken Nature, and destroy the Body; but Life and Vigour is in the perfect Law of Charity. A chearful Conscience purifies and refines the Blood, but disobeying the inward Light, is the choaking of the Vital Spirits. A sound heart is the life of the flesh, (saith Solomon) but envy is the rottenness of the bones. This for Health and Strength.25

Sound bodies are the rewards of humble souls. That 'discontented Melancholy' is listed alongside the deadly sins of envy, anger and hatred indicates the severity of falling prey to the humour's malign influence. That it is given among the dominant features of weak, prideful souls implies a pernicious cycle in which melancholy is both a mental state occasioned by pride or cowardice and the motive force of self-
aggrandising delusions. *Conjectura Cabbalistica* also offers a psycho-physical scheme of man’s soul in its natural state before divine intervention:

> The rude Soul of Man in this disorder that is described; sad Melancholy like the drown’d Earth lies at the bottome, whence Care, and Grief, and Discontent, torturous Suspicion, and horrid Fear, are washed up by the unquiet watry Desire, or irregular suggestions of the Concupiscible, wherein most eminently is seated base Lust and Sensuality; and above these is boisterous Wrath, and storming Revengefulnesse, fool-hardy Confidence, and indefatigable Contention about vain objects. In short, whatever Passion and Distemper is in fallen Man, it may be referred to these Elements. (*Conj. Cab.*, p. 153)

Melancholy’s composition here is interesting. It appears to be constituted by care, grief, discontent, suspicion and fear washed to the bottom of the soul by desire. And seated ‘most eminently’ in Desire are ‘base Lust and Sensuality’, which drive these malign passions into the melancholic waters at the soul’s base. Individual will holds responsibility for the accumulation of this material. More’s response was to set mind over matter: in the *Discourses* he reported that, ‘A chearful Conscience purifies and refines the Blood’, and the *Conjectura Cabbalistica* reminds him that ‘God leaves not his creatures in this evil conditi

More knew the danger of becoming tainted by association with melancholy, particularly that stemming from, in Burton’s characterisation, overmuch study. Scholars, More wrote, are as often fed by genuine interpretation as by delusion:

> And although this fewel and blaze may transmit some strange steam into their Brains, that they be drunkenly merry; yet surely if they ever come to themselves, they will fall into as deep and dull a Melancholly, to see how horribly they have been deceived: They shall lye down in sorrow.

It was in part anxiety about being tarred with this brush that led More into dispute with Thomas Vaughan in the early 1650s. Irritated that the hermetic Vaughan
claimed to be an exponent of Platonism, More was concerned that readers might confuse Vaughan’s occult perceptions with his own professed reason (though, in fact, Fouke suggests the two philosophical schemes bore much similarity). The Second Lash of Alazonomastix (1651), an open letter to Vaughan, claimed defensively, ‘[t]hat you so carelessly and confidently adventuring upon the Platonick way, with so much tainted heat and distemper, that to my better composed spirit you seemed not a little disturbed in your phansie, and your bloud to be too hot to be sufficiently rectified by your brain’. Vaughan, More claimed, had laid himself open to a charge of melancholic ranting: ‘thy melancholy being so highly heated, it makes thee think confidently thou hast a Phantasme or Idea of a thing belonging to this or that word, when thou hast not, which is a kind of inward Phrensie and answers to the seeing of outward apparitions when there is nothing before the sight’. More’s aim was to place Vaughan’s condition (physiological and religious) in opposition to his own. He took pains to distinguish himself from the melancholic philosopher, disowning any claim to revelation or inspiration, and arguing instead that he was deliberately exercising reason:

Nor am I at all, Philalethes, Enthusiasticall. For God doth not ride me as a horse, and guide me I know not whither my self; but converses with me as a friend, and speaks to me in such a Dialect as I understand fully, and can make others understand, that have not made shipwrack of the faculties that God hath given them, by superstition or sensuality.

MORE’S EXPERIENCE OF MELANCHOLY

As well as criticising delusional melancholics, More suffered chronically from the illness’s effects. The ‘Preface General’ to his Collection of Philosophical Writings finds More expressly admitting to an enthusiastic temperament:
For I must confess I have a natural touch of Enthusiasme in my Complexion, but such as, I thank God, was ever governable enough, and I have found at length perfectly subduable. In virtue of which victory I know better what is in Enthusiasts then they themselves, and therefore was able to write what I have wrote with life and judgement, and shall I hope contribute not a little to the peace and quiet of this Kingdom thereby ('Pref. Gen.', p. x).

It is worth dwelling for a moment on More's phraseology. His admission to a disorder that 'was ever governable enough', and which he found, 'at length', to be 'perfectly subduable', acknowledges both that melancholy to More was a long-term condition, and that he took interventional steps to govern and subdue it. Like Burton, he addressed the subject of melancholy as a melancholic. Often, More's was cooled, scholarly melancholy, rather than the heated, fanatical melancholy debunked in his philosophical writing, but he frequently complained of a hot temper too. And, while More's initial problem was cooled melancholy and the problems of temperament it brought, he was not automatically inoculated against the humour's more harmful effects. Even cooled melancholy appeared to carry religious implications:

For as it is thus vehemently hot, so it is as stupidly cold; whence the Melancholist becomes faithlesse, hopelesse, heartlesse, and almost witlesse. Which Ebbs of his Constitution must needs make the overflowing of it seem more miraculous and supernatural. But those cold and abject fits of his make him also very sensibly and winningly Rhetorical, when he speaks of disconsolation, desertion, humility, mortification, and the like, as if he were truly and voluntarily carried through such things; whenas onely the fatal necessity of his Complexion has violently drag'd him through the mere shadows and resemblances of them. (Enth. Tri., p. 13)

Like heated melancholy, the religious implications of cooled melancholy are mere impressions. It seems 'miraculous and supernatural'; the melancholic's apparently winning rhetoric is a mere 'cold and abject fit', dictated by 'the fatal necessity of his Complexion'. For More, the challenge was to avoid falling prey to such misleading physiological effects.
Although More does not leave a concerted autobiographical text that describes his condition in detail, he is survived by a number of letters, with his correspondence with Anne Conway notably more personal and confidential than his letters to other correspondents. His surviving letters to Hartlib notably avoid making reference to the state of his health (among the twenty-six letters there is one reference to More's having 'been a little in Physick'). Writing to Boyle, meanwhile, More concentrated largely on philosophical matters, and took a matter-of-fact approach to illness and recovery, thanking Boyle for his 'care in directing' More to an 'excellent Medicine' 'against [his] Quartan' (ague). His correspondence with Conway, by contrast, is littered with descriptions of his fluctuating temperament.

In June 1653, More suffered troubled spirits among a raft of other complaints, including 'a tough phlegm in my stomach and head, with the scurvy, the spleen, sinking of spiritts, weakness of my legs, wasting of my flesh and heaviness in my head, and perpetuall sleepiness so that I suspect my self not far of from an Apoplexy which is an easy death'. Amid a fierce bout of melancholy in 1654, he wrote to Conway:

But the excesse of these passions I was obnoxious to, proceeded from that reall and burdensome disease of Melancholy that had so seiz'd on my body and spiritts, and made me unfitt to bear lesser evills, and therefore much more unfitt to undergo that greatest that I can for the present imagine as to my outward content. I am driven againe upon that which I have 5 thousand times thought upon, that the joyes of this present life, are but a Mockery, and to cleave to close to them, the ground of the greatest misery conceivable. (Conway Letters, p. 96)

So physically and mentally debilitating was melancholy that More seemed to border on nihilism. Physically he was exposed to an 'excess of these passions', stemming from the 'reall and burdensome disease of Melancholy' and this set of symptoms wreaked psycho-somatic consequences, leaving More 'unfitt to bear lesser evills', among which came morbid obsession. He was quick to issue a disclaimer which
would find an echo in the *Discourses*’ reminder that ‘A cheerful Conscience purifies and refines the Blood’: ‘[b]ut a man may always be cheerfull, or make his passions tolerable if he joyn his minde to nothing of this terrestriall world, but make all things an Object of those divine graces and peace which God has putt into the soule of man...’ (p. 96).

But such mental efforts did little to staunch melancholy’s onslaught. The following month, More wrote again, ‘I am assaulted with the mischievous stormes of this pitifull terrestrial karcas of mine’ (p. 102). With bodily affliction came more morbid thoughts. In a striking metaphor he described his body as ‘an house made of clay walls and a little thatch to cover it, a very homely cottage, but when it is out of temper, a mere dampish dungeon and the soul is a fallen prisoner, which makes me look on that terrible scar-crow of the ignorant, Death, as a rude friend that breaks the prison doore open to let me out’ (p. 92).

The next spring, when melancholy recurred, More’s condition and his epistolary relationship with Conway appeared to have become interconnected:

> Your Ladiship never send me a more seasonable letter in your life. For I was never in so sad a pickle and so confounded with sorrow as that very afternoon the letter came. The clouds had been gathering from Fryday in the afternoon that I mist of your expected letter, but discharg’d themselves then, when in my study I sorted my letters and bound up your Ladiships in a bundle by themselves, despairing ever to hear from your againe. So that this last letter was an infinite relief to my passion and melancholy. (p. 130)

Perhaps a tendentious attempt to perpetuate a correspondence he worried was dwindling, this pitiable vision of More’s solitary life, beset by a disordered constitution, liable to passionate fits, attributes to Conway’s letters the power to dispel accumulations of ill humour. A fit of depression at about this time of year seems to have been an annual event. The following February, More reported, ‘[t]hings go so crosse with me as concerning the enjoyments of this world, that I
professe I am resolved I will not be mocked any longer with any hopes in it, but keep me onely to such enjoyments as are common to both states and lett God do his will in all’ (p. 138).

After 1657, the yearly bouts of melancholy seemed to let off, though More still made occasional mention of his mental state. In 1658 he wrote, ‘[t]his present world is so full of vexations and disturbances’ (p. 149), a state of affairs that prompted him to begin work on The Immortality of the Soul. In 1659, hearing of Conway’s continuing ‘diseasement’, he observed, ‘[t]his life is full of trouble and uncertainty, and it is onely left to us to act our parts in it so well as we can, and to reape the satisfaction that we do soe, and to submitt our selves to his will that rules all thinges’ (p. 158).

In 1660, More made a more direct statement about his natural melancholy and the struggle against it. He had visited Conway in London the previous month, and expressed displeasure at parting from her. Either her absence,

or my incessant tumbling down to much small beere and fruit to mitigate that troublesome and wasting heate in my body caused by those fierce elements and materialls of green cholere, is the reason of this flaccidness of the mouth of my stomach, as that of my extream proneness to heaviness and sorrow. Which proportion in the body will not fayle to offerr the saddest scenes of thinges that can be to afflict the minde. But I never deale with any passion that troublesomely invades me, with slights and divertisements but bid them batteyle in the open field, and by a serious ramble for a whole afternoon together into [Jesus College?] closing, I gott some consyderable ground against my enemie, after which I was better both in body and minde, and after the receipt of your Ladiships letter much better then before. (pp. 164–5)

More’s heated condition was either a psycho-somatic response to parting from Conway, or the product of beer and fruit added to his natural store of green choler. He hinted in 1653 about suffering from ‘hott’ spirits and, being a source of fanatical delusion, heat in More’s body had to be handled with care. The letter makes explicit the hints of earlier correspondence that More regarded himself as being embroiled in
an ongoing battle against melancholic symptoms. In this case, the (conventional)\textsuperscript{34} treatment was walking and fresh air (a course he also recommended to Conway [75]), but the letter nonetheless finds More taking stock of his gains and losses in this continuing process.

In a long letter of 1661, More apologised for having abruptly taken his leave after another visit. Conway was about to depart for Ireland where she would spend the next three years. ‘Indisposedness of body, distractedness of minde of the uncertaine aspect of publicke affaies concerning which I think I am over solicitous and the disturbance of my thoughts from the consyderation of my two years exile from your Ladiships excellent society’ (p. 182), More claimed were the reasons for his seeming rudeness. On leaving Conway, More experienced his familiar mental disturbance. External as well as internal physical experience seems to have prompted his confusion, which he struggled to shake off, writing, ‘I was much besottedly melancholy after my departure and as jumbled in my minde as in my body by the jogging of the coach, and now I come to some rest, it is but a troublesome leasure of sadly computing with my self the summe of my losses’ (p. 182). Two weeks later, he was again complaining of ‘a ten days cold, and longer which hath much quenched and made sad my spiritts’. Spleen and scurvy, he wrote, ‘seiz’d my body and at once my minde was in the worst temper of all’ (p. 184). The letter develops into a demonstration of this disturbance, with More describing his dreams: ‘my Spiritt was so tost and exagitated betwixt a melt ing pity and a fretting indignation (you may easily imagine the objects) and my head so fill’d with the scene of Mariana’s and sundry other rougish and disharmonious representations’ (pp. 184–5). Self-reflection, to More, was suspicious (‘Melancholy that calls the thoughts inward’), and mental experience impossible to convey accurately—‘I can no more express to the sense of another, then if I should tell my dreame which no man can so be affected with as he that dreamt it’—but he gave a clue to the severity of his
melancholy by offering a comparison that smacked of malevolent possession: ‘I could not be more worn out and weary’d if I had fall’n indeed into a dream of Hags and Hobgoblins or been really rid by them’ (p. 185).

A week later, More wrote again, still beset by ‘sadness and soliciitude of spiritt’ (p. 185). He complained of being ‘disturb’d and confus’d in my minde by reason of the conflict of my passions and my reason’, another acknowledgement that his physical make up had impinged upon his operation as a philosopher. Early the following year, another intermission in Conway’s letters prompted him to remark, ‘[t]he long delay of this letter made my Melancholy create very sad scenes of things to vex my minde with’ (p. 198). In 1662, he reasserted the natural heat of his body, claiming that returning to eating meat after his Lenten fast ‘makes my body more then ordinarily hott and feaverish’ (p. 198). The upshot was by now familiar, but expressed with new vividness: ‘I profess I am very indifferent whether I be dead or alive, that seeming not a Metaphor to me but a truth which the holy men of God have spoken, that this life is a Pilgrimage, and I have a strong presage that I shall finde myself among my more domestick friends when I am out of it, who will heartily congratulate my return home’ (p. 200). In 1662, More apologised for his reluctance to engage in jovial banter, confessing to wearing ‘so many badges of gravity upon me’ that he felt obliged to ‘remember what part I act, and tread the stage decorously’ (p. 206).

An ague of 1664 plunged More again into morbid reflection, hoping the episodic fevers it brought would ‘cure me either by discharging my body, through [flatulency] and heavy melancholy, or else by discharging my soul of the burden of my body, though it be no very great one’ (p. 228). The final decade of their correspondence produced letters of fewer personal details, more given to philosophical observation. In 1667, More remarked, ‘[i]t is a melancholick world upon both publick and private respects, but the saying so will not diminish but
encrease it’ (p. 280). And, in 1670, in the course of an anecdote about his rediscovered habit of lute playing, More observed ‘it is such a solace in this drudgery I labour under’ (p. 207). Sometimes, his disposition was publicly embarrassing. In 1670, he was visited by Francis Mercury Van Helmont, Conway’s physician at that time, who, More reported, ‘has a hearte so good, so kind, so officious, so plaine and simple, and so desirous of the publicke good, that the consideration of that in conjunction with something els, putt me into such a passion of joy and benignity, that I could not for my life keep my eyes from letting down teares’ (p. 329). Overwhelmed, More withdrew to his chamber to compose himself, as ‘the more I endeavour’d to suppresse it the more it broke out, as old hapinesse sometimes touches laughter in Melancholy men’ (p. 329). This and another letter six months later suggests that More’s view of his natural temperament had not changed in at least a decade. In 1660, he complained of ‘a very great distemper of heat by making over much hast in my studyes’ (p. 182). In 1671, he was still observing, ‘I have a quick heat in me naturally, that flashes out sometimes before I be aware’ (p. 344). His only solution was to fall back on faith: ‘[s]uch crosse occurrences as these, would make a man hasten not onely that he may retire into God alone’ (p. 349).

In the correspondence’s last years, references to More's state of mind thin even further. Another philosophical letter of April 1672 found him accepting his lot, reflecting, ‘[a] man shall never be at peace till he have no will of his own, but be content with every thing as a gift from God to the world for some designe or other, or upon some groundes or other which are certainly righteous and good, whether we understand them or noe’ (p. 356). But he continued to tinker, resolving to forego alcohol for ‘the health of my body and minde’, as well as to ‘contribute something to the healing and corroborating my better part, and extinguishing in me that false pleasure, and brining in a better in the stead of it’ (p. 357). To the last, More was
resolved to fight off physically born delusions to achieve a better spiritual-emotional condition.

CONCLUSIONS

The struggle against melancholy was a frequently recurring feature of More's adult life, but how did his scholarly treatment of melancholy relate to his personal experience of the disease? We have seen evidence of his suffering from the melancholy caused by ‘overmuch Study’, which Burton said was ‘one of those five principall plagues of Students’, which ‘weakens their bodies, dulls the spirits, abates their strength and courage’. Ficino, likewise, developed the Aristotelian maxim, that ‘all men who excelled in any art lived as melancholics whether they were born as such or whether they emerged as such from assiduous contemplation’. In 1659, More became trapped in a downward spiral, writing that ‘the frame and constitution of my body is so much altered with melancholy and I know not what mischief els, that I cannot read or speculate much without a very great deal of prejudice to my health. The greatest recreation I finde are some certaine Meditations concerning my soul. but this againe proves but an Hell to me so oft as I consider her frequent pain and torments. So yt Providence is pleased to feed me, as Apes are sayd to be fed, with a bitt and a knock’ (Conway Letters, p. 499). And, in More's Latin preface to his Opera Omnia (1679), translated in John Ward’s 1710 biography, he describes an earlier spiritual crisis, appearing to have relevance to the problem of melancholy brought on by philosophical endeavour. In More's case:

It fell out truly very Happily for me, that I suffer'd so great a Disappointment in my Studies. For it made me seriously at last begin to think with myself; whether the Knowledge of things was really that Supreme Felicity of Man; or something Greater and more Divine was: Or, supposing it to be so, whether it was to be acquir'd by such an Eagerness and Intentness in the reading of Authors, and Contemplating of Things; or by the Purging of the Mind from all sorts of Vice
whatsoever: Especially having begun to read now the Platonick Writers, Marsillus Ficinus, Plotius himself, Mercurius Trismegistus; and the Mystical Divines among whom there was frequent mention made of the Purification of the Soul, and of the Purgative Course that is previous to the Illuminative; as if the Person that expected to have his Mind illuminated of God, was to endeavour after the Highest Purity.36

More's difficulty here may have been 'Melancholy' calling his 'thoughts inward': he begins to question the spiritual value of his philosophical programme – even if 'Knowledge of things' is the 'Supreme Felicity of Man', it may be that it shouldn't be acquired by 'Eagerness and Intenctess in the reading of Authors', but rather 'by the Purging of the Mind from all sorts of Vice whatsoever'. Here, it is important to note that More's melancholy appears to call his thoughts inward to the extent that he questions the motives of his philosophy—thinking 'with my self; whether the Knowledge of things was really that Supreme Felicity of Man'—but while here he begins to reject the pursuit of natural knowledge, he does not reject philosophy out of hand, preferring the authority of Plato, Ficino, and Hermes Trismegistus and making recourse to the Platonic example of purifying the soul and seeking 'Highest Purity'. Most useful to More's new philosophical purpose was the Theologia Germanica, the fourteenth-century mystical treatise popularised by Martin Luther. Although More found 'no slight Errors in Matters of Philosophy' in the text, many of which he believed to proceed from 'a certain deep Melancholy', some of the Theologia's precepts did have spiritually rejuvenating effects:

But that which he doth so mightily inculcate viz. That we should throughly put off, and extinguish our own proper Will; that being thus Dead to our selves, we may live alone unto God, and do all things whatsoever by his Instinct, or plenary Permission; was so Connatural, as it were, and agreeable to my most intimate Reason and Conscience, that I could not of any thing whatsoever be more clearly or certainly convinced. Which sense yet (that no one may here use that dull and idle Expression Quales legimus, Tales evandimus, Such as we read, Such we are) that truly Golden Book did not then first implant in my Soul, but struck and rouz'd it, as it were out of Sleep in me: Which it did verily as in a Moment, or the twinkling of an Eye.37
In the proposition that ‘we should throughly put off, and extinguish our own proper Will; that being thus Dead to our selves, we may live alone unto God’ More finds his soul ‘struck and rouz’d’ out of Sleep; his ‘Reason and Conscience’ are engaged and he ‘certainly convinced’. Here More appears to find an ideal response to his enthusiastic tendencies: his expression of self-abasement and submission to God’s control is typical, especially of Protestants at the Puritan end of the scale, but, rather than believing himself the vessel of God’s prophesies, More is the object of his corrections, and his spiritual and physiological condition is attuned to humble acceptance of those rather than self-aggrandising proclamations of divine inspiration.

It is important that More comes to this realisation through his reading of Plato, Ficino, Hermes Trismegistus and particularly Theologica Germanica. Rather than developing original lines of thought, More located himself in relation to a tradition of influential exemplars. Philosophy for More, as it was to Burton, is central to his developing sense of self-awareness and of his subordinate place in his relationship to God. Burton advocated something similar. Gowland speaks of the purpose of Burton’s ‘Consolatory Digression’ as being to cultivate ‘self mastery’ through ‘the application of philosophical or spiritual argument to uproot despair from the soul as the product of the erroneous valuation of worldly fortuna’. Burton provided an example for More in his marshalling of influential source material, proposing in his digression ‘to collect and gleane a few remedies, and comfortable speeches out of our best Orators, Philosophers, Diuines, and fathers of the Church’, envisaging, he said, that such speeches ‘must needs doe some good to such as are happy, to bring them to a moderation, and make them reflect on and knowe themselves, by seeing the unconstancy of humane felicity, others misery: and to such as are distressed, if they will but attend and consider of this, it cannot chuse but give some content and comfort’. More seems to have taken the principle further than seeking realisation of ‘the vnconstancy of humane felicity, others misery’ when
happy, and 'content and comfort' when miserable: he actively deployed philosophical reading to strike and rouse his soul from spiritual complacency.

But philosophy was not More's only recourse. Correspondence with Conway also seems to have had therapeutic value. Sometimes, correspondence provided a distracting outlet for philosophical exercise. In 1673, More wrote, 'I thank you for your kinde and ingenious project for diverting me from my Melancholy as you suppose it, by propounding those 3 Objections touching the placing of the vialls after the 6 Trumpett' (Conway Letters, p. 521). As well as in philosophical discourse, he seemed to find inherent value in writing and receiving letters. In 1661, he wrote, 'in what sadness and solicitude of spiritt your letter found me you may imagine in part from my last, which I suppose you received not till after you had writt. But really at that very hour I receiv'd your Ladishes letter I was more sunk in sadness then ever since I left London last, so that it came like cordiall water to a fainting man' (p. 185).

In falling back on letter-writing, More may have also been drawing on a pre-existing tradition: that of the epistola consolatoria, characterised by George McClure as part of the long-standing practice of consolatory literature, in which letters, treatises, dialogues, elegies, manuals and poems participated in the work of easing sorrow through the stimulation of the soul. Erasmus’s letter-writing manual, De Conscribendis Epistolis, spoke of the duty of a correspondent writing to console an addressee being to 'carefully marshall all the arguments that may serve to soothe the pain'. More was certainly accustomed to dispensing consolation by letter. As Marjorie Nicolson has it, 'there were correspondents all over England who wrote him for advice and comfort: young men on the threshold of life, desiring counsel from him who looked back on ministering years; older men who had felt the chaos of doubt and unbelief; a mother begging him as godfather to her unborn child; apocalyptical scholars arguing, agreeing, disputing; philosophers and theologians weighing and pondering his arguments; credulous spiritists sending him careful
accounts of visitations’ (Conway Letters, p. 470). A letter to a friend whose daughter was dying of a consumption, attempted to persuade the friend that ‘her Passage will be in all likelyhood, very easy to her … she being an innocent vertuous Young Lady’ and, further, More sought to enlist his friend’s assistance in reminding his daughter of various spiritual places, which were ‘apt to raise her affection to, and affiance in our Saviour’ and, furthermore, to ‘contribute (her mind being thus chear’d) to the bettering the state of her Body, and help on a Recovery, if she be at all recoverable’.43

Conway’s letters appeared to perform a similar office of rejuvenation for More. During a period of illness in 1662, he wrote to her, ‘I confesse your letter was so great a satisfaction to me when I thought you had forgotten all concernments of so uselesse a person, that it gave much of vigour to that weake estate it found me in’ (p. 201). Another time, he called Conway’s letters ‘the best refreshments that I can meet with, they appearing to me to be [fruits?] of what has ever been the most pleasant object of my minde, of the [ingenious] spiritt as deeply tinctured with benignity as adorned with true judgement and knowledge’ (pp. 90–91). It has been often remarked that More was susceptible to the enthusiastic tendencies he treated in Enthusiasmus Triumphatus, and I have, here, attempted to show the ‘balancing act’ More performed in challenging his religious opponents and seeking comfort for his own melancholy. In the search for relief for his symptoms, I argue, More deployed two significant (and related) techniques: practicing philosophy and engaging in epistolary correspondence, especially with Conway. In seeking the ‘Purification of [his] Soul’, and attempting ‘to have his Mind illuminated of God’ through reading philosophical texts, More was drawing on a tradition of consolation going back to his classical predecessors. As McClure says of Ficino, for More the immortality of the soul ‘was a central organizing principle’.44 In seeking refreshment and vigour in his ‘weake estate’ through correspondence with Conway, he was drawing on a similar tradition to that described by Erasmus. His therapeutic programme, in both cases,
invoked a classical precedent that could be weighed against classical accounts of melancholy’s deleterious effects.
Notes

1 Unless otherwise indicated, references to More’s writings are from Henry More, A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings of Dr Henry More Fellow of Christ’s College in Cambridge (London: Flesher, 1662). More’s works in that edition are paginated individually. References to the Collection are thus given in-text by abbreviated title and page number.


13 More is quoting from The Anatomy of Melancholy, I, p. 381–482.


19 Vermeir, ‘Imagination between Physick and Philosophy’, p. 126. Fouke also shows More sometimes holding that ‘moral corruption and disordered passions were obstacles to faith because they interfered with rational judgment’, and sometimes writing ‘as though the deified soul’s superior rationality results from contemplating divine ideas and their logical relations’. Fouke, *Enthusiastical Concerns*, p. 160.


26 More, *Discourses on Several Texts*, p. 114.


31 University of Sheffield, Hartlib Papers, 18/1/26A–27B, fol. 26v.


38 Gowland, *Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy*, p. 266.


