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HUME'S SOLUTION TO SCEPTICAL MELANCHOLY

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ABBREVIATIONS

Below I illustrate how works by Hume are referred to. A complete list of references is included at the end of this text.

Abstract 27, SBN p. 657	"An Abstract of a Book lately Published, entitled, *A Treatise of Human Nature,* &c.", paragraph 27. The page number following "SBN" refers to the L.A. Selby-Bigge edition.
DNR 3.7	*Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, part III, paragraph 7.
EHU 12.1	*An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, section XII, paragraph 1.
Letter to a physician, p. 15	Letter "To [Dr. George Cheyne]", page 15, J. Y. T. Greig edition.
NHR 11.5	*The Natural History of Religion*, section XI, paragraph 5.
T 1.4.2.9, SBN p. 190	*A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, part 4, section 2, paragraph 9. The page number following "SBN" refers to the L.A. Selby-Bigge edition.

RÉSUMÉ

Il y a plusieurs écoles d'interprétation concernant la nature du scepticisme de David Hume. Ces interprétations caractérisent les arguments sceptiques de Hume comme étant soit : i) seulement partie d'un projet naturaliste de ce que Hume appelle "la science de la nature humaine"; ii) d'une portée radicale et destructrice des hypothèses métaphysiques et rationalistes; iii) la seule forme "compatible" de scepticisme pyrrhonien; iv) une forme de scepticisme mitigé. Ce document présente une nouvelle approche pour renforcer l'interprétation selon laquelle le scepticisme de Hume est de type modéré. On explore la conception et les soins répandus contre la mélancolie au dix-huitième siècle. Grâce à cette approche, on peut faire une nouvelle lecture de la façon dont Hume représente la mélancolie sceptique dans son *Traité de la Nature Humaine*. Hume montre que la stabilité doxastique (un équilibre entre croyances en conflit) peut être atteinte grâce au contraste entre deux passions : l'amour pour la vérité et la mélancolie. Les conclusions du travail de recherche montrent que la solution humienne à la mélancolie sceptique passe par le rejet seulement temporaire de la pensée complexe et de l'enquête rationnelle. Une telle approche est conforme au type de soins prescrits contre la mélancolie dans le dix-huitième siècle, lesquels ordonnent la modération dans les activités intellectuelles pour éviter l'abattement émotionnel. Par ailleurs, on montre que, grâce à leurs avantages pratiques et épistémiques, les traits de personnalité permettant le scepticisme modéré dans les conditions appropriées sont désirables.

MOTS-CLÉS : histoire, épistémologie, scepticisme, mélancolie, émotions.

ABSTRACT

There are several schools of interpretation regarding the nature of David Hume's scepticism. These different approaches claim that Hume's sceptical arguments either: i) only foster a naturalistic project or what Hume calls a "science of human nature"; ii) aim at destroying metaphysical and rationalistic assumptions; iii) offer the only "consistent" form of Pyrrhonian scepticism; iv) form part of a kind of mitigated scepticism. This thesis offers new evidence to reinforce the interpretation that Hume's scepticism is of a moderate nature. My analysis explores the conception and treatment of melancholy prevailing in eighteenth-century England, which allows for a new reading of Hume's portrayal of sceptical melancholy in his *Treatise of Human Nature*. Hume shows that doxastic stability—an equilibrium between conflicting beliefs—is reached through finding an equilibrium between two passions: love of truth and melancholy. My findings reveal that Hume's solution to sceptical melancholy consists of temporarily rejecting abstruse reasoning and rational inquiry. This approach is in line with the eighteenth century's treatment of melancholy, which prescribes moderation in intellectual endeavours in order to avoid despondency. Moreover, the character traits allowing moderate scepticism, developed under the appropriate circumstances, are portrayed as desirable because of their practical and epistemic advantages.

KEYWORDS: history, epistemology, scepticism, melancholy, emotions.

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I aim at providing further support for the claim that the nature of David Hume's (1711-1776) philosophical doubt is that of a moderate sceptic. I intend to reach this goal by showing that, for Hume, the love of truth and melancholy are two passions that can pull one's point of view in two opposing directions, resulting in doxastic stability[1]—an equilibrium between conflicting beliefs. The tension between these two passions involves a tension between conflicting beliefs because Hume associates the love of truth with the pursuit of knowledge through the use of reason, while linking melancholy with a loss of hope in attaining knowledge.

Although Hume describes the love of truth extensively (T 2.3.10.1-12, SBN pp. 448-454), he writes little about melancholy. However, since melancholy plays such a fundamental role in Hume's account of scepticism, I will explore it here, both historically and philosophically, in order to better understand the role it plays in Hume's *Treatise*. In addition, to better understand how the love of truth triggers melancholy, I will closely examine the chief sources that shape the conception of melancholy in the eighteenth century. The literature under review offers important insights.

Until some decades ago, most secondary literature has overlooked the link between Hume's epistemology and the passions in general,[2] as well as the link between melancholy and the love of truth in particular. I claim that these neglected aspects of Hume's philosophy are indicative of the nature of his scepticism. Considering them more seriously can shed light on the current debate regarding the nature of Hume's scepticism.

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[1] The concept of doxastic stability was borrowed from Louis Loeb's (2002) study of the role that

[2] After Ardal (1966) and Baier (1991), there are many scholars paying attention to this link.

There is no doubt that Hume considers melancholy as a passion since he explicitly classifies it as such in a passage of Book II of his *Treatise*—a book entitled "Of the Passions"—in the following way: "Hatred, resentment, esteem, love, courage, mirth and melancholy; all these passions I feel more from communication than from my own natural temper and disposition" (T 2.1.11.2, SBN pp. 316-317). Concerning the love of truth, it is also clear that Hume considers it a passion, as he dedicates the last subsection of Book II of his *Treatise* to this subject (T 2.3.10.1-12, SBN pp. 448-454).

There are currently four schools of thought discussing the nature of Hume's scepticism, namely:

i) Some commentators (Baier, 1991; Garrett, 1997; Kemp Smith, 1905a, 1905b, 1941; Stroud, 1981) believe that Hume uses sceptical arguments only to foster a positive and naturalistic project or what he calls a "science of human nature"—a methodical approach and study of human nature.

ii) Other authors (Beattie, [1783] 1970; Kant, [1783] 2004; Reid, [1764/1785/1788] 1983; Waxman, 2003) portray Hume as a radical sceptic. They support a long-standing interpretation of Hume as a negative philosopher and destroyer of metaphysical and rationalistic assumptions.

iii) There are also those, like Richard Popkin (1951), for whom Hume offers the only "consistent" form of Pyrrhonian scepticism. According to Popkin, Hume's position is similar to that of Pyrrhonian sceptics, in that he appropriately distinguishes philosophical doubt from beliefs rooted in natural or psychological experiences. In connection with this interpretation, Donald Baxter (2008) explores how Hume's metaphysical principles and speculations are not inconsistent with his own scepticism.

iv) Finally, there are those who support the idea of Hume being a mitigated sceptic (Broughton, 2008; Castiglione, 2006; Fogelin, 1985, 2009; Meeker, 1998; Norton, 1982, 1994; Penelhum, 2003; Strawson, 1985). These authors argue that Hume's epistemology is clearly sceptical with regards to reason, but that the workings of human nature help one make sense of the world. My argument is most closely aligned with this approach. However, my approach is different, since I shall substantiate this interpretation by paying attention to the connection between Hume's scepticism and his views on the love of truth and melancholy, an important aspect of the problem which has been neglected in the on-going debate regarding the nature of Hume's scepticism.

Moreover, a new understanding of the nature of Hume's scepticism can be achieved by exploring Hume's account of sceptical melancholy *vis-à-vis* the eighteenth century conception of melancholy. Hume's *Treatise*—section 1.4.7 in particular (SBN pp. 263-274)—shows that the solution to live through an emotional crisis triggered by philosophical doubt has important parallels with the remedies prescribed against melancholy in the eighteenth century. Some of the themes that connect Hume's account of sceptical melancholy and the conception of melancholy portrayed in the primary sources explored in this thesis are: solitude, physical inactivity, unfounded fears, excessive and abstruse thinking, inadequacy between self and world, incapacity to act, and despondency as a source of intellectual progress.

This thesis gives a prominent place to the love of truth and melancholy in Hume's *Treatise*.[3] By acknowledging the love of truth as a trigger for scepticism, this work

[3] The main philosophical source of this thesis is Hume's *Treatise*. A disadvantage of this choice is the fact that many of Hume's writings after the publication of the *Treatise* offer evidence of certain modifications and refinements in his philosophy, which are not taken into consideration. Moreover, Hume himself writes in his "Advertisement," which was first published in the posthumous 1777 edition of EHU, to disregard the *Treatise* as an unsuccessful, juvenile and unpolished work. In contrast with such a statement, some Hume scholars believe that, although Hume is discontented with both the reception of his *Treatise* and how it expresses his philosophy, he never deserts the fundamental principles contained in it (Norton, 2000, p. 19).

explores the psychological mechanism that leads to melancholy and how one manages to live through it. In this new reading, I argue that melancholy constitutes an important and genuine aspect of Hume's work, a fact that is not sufficiently stressed in the vast majority of secondary literature.[4]

Most commentators disregard the link between Hume's conception of belief and the emotional aspects of his scepticism. Such a neglect becomes evident if one considers that most of the secondary literature focuses mainly on either one or the other of the three themes in Hume's *Treatise*—the study of the understanding, the passions, and morals—without drawing any deep connections between them.[5] Such division of labour has a considerable effect in limiting our understanding of the nature and scope of Hume's scepticism.

This thesis comprises two chapters. Chapter I offers a survey of the history of the concept of melancholy—its aetiology, symptoms, and treatment. It also explores the persons, medical works, and cultural influences that shape its conception, from its historical origins in ancient Greece up to eighteenth-century England. This conceptual exploration starts with a close reading of Hume's *Letter to a physician.*

Chapter II explores the psychological process that, according to Hume, may plunge one into despondency. It also describes my interpretation of Hume's remedy against sceptical melancholy. Particular attention is paid to Hume's account of a sceptical crisis (T 1.4.7.1-15, SBN pp. 263-274), *vis-à-vis* the conception of melancholy explored in the first chapter, as well as an exploration of the role played by the love

[4] Some exceptions to this trend can be found in Baier (1991) and Guimarães (2003, 2008).

[5] A remarkable exception can be found in the work of Annette Baier (1991), who claims that in order to properly understand Hume's *Treatise* it is necessary to read it as a coherent and deeply connected work. She also argues that the *Treatise's* strength grows and develops as one advances into its reading from Book I to Book III.

of truth. In addition, Chapter II concludes with a discussion of the role and moral advantages of the character traits that motivate moderate scepticism.

CHAPTER I
MELANCHOLY IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

Melancholy is a physical and mental condition consisting of a state of profound, pensive and long-lasting sadness, as well as unfounded fears. Currently, one would be inclined to classify such a condition as depression, but this would be misleading. The concept of melancholy is elusive and several modern scholars have tried to fix its definition with little success. Moreover, melancholy has often been a term equated with unhappiness, hypochondria, spleen, vapours, madness and other mental disorders.[6] This chapter explores how this ailment is thought of, from its conceptual origins up until Hume's time.

After offering a summary of Hume's *Letter to a physician*, I will show how what Hume says in this letter relates to a long history of conceptions of melancholy—from the views of ancient Greek medicine to those of eminent physicians a few decades before Hume's time. I will especially focus on the specific conceptions of melancholy in eighteenth-century England.

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[6] Clark Lawlor observes that, in the eighteenth century, "[m]elancholy, hypochondria, spleen, and vapours were all terms for what we now call depression, and all could be as vague (or as specific) as our present variety of definitions and explanations" (2012, p. 5). According to Jennifer Radden, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the terms "spleen" and "hypochondriasis" were sometimes used as equivalents (2000, p. 174). Stanley Jackson shows that the boundaries between different terms defining mental illness, such as "hypochondriasis," "the spleen," and "melancholy" are, to say the least, fuzzy. He also notes that, in the eighteenth century, the term "melancholy" had several meanings: "[O]ften to vaguer forms of malaise, often to just plain unhappiness, but unfortunately and sometimes confusingly, it was also still used to refer to the traditional disease of melancholia, a form of madness" (1986, p. 140). Some eighteenth century scholars were also aware of this problem. For instance, George Cheyne writes: "The *Spleen* or *Vapours*, as the Word is used in *England*, is of so general and loose a Signification, that it is a common Subterfuge for meer Ignorance of the Nature of Distempers. All *Lowness of Spirits, Swelling of the Stomach, frequent Eructation, Noise in the Bowels or Ears, frequent Yawning, Inappetency, Restlesness, Inquietude, Fidgeting, Anxiety, Peevishness, Discontent, Melancholy, Grief, Vexation, Ill-Humour, Inconstancy, lethargick* or *watchful Disorders*, in short, every Symptom, not already classed under some particular limited Distemper, is called by the general Name of *Spleen* and *Vapours*: of which there are various and different Symptoms, according to the different Constitutions, Tempers of Mind, and common Diseases, Persons subject to such Symptoms labour under" (1733, p. 194).

Although there is no evidence of Hume's direct acquaintance with the primary sources explored in this chapter, it is reasonable to think that they shaped the eighteenth-century understanding of melancholy, and that Hume's comprehension of melancholy was thus influenced by such system of beliefs.

1.1 Hume's Letter to a physician

At the age of twenty-three, Hume wrote a letter to an anonymous Scottish physician and scholar. It is uncertain who the intended recipient of this letter was and whether the letter was actually sent. According to Hume's nineteenth century biographer, the recipient of Hume's letter was probably George Cheyne, whose writing in *The English Malady* resembles the tone of Hume's letter and who was a Scotsman and a prominent physician who "bestowed some attention on mental philosophy" (Hill Burton, 1846, pp. 42-47). But Hume's twentieth century biographer, Ernest Mossner, disagrees with this hypothesis. Mossner argues that Cheyne was no longer practicing medicine in London when the letter was written and that Cheyne would have been offended by the comments that Hume makes in his letter about philosophy and religion. Moreover, he claims the letter was probably written to John Arbuthnot, "an excellent physician, a man of deep learning, and a man of much humour" (Mossner, 1944; 1980, p. 84). However, another author claims that the intended recipient wasn't Arbuthnot, but most probably Cheyne (Wright, 2003). This conclusion is based on material found in Cheyne's relatively recent intellectual biography (Guerrini, 2000).

In this letter, Hume provides an account of the way his health deteriorated during the previous five years and asks for medical advice concerning his despondent state. This document reveals Hume's early curiosity and inclination for intellectual endeavours. He mentions that, after considerable study of numerous unresolved

philosophical disputes, he feels inclined to seek a new way to establish truth (*Letter to a physician*, pp. 12-13).

He recounts how, by the age of eighteen, he is carried away by a "new Scene of Thought,"[7] which transports him "beyond Measure," and makes him abandon any other pleasure or business, including his plans to study law, and focus all of his efforts on becoming a scholar and philosopher (*Letter to a physician*, pp. 12-13).

He mentions that after some months of arduous study, his enthusiasm for intellectual work wanes. Thinking that his "coldness" towards study is due to laziness, he doubles his intellectual efforts during the following nine months. Although he feels uneasy, his condition does not worsen. He tries to strengthen his composure and understanding by reading texts about morality and virtue by Cicero, Seneca, and Plutarch. But, the solitude of his studious life makes these efforts pointless since he cannot put into practice, against the more tangible misfortunes of life, his reflections about death, poverty, shame, and pain. By the time he realizes this situation, he has already ruined his health (*Letter to a physician*, p. 14).

The first physical symptom that Hume describes is "[s]curvy [s]pots" on his fingers, and this symptom is successfully treated by a physician who also warns him about the "[v]apors." This is advice that Hume initially dismisses. By the age of nineteen he notices a new symptom, that of "[p]tyalism or [w]ateryness in the mouth." After consulting with his physician, he is diagnosed with the so-called "Disease of the Learned," a form of melancholy affecting scholars. Hume has difficulty accepting this diagnosis since he claims not to experience any "lowness of [s]pirit," a typical symptom of those suffering from the "Disease of the Learned."

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[7] Unless otherwise stated, all references in this section are to Hume's *Letter to a physician*.

For the next seven months, Hume follows his doctor's advice by going under a course of "[b]itters, & [a]nti-hysteric [p]ills," drinking "an English [p]int of [c]laret [w]ine every [d]ay," and riding "8 or 10 Scotch [m]iles." Acknowledging at last that he suffers from the "Disease of the Learned" helps him ease his worry that the "[c]oldness" experienced towards his studies might be due to a defect in his nature or genius. Hume is eager to continue his philosophical endeavours and the prospect that his intelligence is not permanently damaged gives him considerable hope (*Letter to a physician*, p. 14).

Hume then becomes more moderate in his studies, applying his intellect only when he feels like it. Such moderation helps in the recovery of his "[s]pirits" and in the progress of his work. He is constant in his diet and daily habits, riding two or three times a week and walking every day. But, in spite of these measures, his condition does not completely improve. He develops new symptoms, such as "a ravenous [a]ppetite," which makes him become "the most sturdy, robust, healthful-like [f]ellow you have seen." He also mentions the milder symptoms of "[p]alpitation of the heart," and "[w]ind in [... his] [s]tomach." Yet, again, he denies experiencing any "lowness of [s]pirits." The partial recovery encourages him to continue riding almost every day, except during the winter (*Letter to a physician*, p. 15).

Hume discovers that the problem with the moral philosophy of antiquity is that it depends more on the invention of virtue and happiness than the experience of human nature. Upon this realization, he decides to focus on the study of human nature in order to find the truth about morality (*Letter to a physician*, p. 16). But, the symptoms of Hume's disease persist and he has difficulty concentrating without continual interruptions. He nevertheless keeps working and produces a considerable amount of philosophical writing, which he struggles to bring to a consistent whole. In spite of his symptoms, Hume stresses that he suffers from a "weakness" rather than a "[l]owness of [s]pirits." He distinguishes the severity of his "[d]istemper" from

"common [v]apors," comparing the difference to the distinction between "[v]apors" and "[m]adness."

Hume further suggests that his symptoms are similar to the "[c]oldness & [d]esertion of the [s]pirit" described in the writings of the French mystics and local religious fanatics. By using such analogy, Hume implies that the force of passion and intensity he experiences during his deep and abstruse thinking discomposes "the [f]abric of the [n]erves & [b]rain, as much as profound [r]eflections, & that warmth or [e]nthusiasm which is inseparable from them," thus leaving his spirit cold and empty (*Letter to a physician*, p. 17).

The recognition that his philosophical studies would not help improve his condition, the encouragement brought on by partial relief from his symptoms, and the advice of his physicians help him realize two things that worsen his condition: "[s]tudy & [i]dleness." Correspondingly, he discovers two effective remedies: "[b]usiness & [d]iversion." Realizing that he has been devoting most of his time to study and very little to business and distractions, he resolves to take distance from his studies by seeking a more active life and transitorily becoming a merchant (*Letter to a physician*, pp. 17-18).

Hume's *Letter to a physician* shows a genuine longing for reassurance that his prospects for a full recovery from distemper are good because he is eager to resume his philosophical project with the initial passion that he had before the onset of the first symptoms. The letter also reveals many interesting aspects about how the severe habits of a studious life can wreck the physical and mental health of the philosopher. As it will be shown later on, other important insights about philosophical melancholy are present in Hume's *Treatise*. But, in order to better understand Hume's account of melancholy, a closer look needs to be given to the theoretical background of melancholy in the eighteenth century. The following section provides an overview of

how medical beliefs shaped the understanding of melancholy from its ancient Greek origins to Hume's time.

1.2 Historical background

1.2.1 Ancient Greek origins

Since at least the fourth century BCE, the Greeks identified melancholy as a physical and psychological distress. Hippocrates (c. 460–377 BCE) believed that four basic bodily liquids or humours (blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm) influence the temperament of a person according to the proportion in which they are found in his body. He understood melancholy as an excess of black bile, which causes, among other symptoms, a pessimistic outlook on life. For Hippocrates, causes of melancholy are believed to be a natural disposition, a psychological shock, or excessive and prolonged work. Galen (c. 129–199) continued with this tradition and insisted on the psychosomatic and hypochondriac aspects of melancholy. He considered that an intense intellectual reflection can have important physiological consequences. Along the same theoretical line, Rufus of Ephesus (c. 80-150) noted that constant thinking and worrying give rise to melancholy and that the most subtle and refined minds are more susceptible to it (Minois, 2003, pp. 16-19).

Other early conceptions of melancholy associated it with mentally abnormal and intellectual men, identifying it as a source of genius. *Problemata* XXX.1, a work allegedly written by Aristotle (384-322 BCE), first associated the melancholic temperament—which is not mainly conceived as the product of a disease but as a constitution with a natural preponderance of black bile—with literary and intellectual genius (Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl, 1964, pp. 15-41).

Interestingly, there is a profound link between ancient empirical medicine, or Empiricism, and Pyrrhonism,[8] a school of ancient Greek scepticism. According to Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl, the theory of humours originated from Empiricism (1964, p. 9). But, in spite of this link, both schools have subtle differences.

James Allen (2001) points out the distinctions and similarities between ancient Empiricism and Pyrrhonism. He notes that the Empirics questioned the use of rational methods in medicine. Such methods were criticised, according to Allen, because they point to careless speculative conclusions about non-evident matters that go beyond what could be discovered by mere experience or phenomena.

For Allen, the Pyrrhonists—including one of their heads, Sextus Empiricus—disagreed with the dogmatic view of the Empirics, which both asserts the truthfulness of perceptual evidence and claims that non-evident matters are unknowable. On the other hand, Sextus and the Pyrrhonists questioned both the possibility and impossibility of grasping evident and non-evident matters, thus temporarily suspending judgement about all matters (2001, pp. 97-99). Yet, notes Allen, it is very hard to prove that a Pyrrhonist really suspends judgement about all matters because a Pyrrhonist also claims to follow phenomena alone—holding beliefs about evident matters, thus blurring the initial distinctions between

[8] One traditional philosophical problem involves the question of how to maintain tranquillity, or non-disturbance of the mind, in the face of hardship. More than two thousand years ago, the Pyrrhonian sceptics formulated a plausible solution to such problem. Their solution is often associated with the work of Sextus Empiricus (Sextus, Annas and Barnes, 2000) who summarizes and explains the main tenets of Pyrrhonism. The Pyrrhonian sceptics devised a series of methods, or "modes," in order to attain the suspension of belief, or *epochē*. Although they valued the non-disturbance of the soul, or *ataraxia*, they did not claim that it is attainable or caused by the suspension of belief. Instead, they simply observed, without offering any further claims or causal explanation, that *ataraxia* just happens to follow the suspension of belief unexpectedly. Broadly speaking, for the Pyrrhonists, the suspension of belief, or *epochē*, is attained through the art of balancing two opposing beliefs (or what they call *isosthenia*). The suspension of belief is not needed when dealing with mere appearances, or how things seem to particular individuals, but only when there is disagreement about how things really are. The solution proposed by the Pyrrhonian sceptics is often subject to the critique that life without belief is impossible. This accusation is based on the questionable opinion that belief is indispensable for action.

Pyrrhonism and Empiricism. Nonetheless, such blurring of differences is only superficial, since what Pyrrhonists and Empirics mean by "evident" and "non-evident" is not quite the same thing (2001, p. 100).[9]

Interestingly enough, there are important similarities between Hume's scepticism and ancient Pyrrhonism.[10] Nonetheless, the present research is concerned neither with exploring such similarities nor with analysing the classic philosophical problem involving the tenability or liveability of scepticism.[11]

1.2.2 The Middle Ages and the Renaissance

The link between the medical and philosophical aetiology of melancholy does not pertain exclusively to ancient times. In medieval medicine, Constantinus Africanus (c. 1020-1087), a Tunisian medical scholar, Benedictine, and translator of Arabic medical works into Latin, associated melancholy with overexertion in reading philosophical and scientific books. According to him, excess of study is a cause of mental fatigue and melancholy (Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl, 1964, pp. 84-85). According to Constantinus, religious and solitary people are prone to melancholy and a cure for it cannot be found solely in medicine, but in a reorganization of the ill

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[9] Due to the limits of this work, I am not discussing all the issues here. However, it should suffice to mention the deep and complex historical link between the theory of humours, ancient empirical medicine, and Pyrrhonian scepticism. These three themes are relevant for the present study.

[10] For instance, Louis Loeb notes: "Hume is working within a philosophical tradition that emphasizes the desirability of *ataraxia*, a state of quietude, in which one is tranquil or not disturbed" (2002, pp. 6-7). For Richard Popkin (1951), Hume offers the only "consistent" form of Pyrrhonian scepticism because he distinguishes philosophical doubt from naturally or psychologically produced belief.

[11] The liveability problem entails the charge made to Pyrrhonian sceptics that life without belief is impossible. This accusation is based on the questionable notion that belief is indispensable for action. Thus, someone without beliefs would be neither able to make any decisions nor get by in the world. She would be fatally paralyzed. For more on this topic cf. Barnes (1982), Burnyeat (1983), and Burnyeat and Frede (1997).

person's life, which involves the six "non naturals": air, food and drink, retention and expulsion, rest and exercise, sleep and wakefulness, and the passions of the soul (Starobinski, 2012, pp. 59-60).

The ancient and pseudo-Aristotelian understanding of the creative melancholic genius pervaded up until the conception of the Renaissance's melancholic intellectual. The Italian Renaissance philosopher Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) notes in his *Three Books on Life* ([1489] 1989)—a work dealing with the concerns and health of the intellectual—that artists and students are prone to suffer from melancholy. The symptoms described by the studious Hume in his *Letter to a physician* seem to be a good example of this observation.

The medieval British physician and clergyman Timothie Bright (1551-1615), author of *A Treatise of Melancholie* (1586),[12] attempted to reconcile the theological and psychosomatic explanations of melancholy. As a physician, he remained faithful to the Hippocratic tradition, which explains melancholy as an excess of black bile that provokes sadness by its influence on the mind. For Bright, "shortness of breathing," "an unnaturall boyling of heate, with wyndines under the left side," and a "palpitation of the heart" are some of the symptoms of melancholy (pp. 121-122). In connection with Bright's observation, Hume mentions in his *Letter to a physician* that he has suffered from "[p]alpitation of the heart," and "[w]ind in [... his] [s]tomach" (p. 15).

Five chapters of Bright's *Treatise* are dedicated to religious melancholy resulting from fear of condemnation to eternal punishment in Hell. Bright claims that the Devil can play an important role when melancholy strikes. By taking advantage of the doubts, despair, and fear associated with melancholy, the Devil can push the

[12] The complete title of Bright's work is A Treatise of Melancholy: Contayning the Causes Thereof, and Reasons of the Straunge Effects It Worketh in Our Minds and Bodies: With the Phisicke Cure, and Spirituall Consolation for Such as Haue Thereto Adioyned Afflicted Conscience. For a complete citation, see the list of references at the end of this thesis.

melancholic to sin by making him question his own religious faith. This aspect of Bright's work is relevant if one keeps in mind M.A. Stewart's suggestion that Hume's crisis is due to an introspective religious examination (2005, p. 30).

Like some of his predecessors, Bright also studied the effects of excessive intellectual work which, according to him, throw the spirits that are indispensible to one's natural heat out of balance (Minois, 2003, pp. 149-151). In connection with this theory, Hume's *Letter to a physician* exemplifies how intellectual excess can throw the spirits of the juvenile scholar off balance.

1.2.3 The seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries

Medical definitions had an important role in the shift from humoral theory to the New Science. Thomas Willis (1621-1675) deviated from the theory of bodily fluids while following the iatrochemical school, which considers the basic chemical components of the human body as causes of disease and health. Willis explains melancholy by saying that "animal spirits," which in healthy people are "transparent, subtle, lucid," become "obscure, thick, and dark" in the melancholic (quoted in Lawlor, 2012, pp. 74-75).

Following a gradual scientific shift during the Enlightenment, the Scot William Cullen (1710-1790), Hume's physician and friend (Mossner, 1980, p. 247), explained disease and health through the nervous system. For Cullen, the malfunction or excitability of the nervous system, particularly the brain, was considered a possible cause of melancholy (Lawlor, 2012, p. 82). Cullen changed the basic elements in his physiology from the vascular system and the heart, to the nervous system and the brain (Jackson, 1986, pp. 124-125). In spite of this theoretical shift, Cullen's remedies against melancholy were similar to those of his predecessors. However,

instead of suggesting one get rid of harmful humours, he advises that one get rid of waste matter in the blood through the surgical removal of blood, purges, and vomits (Lawlor, 2012, p. 83).

The medical claims explaining the causes, symptoms, and treatment of melancholy remained oddly stable from their origins in classical antiquity up to the late Renaissance (Lawlor, 2012, p. 37). In spite of advancements in cardiovascular physiology and iatrochemistry,[13] the explanations of the pathogenesis of melancholia that prevailed during the second quarter of the seventeenth century still referred to the traditional theory of humours and excess of black bile (Jackson, 1986, pp. 113-114). Indeed, common seventeenth-century treatments against melancholy remained chiefly in agreement with Galenic medicine, such as:

> bloodletting, cathartics, and emetics, which were aimed at evacuating the melancholic humour. Diet was also to be light and easily digested, with attention to warm and moist foods in this cold and dry disease. Also emphasized were cheerful company and diverting activities, warm bathing, and moderate exercise (Jackson, 1986, p. 131).

Offering a different perspective than the above observations, David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton claim that:

> Although Hume talks about the 'mixture of humours' at [T] 2.1.12.2 [SBN p. 325], by the 1730s few physicians were still using Galen's categories. The newer theory divided the humours, now meaning the fluid parts of the body, into nutritious, natural, and morbid ([1739-40] 2007c, p. 791).

In view of the diversity of opinions, it is difficult to assess the degree of variation in the medical conception of melancholy during Hume's time. The remainder of this chapter shows how the conception of melancholy in the eighteenth century differed

[13] During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, iatrochemistry was a school of thought seeking to understand physiology and medicine in terms of chemistry.

from the long-lasting Hippocratic one of melancholy as an excess of black bile. It also shows a continuity of the old remedies of evacuations, moderate exercise, a light diet, and distractions from thinking too much. These elements are crucial to understanding Hume's conception of, and solution to, sceptical melancholy.

1.3 The conception of melancholy in the eighteenth century

According to Clark Lawlor, during the eighteenth century, there was a gradual but important perceptual shift in the way melancholy was understood. Alchemy was replaced with chemistry, and Galenic humours with "nerves, spirits, and fibres." In Lawlor's own words:

> The balancing act of the humours to keep the body healthy was replaced, gradually and unevenly, even into the nineteenth century, by different conceptions of a balanced bodily economy based on more mechanistic and chemical ideas of flows that might be locked, or chemical imbalances that should be corrected (2012, p. 43).

The explanation of melancholy during Hume's time differed from the old theory of humours by its incorporation of new physiological elements such as "nerves." However, the description of their symptoms and remedies was still heavily influenced by the traditional conception of melancholy. Although the actual explanation of Hume's disease remains uncertain, the case of hypochondria portrayed in his *Letter to a physician* is paradigmatic of how the "Disease of the Learned" (p. 14) was culturally conceived and treated.

Offering a slightly different perspective, Samuel Johnson's[14] (1709-1784) *Dictionary* description of melancholy reveals its meaning in eighteenth-century England:

> MELANCHOLY. *n.f.* [*melancolie*, French; from μέλανος and χολή.] 1. A disease, supposed to proceed from a redundance of black bile; but it is better known to arise from too heavy and too viscid blood; its cure is in evacuation, nervous medicines, and powerful stimuli. [...] 2. A kind of madness, in which the mind is always fixed on one object. [...] 3. A gloomy, pensive, discontented temper (Johnson, 1756).

Foremost, this description is indicative of the Greek origin of the term, as well as the predominant medical explanations of the disease as either an excess of black bile or a thickening of the blood. The remedies listed by Johnson (e.g. "evacuation, nervous medicines, and powerful stimuli") offer a good indication of how this illness was generally treated.

It is important to note the big disparity between the severity implied in the second definition, which depicts an obsessive "kind of madness," and the clearly milder definition of melancholy as a "gloomy, pensive, discontented temper" (Johnson, 1756). The contrast between these two definitions is helpful to grasp Hume's own understanding of the disease, as he describes in his *Letter to a physician* that "there seems to be as great a [d]ifference betwixt my [d]istemper & common [v]apours, as betwixt [v]apours & [m]adness" (p.17).

In addition to the conception of melancholy prevalent in England, it is plausible that the French conception of the so-called "English Malady" influenced Hume's own

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[14] Johnson is famous for his work as an author and lexicographer. He is less known, however, for having struggled with melancholy throughout his life. The first of his two severe and debilitating episodes of melancholy likely started at the relatively young age of twenty, in the summer of 1729, and lasted approximately three years. Johnson fought the symptoms of melancholy with the usual remedies: Exercise and distractions. He was known to have regularly walked thirty miles between Lichfield and Birmingham (Rogers, 2009).

idea of this disease during his residence in France, from 1734 to 1737, while composing his *Treatise* (Mossner, 1980, p. 74). Indeed, the English conception of melancholy in the eighteenth century was partially a by-product of French stereotyping, which the following section explores.

1.3.1 French stereotyping

According to Eric Gidal (2003), French Enlightenment intellectuals such as Voltaire, Montesquieu, Prévost, and Staël associated melancholy and political freedom as characteristic and inextricable features of the English nation. Gloom, suicide, despair, a harsh climate, philosophical speculation, suspicion of social mores, and civic harmony constituted, according to Gidal, the stereotype that French intellectuals made of the English.

Similarly, Jeffrey Hopes (2011) notes that the pathological disorder characterized by the melancholic Englishman was a frequent stereotype in French literature. According to Hopes, for some French writers, the so-called "English Malady" was mainly a disease of the soul. The seriousness, introspection, pensiveness, *ennui*, and meditative spirit of the English were judged as anomalous when compared to the playfulness and cheerfulness characteristic of the stereotype of the French. Diet, humours, weather, idleness, sedentariness, and opulence constituted just some of the most common explanations for this English anomaly of the soul.

Not only eighteenth century French writers recognized the relevance of English melancholy. Morbid psychology was also a topic of interest at that time in England. Literature from and immediately preceding this period abounds with reflections on melancholy. Some of the most distinguished early-modern English intellectuals writing about melancholy and having a considerable influence on the conception of

this disease were Robert Burton, John Arbuthnot, Bernard de Mandeville, and George Cheyne.[15] These authors, whose work is explored in the following sections, studied the aetiology, symptomatology, and treatment of melancholy—relevant aspects that help understand Hume's conception and solution to sceptical melancholy.

1.3.2 Robert Burton

Robert Burton[16] (1577-1640) is best known for having written *The Anatomy of Melancholy* ([1621] 1800), an encyclopaedic work dealing with the different kinds of melancholy, their causes, symptoms, and cures. Although there is no evidence that Hume had this text in his library (Norton and Norton, 1996)[17], I dedicate a considerable portion of this chapter to Burton's work because his compendium of human suffering and madness was a significant contribution to the eighteenth

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[15] Cheyne also acknowledges the cultural influence of continental Europe in shaping the conception of melancholy as a typically English disorder. In this respect, he writes: "The title *I have chosen for this* Treatise [*The English Malady*], *is a* Reproach *universally thrown in this* Island *by Foreigners, and all our Neighbours on the* Continent, *by whom* nervous *Distempers,* Spleen, Vapours, *and* Lowness of Spirits, *are in Derision, called the ENGLISH MALADY. And I wish there were no so good Grounds for this Reflection. The* Moisture *of our Air, the Variableness of our* Weather, *(from our Situation amidst the* Ocean*) the* Rankness *and* Fertility *of our Soil, the* Richness *and* Heaviness *of our Food, the* Wealth *and* Abundance *of the Inhabitants (from their universal Trade) the* Inactivity *and sedentary Occupations of the better Sort (among whom this* Evil *mostly rages) and the Humour of living in great, populous and consequently unhealthy Towns, have brought forth a* Class *and* Set *of Distempers, with atrocious and frightful* Symptoms, *scarce known to our Ancestors* [...]" (1733, pp. Preface i-ii).

[16] Burton was born in Leicestershire, England. For most of his life, and until his death, he was a student of Christ Church College in Oxford. In 1624, he was appointed librarian of Christ Church, a position that he kept until the end of his life. From a young age, Burton suffered from melancholy. He wrote about it, among other reasons, in order to avoid his own suffering (Bamborough, 2009).

[17] No catalogue of Hume's library survives. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (1996) have reconstructed it based on the list of books possessed by Hume's nephew, David Hume the Younger, who inherited the books owned by Hume and his brother and sister. Burton's work is absent from this account.

century conception of melancholy (Radden, 2000, pp. 129-130) and might have indirectly influenced Hume's conception of melancholy. Moreover, there are striking similarities between Burton's and Hume's writings about melancholy.

In accordance with the Hippocratic theory of humours, Burton understands melancholy as an excess of black bile. He explains the causes of such excess as loneliness, lack of exercise, idleness, and an inappropriate diet. For instance, Burton cites Crato's explanation of how an inactive lifestyle interferes with the elimination of bodily residues, which accumulate in the body and cause excessive black bile:

> Opposite to Exercise, is Idleness (the badg of gentry) or want of Exercise, the bane of body and minde [...] 'For the minde can never rest, but still mediates on one thing or other, except it be occupied about some honest business, of his own accord it rusheth into melancholy. As too much and violent exercise offends on the one side, so doth an idle life on the other (saith Crato) it fills the body full of flegm, gross humors, and all manner of obstructions, rheumes, catars, &c.' (*Anatomy* 1.2.2.6).

In this passage, one can appreciate the positive role that moderate exercise can have in distracting the mind from its own spiralling, melancholic, and restless thoughts. Burton (quoting Crato) warns against any excess of exercise, which can also be harmful. Moderation in exercise, he argues, is a viable prescription against the gloomy effects of excessive thinking and an aid in the evacuation of certain harmful humours from the body. In connection with this remedy, Hume explicitly mentions the benefits of exercise—particularly frequent horseback riding and daily walking (*Letter to a physician*, p. 15). In addition, it will be shown in the next chapter how one can learn from Hume's *Treatise* about the usefulness and immediate agreeableness of moderating excessive thinking.

Burton relies on Seneca when explaining how solitude is a cause of melancholy, for which occupations, distractions, employment, physical labour, and pleasant company

are the best remedies, particularly for those already habituated to such activities or company:

> Especially if they [those tormented with melancholy] have been formerly brought up to business, or to keep much company, and upon a sudden come to lead a sedentary life, it crucifies their souls, and seazeth on them in an instant; for whilst they are any ways imployed [*sic*], in action, discourse, about any business, sport or recreation, or in company to their liking, they are very well; but if alone or idle, tormented instantly again; one day's solitariness, one hour's sometimes, doth [*sic*] them more harm, than a week's physick, labor and company can do good. Melancholy seazeth on them forthwith being alone, and is such a torture, that as wise Seneca well saith, *Malo mihi malè quam molliter esse*, I had rather be sick than idle. This idleness is either of body or minde (*Anatomy* 1.2.2.6).

In relation to this observation, Hume's *Letter to a physician* offers evidence that his youth is plagued with intense solitary moments. These moments preceded and were present during his hypochondriac crisis. Although he is not idle as his arduous studies keep him busy, it is reasonable to think that the loneliness of his studious life makes his emotional life uneasy. In his *Treatise*, Hume notes that even the most powerful person on earth would be miserable in complete solitude, because he would lack the pleasure associated with the company of others (T 2.2.5.15, SBN p. 363).

Burton also warns his reader against a voluntary type of solitude—that is, one that could be avoided by engaging in society. At first, such voluntary solitude may seem alluring to the melancholic, especially to the meditative and scholarly type. But Burton cautions that this is a trap that one should stay away from because it is ultimately conducive to despair and a negative state of mind:

> Voluntary solitariness is that which is familiar with Melancholy, and gently brings on like a Siren, a shooing-horn, or some Sphinx to this irrevocable gulf, a primary cause, Piso calls it; most pleasant it is at first, to such as are melancholy given, to lie in bed whole days, and keep their chambers, to walk alone in some solitary Grove [...] until at last the Scene is turned upon a

> sudden, by some bad object, and they being now habituated to such vain meditations and solitary places, can endure no company, can ruminate of nothing but harsh and distasteful subjects. Fear, sorrow, suspition, *subrusticus pudor* [Latin for "clownish shame"], discontent, cares, and weariness of life surprise them in a moment, and they can think of nothing else, continually suspecting, no sooner are their eyes open, but this infernal plague of Melancholy seizeth on them, and terrifies their souls [...] (*Anatomy* 1.2.2.6).

Burton finds, throughout his own scholarly life, that immoderate study is conducive to reclusiveness, which in turn is conducive to melancholy. His advice is to resist the temptation to be alone and to join others in society or, at least, to try to avoid solitude at all costs. Emphatically, Burton prescribes: "[...] a melancholy discontented person (be it in what kinde of melancholy soever) never be left alone or idle" (*Anatomy* 2.2.6.2).

There is an interesting parallel between Burton's direction to avoid loneliness and a passage from Book II of Hume's *Treatise*, in which he acknowledges that the company of another person can be both a distraction from melancholy and a source of pleasure, particularly when that person communicates her thoughts and sentiments:

> [...] company is naturally so rejoicing, as presenting the liveliest of all objects, *viz.* a rational and thinking Being like ourselves, who communicates to us all the actions of his mind; makes us privy to his inmost sentiments and affections; and lets us see, in the very instant of their production, all the emotions, which are caus'd by any object (T 2.2.4.4, SBN pp. 356-357).[18]

In this passage Hume observes that the lively company of others excites the mind and averts falling into melancholy and hopelessness. In a similar way than Burton, Hume implies that avoiding solitude is a good antidote to melancholy.

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[18] The full passage is quoted below, in section 2.3 of this thesis.

Burton also dedicates a lengthy section of his *Anatomy* to explaining melancholy as a result of a disproportionate love of learning and engaging in excessive study. He believes that the desk-bound life of the student is prone to be inactive and solitary. Excess of study and contemplation also play a crucial role in obstructing the elimination of harmful humours and vapours from the body:

> [...] 'tis the common Tenent of the world, that Learning duls and diminisheth the spirits, and so *per consequens* produceth melancholy. Two main reasons may be given of it, why Students should be more subject to this malady than others. The one is, they live a sedentary, solitary life, *sibi & musis*, free from bodily exercise, and those ordinary disports which other men use: and many times if discontent and idleness concur with it, which is too frequent, they are precipitated into this gulph on a sudden: but the common cause is overmuch study; [...] The second is contemplation, 'which dries the brain and extinguisheth natural heat; for whilst the spirits are intent to meditation above the head, the stomack and liver are left destitute, and thence come black blood and crudities by defect of concoction, and for want of exercise the superfluous vapours cannot exhale,' &c. (*Anatomy* 1.2.3.15).

In this passage, one can appreciate the twofold harm experienced by devoted students. First, excessive study fosters a lack of exercise, company, and the amusements that most non-studious people enjoy, thus debilitating the mind. Second, contemplation "dries the brain and extinguisheth natural heat." Note here the possible link between Burton's observation regarding the extinction of natural heat and the use of the term "[c]oldness" in Hume's *Letter to a physician*. Hume uses this term to describe the waning interest in his studies, which he initially fears is due to his own laziness or a defect in his intelligence (*Letter to a physician*, pp. 13-14).

For Burton, excessive thinking and contemplation—the prime activities of scholars and philosophers—impede the exhalation of harmful vapours from the body, thereby causing disease. Interestingly, Burton refers to "black blood," as opposed to black bile. Perhaps the shift from black bile to black blood could be explained by the, then recent, influence of the aforementioned advances in cardiovascular physiology and

iatrochemistry. In any case, Burton believes that excess of studies, loneliness, and lack of exercise are among the chief causes of melancholy.

Referring to the symptoms of melancholy, Burton quotes other intellectuals:

> [...] hard Students are commonly troubled with Gouts, Catarrhes, Rhumes, Cacexia [19], Bradiopepsia [20], bad Eyes, Stone, and Collick, Crudities, Oppilations, Vertigo, Windes, Consumptions, and all such diseases as come by overmuch sitting; they are most part lean, dry, ill coloured, spend their fortunes, lose their wits, and many times their lives, and all through immoderate pains, and extraordinary studies (*Anatomy* 1.2.3.15).

This extensive list of symptoms makes the diagnosis of melancholy difficult and unclear, which is typical of the eighteenth century conception of this disease. In fact, many devoted students with physical or mental discomforts could fit into the above symptomatology. For instance, in his *Letter to a physician*, Hume mentions suffering from some of the above listed symptoms, such as "weakness" and "[w]ind in [... his] [s]tomach" (p. 15).

In spite of the vague description and long list of symptoms mentioned by Burton, the account Hume offers in his *Letter to a physician* seems to fit the description of Burton's zealous student whose health is affected by excessive learning. This is likely if one considers that Hume links his symptoms to his excessive studies. In his *Letter to a physician* he mentions "a strong Inclination to Books & Letters" (p.13), "to Books of Reasoning & Philosophy, & to Poetry & the polite Authors" (p.13), "having read many Books of Morality, such as Cicero, Seneca & Plutarch" (p. 14),

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[19] The *Physical Dictionary* defines cachexia [*sic*] as "an Ill Habit of Body, proceeding from an ill Disposition of the Humours of the Body; whence lingrin [*sic*] Fevers, Consumptions, and Dropsies are contracted; In this Disease the Face is often pale, and discoloured, and the Body big, and swoln [*sic*]; [...]" (Blankaart, 1702, p. 46).

[20] "Bradipepsia" [*sic*] is defined by the *Physical Dictionary* as "slow Digestion, proceeding from a depraved Disposition of the Acid Ferment in the Stomack" (Blankaart, 1702, p. 42).

"Reading most the celebrated Books in Latin, French & English, & acquiring the Italian" (p. 16), and his acknowledgement that "there are two things very bad for this Distemper, Study & Idleness" (p. 17).

1.3.3 John Arbuthnot

John Arbuthnot's[21] (1667-1735) first important medical work, *An Essay Concerning the Nature of Aliments, and the Choice of them, According to the Different Constitutions of Human Bodies,* appears in 1731. In this work and its subsequent editions, Arbuthnot offers cautious advice about the effects of diet on health, which vary according to a person's physical condition (Ross, 2004).

According to a plausible reconstruction of Hume's own library,[22] he possessed a copy of Arbuthnot's *Miscellaneous Works* (1770). More pertinent to the present work is the possibility that Arbuthnot is actually the intended addressee of Hume's *Letter to a physician.* The following paragraphs point to some relevant passages in the work of Arbuthnot that help elucidate the conception and treatment of melancholy in the eighteenth century.

Arbuthnot follows the medical tradition of explaining melancholy as a darkening and thickening of the bodily fluids, particularly the blood:

> We come now to what we may call the earthy or atrabilarian Constitution, where the spirituous and most fluid Parts of the Blood are dissipated, that is the Spirit, Water and subtile Oil so much evaporated, as to leave the Salts, Earth, and grosser Oil in too great a Proportion. The Blood grows darkish and thick, such a Constitution the Ancients call'd Atrabilarian or melancholick (1731, p. 200).

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[21] Scottish physician and satirist based in London.

[22] See item 63 in Norton and Norton, 1996.

Arbuthnot thinks that some persons have a tendency to be of a melancholic constitution. Such persons are recognizable for having a darkened physiognomy, dry skin, a slim or skinny body, a witty mind, and a slow respiration and pulse. He explains that the causes for this illness include: intense thinking about one thing in particular, excessive exercise in hot weather and unquenched thirst, food that is hard to digest (dried and salted meat, immature fruits, unfermented floury substances), and excessive use of alcoholic beverages. These factors remove the most vaporous compounds of the blood and lodge the residue in the circulatory system. In turn, this thick and tacky blood produces:

> Stagnation, Obstructions, Acrimony, Putrefactions, Viscidity, and imperfect Secretion of the Gall, a defective Circulation, especially in the lateral Branches destined to separate the more fluid Parts, and therefore viscous, and sparing Secretions in the Glands: The Blood moving too slowly through the celiack and mesenterick Arteries, produce various Complaints in the lower Bowels and Hypochondres; from whence such Persons are call'd Hypochondriack [...] Such a State of the Fluids at last affects the tender capillary Vessels of the Brain by the Viscidity and Immeability of the Matter impacted in them, and disorders the Imagination, and at last produceth Corruption in the Bowels of the lower Belly (1731, pp. 201-203).

The symptoms by which Arbuthnot explains the mental and physical troubles of the hypochondriac or melancholic are relatively straightforward: the thickening of the blood dulls the circulatory mechanisms, delaying or preventing proper secretions of bodily fluids which, if untreated, cripple the functions of the digestive system and the brain. The mention of circulatory and nervous systems, inconceivable notions in the long-standing theory of humours, is a novelty in Arbuthnot's theory.

In spite of this explanatory novelty, Arbuthnot suggests, as did some of his predecessors, that one can avoid such an undesirable condition mainly through a light and simple diet:

> The Diet [of the melancholic] ought to be opposite to the particular Acrimony, whether acid or alkaline [...]. It ought to be demulcent, in both Cases light, and of easy Digestion, moistening and resolvent of the Bile; of such Nature are vegetable Soaps [*sic*], as Honey, and the Juices of ripe Fruits, some of the cooling, lactescent, papescent [*sic*] Plants, as Cichory [*sic*], Letuce [*sic*], Dandelion, which are found effectual in hot Countries (1731, p. 204).

Such a light diet should be complemented by an administration of remedies to ease and promote bodily secretions, particularly the bile, allowing them to flow out of the body.

Although Hume's *Letter to a physician* does not mention any specific foods composing his diet, his dietary habits are not in disagreement with Arbuthnot's recommendations. For instance, when Hume mentions improvement in his health, he also mentions being "[...] very regular in my [his] diet and way of life from the beginning" (*Letter to a physician*, p.15). He also mentions the unsettling effects of excessive eating as he recounts that:

> [...] for next summer, about May 1731 there grew upon me [Hume] a very ravenous appetite, and as quick a digestion, which I at first took for a good symptom, and was very much surprised to find it bring back a palpitation of heart, which I had felt very little of before. This appetite, however, had an effect very unusual, which was to nourish me extremely; so that in six weeks' time, I passed from the one extreme to the other (*Letter to a physician*, p.15).

In addition to Hume's eating habits, there is sufficient reason to think that Hume's drinking habits are regular and moderate since he mentions drinking "[...] an English pint of claret wine every day" (*Letter to a physician*, p.14). Such moderation is in line with Arbuthnot's recommendation against the excessive use of alcoholic beverages. As I will show in the next chapter, a different kind of moderation constitutes the outcome of two conflicting passions (the love of truth and melancholy) and the beliefs associated with these passions (the pursuit of knowledge

through the use of reason and the loss of hope in attaining knowledge), which Hume mentions in the *Treatise.*

1.3.4 Bernard de Mandeville

Bernard de Mandeville[23] (1670-1733) is most famous for writing *The Fable of the Bees* ([1714] 1723), one of the most important works in British moral philosophy. Hume read Mandeville (Norton, 2000, p. I12) and his personal library collection apparently included Mandeville's *Fable*[24] (Norton and Norton, 1996). Nonetheless, the work that is of chief relevance here is Mandeville's *Treatise of the Hypochondriack and Hysterick Diseases* ([1711] 1730)—not because there is evidence that Hume read this book, but because it is influential in shaping the system of beliefs about melancholy in the eighteenth century.

Mandeville's *Treatise* consists of a set of dialogues between a physician (Philopirio) and his hypochondriac patient (Misomedon), in which the speculative theories and remedies prescribed by contemporary physicians and apothecaries are criticized, and preference is given to treatments based on observation.

Grounded in empirical evidence, Mandeville notes that the "Disease of the Learned" is partly the result of a lack of exercise. Using the character of Misomedon as a mouthpiece, Mandeville recounts a successful approach to melancholy:

> I remain'd in tolerable Health all the succeeding Summer, and, to prevent the return of my Distemper, I went through a Steel Course, and after that to the

[23] Physician and moral philosopher born and raised in Rotterdam who settled in London in 1693 (Goldsmith, 2004).

[24] Mandeville's work is included in the list of books that, according to manuscript sources, formed part of David Hume's library. See note 17 of this thesis.

> *Bath*, where I drank the hot Waters the whole Autumn Season; and using much Exercise, especially Riding, I continu'd very well ([1711] 1730, p. 28).

Such prescription for moderate exercise and distractions is in line with all the remedies presented so far in this chapter. More importantly, moderate exercise, in the form of regular horseback riding and walking, is repeatedly mentioned in Hume's *Letter to a physician* as an activity that ameliorates his condition (p.15).

In the second dialogue of his *Treatise,* Mandeville challenges established medical beliefs through the voice of Philopirio. The physician criticizes the lack of scientific rigour in the predominant medical hypotheses, saying that a viscous stagnation of blood in the spleen irritates the "animal spirits," affecting the brain and accounting for the distempered condition, wittiness, and ingeniousness of melancholic persons. Philopirio's critique is influenced by contemporary physiological discoveries of blood circulation and digestion, which make the hypothesis of blood thickening and stagnation in the spleen seem implausible ([1711] 1730, pp. 100-105).

Speaking about the "Disease of the Learned," Philopirio notes that hypochondriacs are generally men of sense. But, he denies that a stagnation of blood in the spleen (or other abdominal organs) is the cause of either sagacity or hypochondria. In fact, the empirical explanation he offers is that, because men of learning are continually tiring their heads with intense thinking and studying, they neglect to exercise their bodies ([1711] 1730, p. 106). In a different section, Philopirio praises the benefits of exercise in warding off melancholy. He says that exercise fosters enthusiasm for food, aids digestion, helps to remove obstructions, and makes the blood and the whole body stronger. He adds that:

> Exercise is so necessary to all People that use a plentiful and nutritious Diet, that by the musculary [*sic*] Motions, the Spirits, which from their Blood are separated in great abundance, may be shook off and eliminated before they can prove prejudicial ([1711] 1730, p. 166).

Philopirio expounds why melancholy is often called the "Disease of the Learned." He notes that there are more scholars and studious persons suffering from melancholy than those of any other occupational group. He explains that leaning of the stomach and the region of the thorax immediately in front of the heart against large books, tables, and desks may hinder the circulation of humours, thus contributing to the scholar's disease. Additionally, he mentions that people with sedentary trades or occupations, such as merchants, artists, or people owning an estate, suffer from melancholy to a lesser degree than the scholars ([1711] 1730, pp. 216-217). By doing so, he perpetuates the myth, held also by Hume,[25] that working-class people are less prone to melancholy than members of upper classes:

> Immoderate Grief, Cares, Troubles and Disappointments are likewise often Concomitant Causes of this Disease [of the Learned]; but most commonly in such, as either by Estate, Benefices, or Employments have a sufficient Revenue to make themselves easie [...] Those that enjoy 'em [Riches and Possessions] are more at leisure to reflect, besides that their Wishes and Desires being larger, themselves are more likely to be offended at a great many Passages of Life, than People of lower Fortunes, who have seldom higher Ends, than what they are continually employed about, the getting of their daily Bread ([1711] 1730, pp. 219-220).

In addition to the myth of poverty as immunity to melancholy, this passage also illustrates Mandeville's endorsement of employment as a remedy for it. For him, idleness—a privilege of the rich—carries with it the opportunity to worry and think about disappointments and unfulfilled aspirations.

Hume also endorses employment as a cure to his distemper. The closing paragraphs of his *Letter to a physician* mention that "study and idleness" worsen his condition,

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[25] Jeremy Schmidt notes that most eighteenth century physicians conceive the sufferer of hypochondria to be a privileged member of polite society, distinguished from the labouring masses by the wit and sensibility of a refined nervous system (2007, p. 154). This belief reflects the pseudo-Aristotelian myth associating melancholy with intellectual genius, which Hume's youthful malaise exemplifies. Hume's biographer, E.C. Mossner, notes that Hume vainly thought that the vapours, or lowness of spirits, was a disease of the mind restricted to the idle rich (1980, p. 67).

and that "business and diversion" ameliorate it. Based on this finding, Hume resolves to take some distance from his sedentary and studious life, albeit just temporarily, by pursuing the more active life of a merchant in Bristol. Hume thinks that such a choice is more suitable than being a travelling governor, which he also believes would, in some respects, lead to an idle existence (*Letter to a physician,* pp. 17-18). Once in Bristol, Hume worked for about four months as a clerk in a counting-house, before moving to France and resuming his studies (Mossner, 1980, pp. 88-91).

Philopirio believes that not all thinking is equally harmful. For instance, he compares the thinking of "witty [m]en" against that of "[b]lockheads," noting that, even if the latter were to think for the same amount of time, their slow, dull, and heavy thinking would not require as much sharpness and alertness as the clever thoughts of the former. He claims that half-asleep witty individuals may think as much as fully-awake idiots, which partially explains why fools seldom suffer from melancholy, while geniuses, who tire their heads with intense thinking, so often do ([1711] 1730, pp. 237-238).

If excessive thinking constitutes a characteristic of the melancholic, Philopirio prescribes moderation in the intensity and amount of thinking and, above all, seeking out distractions and stimulating activities:

> Ingenuity only makes them [the hypochondriacal] proper Subjects for the Disease to work upon, and the most witty Men, if they commit no Excess in those things that exhaust the finer Spirits, but divert themselves daily with Hunting, the Tenniscourt [*sic*], or other brisk Exercises, will be as exempt from the Distemper as the greatest Logger-heads ([1711] 1730, p. 238).

Such prescription is fully in accordance with what other eminent physicians of the time recommended to attenuate the pain and uneasiness of melancholic spirits. The recommendation to think and study moderately and seek out distractions and entertainment is fully acknowledged and employed by Hume as an antidote against

both the condition he suffers in his youth (*Letter to a physician*, p. 14) and his more mature and complex sceptical melancholy (T 2.2.4.4, SBN pp. 352-353).

Finally, Philopirio also advises on the proper amount of sleep for the melancholic: sleep should not be restricted, but rather extended. Yet, early rising is recommended and lying in bed after awaking is especially to be avoided. Such regimen will be achieved more easily if the above recommendations of daily exercise and employment are followed, making the tired melancholic long for sleep in the same way that a hungry person would yearn for food ([1711] 1730, pp. 341-342). In connection with this last point, Hume's regular exercise regime seems to benefit his sleeping habits. After mentioning thrice in his *Letter to a physician* that he horseback rides regularly, he also acknowledges: "I sleep well" (p. 15).

1.3.5 George Cheyne

Cheyne (1671-1743) was one of the most renowned medical specialists to write about melancholy and other mental disorders during the eighteenth century. Cheyne's treatise on mental health, *The English Malady*, deals with melancholy[26] and hysteria, or hypochondria, or what is then referred to by the umbrella term "the vapours." Cheyne's biographer, Anita Guerrini (2000), mentions that he links intellectual capacity and a sensitive nervous system with hypochondriasis and melancholia, which is an eighteenth century myth—partially stemming from Aristotelian times—that many of his colleagues also fostered.

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[26] Stanley Jackson disagrees: "Despite often being cited as the prototypical study of melancholy for this era, Cheyne's work might better be referred to as a representative account of hypochondriasis in its eighteenth-century meanings, as his syndrome was only minimally related to traditional melancholia" (1986, p. 140). Nonetheless, one needs to keep in mind that, in the eighteenth century, melancholy and hypochondria were two interchangeable terms. Jackson's distinction seems to lack insight.

Cheyne's selection for his book's title is not gratuitous. England's hostile weather and heavy foods contributed to its reputation as a place that would foster its inhabitants' low-spirits. Moreover, Cheyne perpetuated a myth that Hume also seemed to hold: idleness, particularly due to a recently acquired excess of wealth, is a factor that brings about melancholy.

Although there is no direct evidence of Hume reading *The English Malady*, the relevance of Cheyne's work is threefold:

i) *The Physiological Library* (Steuart, 1725, p. 21), an early catalogue of a collection of scientific, philosophical, and literary works to which Hume subscribed, includes Cheyne's *Essay of Health and Long Life* (1724). This fact suggests that Hume may have been acquainted with Cheyne and his work.

ii) As aforesaid, Cheyne was one of two possible addressees for Hume's *Letter to a physician.*

iii) Cheyne's work significantly shaped the medical and cultural notion of melancholy in the eighteenth century, which may have indirectly influenced Hume's understanding of the disease.

A novelty in the conception of melancholy in Cheyne's work was his acknowledgement of the role nerves play in the explanation of nervous diseases. He writes that: "[...] these Diseases [nervous distempers] are chiefly and properly called *Nervous*, whose Symptoms imply that the System of the *Nerves* and their Fibres, are evidently relax'd and broken" (1733, p. 14). Yet, in spite of such innovation, Cheyne's symptomatology of melancholy offered no new insight into the definition of the disease. The list and progression of symptoms is so illustrative of the vagueness in definitions of melancholy that it is worth citing at length:

> The [*first Degree*] Symptoms [of Vapours] then, besides Lowness of Spirits, are *Wind, Belching, Yawning, Heart-burning, Croaking of the Bowels* (like the Noise of *Frogs*) a *Pain* in the *Pit of the Stomach* [...] and sometimes there is an *Inflation*, and an actual visible Swelling, to a very considerable Bigness, in the Stomach to be seen, especially in the *Sex*; a *Coldness* or *Chilliness* upon the Extremities, and sometimes Flushing (especially after a full Meal) and Burning in the Hands and Feet, *Cold Damp Sweats, Faintings*, [...] *Head-aches* either behind or over the Eyes, like a *Puncturation, Flies* and *Atoms* dancing before the Eyes, a *Noise* like the *dying* Sounds of Bells, or a Fall of Water, in the Ears; *Yawning*, and *Stretching*, and sometimes a Drowsiness or *Lethargy*, at other times *Watching* and Restlessness, and several other *Symptoms*, which it is impossible to enumerate [...] a Tendency to *Spitting, Ptyalism*, or a Discharge of the Phlegm from the Glands of the Throat, seldom fails to attend all the *Symptoms* of it [...]. The *second* stage of this Distemper is attended with all these Symptoms, on a much higher and eminent Degree, and some new ones [...] such as are instead of Lowness of Spirits: a deep and fixed *Melancholy, wandering* and *delusory Images* on the Brain, and *Instability* and *Unsettledness* in all the intellectual Operations, *Loss of Memory, Despondency, Horror* and *Despair*, a *Vertigo, Giddiness* or *Staggering, Vomittings* of *Yellow, Green*, or *Black Choler*: sometimes unaccountable Fits of *Laughing*, apparent *Joy, Leaping* and *Dancing*; at other Times, of *Crying, Grief*, and *Anguish*; and these generally terminate in *Hypochondriacal* or *Hysterical Fits* (I mean *Convulsive* ones) and *Faintings*, which leave a Drowsiness, *Lethargy*, and extreme Lowness of Spirits for some Time afterwards. [...] The State of the Blood is generally viscid [...] [if the *first* and *second* Degrees are not cured] the *third* State begins, which is generally some *mortal* and incurable Distemper, such as *Dropsy, Black Jaundice, Consumption, Palsy, Epilepsy*, or *Apoplexy, &c.* (1733, pp. 196-200).

In his *Letter to a physician*, Hume mentions having suffered from some of the symptoms listed above, such as "[w]ind in [... his] [s]tomach" and "[p]tyalism or [w]ateryness in the mouth;" yet, he thrice denies having suffered from any "[l]owness of [s]pirits" (pp. 14-15; 17).

A hypochondriac and melancholic himself,[27] Cheyne proposes turning to God and religion as treatments and cures for hypochondriac melancholy. The link between

[27] By the end of the preface of *The English Malady*, Cheyne confesses to have found inward peace, health, and freedom of spirits by following the same guidelines he offers to others.

religion and melancholy is relevant because it shows how, for Cheyne, the passions of the soul have an effect on the body. Cheyne believes the body simply registers the state of the soul, and that the way to heal the body is through the moral care of the soul (Schmidt, 2007, p. 182; 186). The importance that Cheyne confers to religion in treating melancholy is significant if one keeps in mind Hume's plausible explanation for his disease.

In his *Letter to a physician*, Hume suggests that his condition is parallel to the "[c]oldness & [d]esertion of the [s]pirit" described in the writings of the French mystics and local religious fanatics. For Hume, the passionate devotion of the mystic or religious fanatic produces "rapturous admirations [that] might discompose the fabric of the nerves and brain, as much as profound reflections, and that warmth or enthusiasm which is inseparable from them" (p.17). Hume believes, not unlike religious mystics, that the intense reflections driven by his passionate curiosity might be strong enough to damage his nerves and brain, impairing his enthusiasm and motivation to pursue his devoted activity.

According to Cheyne, an idle, desk-bound, self-indulgent, and slothful lifestyle is associated with melancholy because such ways draw away from exercise, motion, and labour. Cheyne even cites certain luxuries of his time, such as coaches improved with springs, horses taught to pace, and chairmen trained to drive smoothly, as elements preventing bodily motion and thus leading to fixing obstructions in the small vessels, inhibiting the secretions that would alleviate the symptoms of melancholy (1733, p. 52).

Like his colleagues, Cheyne emphasizes that moderate exercise is the most effective treatment against nervous distempers (1733, p. 172). The explanation for the benefits of exercise is that the bodily movements, especially when the body is erect, and the

change of air, facilitate the dilution and elimination of harmful and obstructive matters:

> It is of no great Consequence of what Sort or Kind the *Exercise* be, provided it be but *Bodily Exercise* and Action; certainly *riding* on Horse-back is the best of all, because of the almost erect Posture, the lesser Weariness, and the more universal and natural Motion of all the Organs, with the constant Change of Air: and that the lower Regions of the Body, and the alimentary Instruments and *Hypochondres* are thereby most shaken and exercised. Next to that, is riding in a *Chaise* or *Chariot*. [And] *Walking* (...). Next to these are the active Games and Sports, such as *Hunting*, *Shooting*, *Bowls*, *Billiards*, *Shuttle-cock*, and the like (1733, p. 180).

It is easy to link Cheyne's writings with Hume's *Letter to a physician*, which openly condemns an idle life for being conducive to the condition he complains about (pp. 17-18). Moreover, Hume endorses the benefits of exercise, especially horseback riding and walking (p. 15).

In addition, Cheyne advises entertaining the mind and diverting it from thoughts about misfortune and misery in order to avoid anxiety:

> [...] I would earnestly recommend to all those afflicted with *Nervous* Distempers, always to have some innocent entertaining *Amusement* to employ themselves in, for the Rest of the Day, after they have employed a sufficient time upon *Exercise*, towards the Evening, to prepare them for their Night's quiet Rest [...]. *Study* of difficult and intricate Matters will infallibly do Hurt. *Reading* must be light, entertaining, and diverting, as well as Food (1733, pp. 181-182).

Cheyne's recommendations of using entertainment to lessen melancholy are echoed in Hume's acknowledgement of "[...] that continual search after amusement in gaming, in hunting, in business," which enlivens the spirit and serves as an antidote against "the deepest melancholy and despair" (T 2.2.4.4, SBN p. 352).

1.4 Closing remarks

Moderate exercise, harmless amusements, and a light diet[28] seem to be the most conventional remedies recommended by eighteenth century physicians for treating the symptoms of melancholy. Although Cheyne also recommends medicinal remedies,[29] the most relevant treatments against melancholy have been considered in this chapter.

Hume is unwilling to admit that he suffers from any "lowness of spirits," yet the general description of his disease is typical of melancholy, according to eighteenth century standards. The causes (abstruse and excessive studies, isolation, idleness, and lack of exercise), his hypochondriac symptomatology (scurvy spots, hypersalivation, excessive appetite, heart palpitations, bloated stomach, weakness, and lack of enthusiasm) and the comprehensive remedies that Hume describes in his *Letter to a physician* (moderation in studying, exercise in the form of regular horseback riding and daily walking, a constant and moderate diet, good sleep, business, and distractions), are certainly in line with the eighteenth century conception of melancholy.

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[28] As well as Arbuthnot, Cheyne also recommends a simple, soft, tender, and easy-to-digest diet to help thin and dilute the viscid liquid and obstructions that cause melancholy (1733, pp. 159-160).

[29] Summarizing his therapeutic method, Cheyne writes: "What I have formerly said about the general Cure of *Nervous* Distempers by a *Regimen of Diet, Exercise*, and the three Classes of Medicines mentioned [which, correspondingly, have the intention to 1) thin, dilute, and sweeten the whole Mass of Fluids, to open the Obstructions and make the Circulation full and free, the Perspiration current, and the Secretions flow; 2) to divide, break and dissolve the saline, acrid and hard *Concretions*, generated in the small Vessels; 3) to restore the *Tone* and *elastick* [*sic*] Force, to crisp, wind up, and contract the *Fibres* of the whole *System*] is not only the solid Foundation of a substantial and lasting Cure, but is also the most effectual Means for weakening the Symptoms, and making their Intervals longer, and without which all the other Attempts for that Purpose will be ineffectual" (1733, p. 205).

But Hume mentions neither an excess of black bile nor digestive obstructions as an explanation of his distemper. Rather, he talks about a disturbance of the nerves and brain as a plausible foundation (*Letter to a physician*, p. 17). Such an explanation seems to correspond with Cullen and Cheyne's above-mentioned contributions to eighteenth century medicine.

Hume's *Letter to a physician* offers insightful passages about the relation between studying excessively and some symptoms of melancholy. However, immoderate study is not the only trigger for this disease. The *subject* one studies can also have a major emotional impact. In the following chapter, I will show how excessive rational inquiries and sceptical arguments may be the cause, according to Hume, of a profound and complex melancholy. I will do this by exploring the link between Hume's scepticism and melancholy, as well as his solution to sceptical melancholy.

CHAPTER II
HUME AND THE MELANCHOLY OF THE SCEPTIC

In this chapter I will put forward a new reading of Hume's scepticism in the *Treatise* by showing how he connects scepticism with an emotional pathology—melancholy. Based on the previous chapter, I will argue that Hume's solution to philosophically-induced melancholy is based on some of the remedies prescribed against melancholy in the eighteenth century. I shall also claim that melancholy plays a vital role in Hume's philosophical project, as doxastic stability[30] is reached through balancing melancholy against the love of truth. Understanding the "cure" Hume proposes—the moderation of sceptical speculation by rejecting abstruse reasonings—is paramount for characterizing the nature of his scepticism, which is a hotly debated topic. Finally I will claim that the character traits allowing practical and epistemic moderation are virtuous by Hume's own standards.

This chapter is organized in the following way. In section 2.1 I explore Hume's investigative journey throughout Book I of the *Treatise*, in which an initial enthusiasm and devotion for the search for truth motivates questioning the faculty to make "demonstrative and probable reasonings" (T 1.3.9.19 n. 22, SBN p. 117 n. 22), leading the reader into a sceptical trap. In that section I will explain how the unfulfilled desire and longing for truth can plunge one into emotional strife.

While making a detailed examination of Hume's *mise en scène* of a sceptical crisis, I will claim that the emotional and pathological aspects of Hume's conception play a positive role—one that can save the reader from scepticism regarding common beliefs. My analysis shows how the love of truth[31] and melancholy can steer one's commitment to everyday beliefs in two opposing directions, and how this contrast

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[30] Cf. Introduction of this thesis.

[31] Cf. section 2.2 of this thesis.

helps to explain moderate scepticism. Finally, this section highlights the link between Hume's scepticism and the medical conception of melancholy in the eighteenth century.

In section 2.2 I will show how the love of truth is Hume's ruling passion throughout Book I of the *Treatise*. I will explain how a deep sceptical crisis can result from an unsatisfied love of truth. Hume's staged melancholic crisis, in the end of Book I, serves the purpose of showing how radical doubts, and the loneliness of a philosophical quest, trigger feelings of despair, uneasiness, and pessimism. I will also expose the dilemma of having to choose between two unreliable methods of inquiry (the faculty to make "demonstrative and probable reasonings" and an unrestrained imagination) contribute to the loss of hope in attaining the truth. At the highpoint of doubt, melancholy acts as a warning sign, forcing one to stop questioning certain beliefs.

In section 2.3 I will argue that Hume's solution to sceptical melancholy consists in rejecting abstruse reasonings and regaining certain beliefs through the lively impressions, distractions, and company. There is ample evidence in Hume's writings showing that he holds the view that a moderate approach to knowledge and philosophical inquiry is the best solution to the intellectual deadlock and emotional distress to which radical doubt leads. Hume's view is that doxastic stability is reached through 1) refraining from seeking the justification of certain fundamental beliefs—e.g. in absolute space and time, in the existence of external objects, in real causation, in immaterial substances, in reason, and in personal identity—and 2) limiting our blind trust in reason. Such stability is attained through balancing two emotions: the love of truth and the aversion to speculative inquiry.

Section 2.4 portrays the character traits motivating moderate scepticism as desirable qualities—because of their association with epistemic and practical advantages.

These advantages consist in avoiding error and deception, as well as overcoming the emotional pain triggered by radical doubt.

2.1 Melancholy and the shattering of common life beliefs

2.1.1 Hume's investigative journey

Book I of the *Treatise* deals with the mechanisms of human understanding, particularly with how one acquires knowledge. Hume begins his journey towards establishing a science of human nature with the basic premise that there is nothing in the mind but perceptions—the immediate objects of the mind, which he divides in impressions and ideas (T 1.2.6.7, SBN p. 67). Impressions and ideas are subdivided into simple or complex. Simple perceptions are indivisible, while complex perceptions are the result of a combination of simple perceptions. The main difference between ideas and impressions is that ideas are causally dependent on impressions, and not vice versa. In this respect, Hume notes that "[...] all our simple ideas proceed, either mediately or immediately, from their correspondent impressions" (T 1.1.1.11, SBN pp. 6-7). Another difference is that ideas, being a copy of impressions, will usually have different degrees of vivacity—but not of quantity and quality—than impressions (T 1.1.7.5, SBN p. 19).

With this initial assumption in hand, Hume is interested in explaining how one acquires some of the fundamental ideas—such as space, time, existence of external objects, causation, immaterial substances, reason, and personal identity—employed in metaphysics and in the seemingly most trivial aspects of practical life. Through his inquiry, Hume discovers that one does not have access to direct impressions of these fundamental ideas. For instance, one may not have an impression corresponding to

the idea of causality in objects, but this idea can be formed by an impression corresponding to one's revised idea of causality. Hume notes that if all ideas are causally dependent on impressions, then the origin of these fundamental ideas is unclear because it is not obvious that we can point out the impressions from which they are derived. Hume's journey in the first book of the *Treatise* then, is motivated by the desire to discover the *true* origin of one's ideas of space, time, existence, causation, reason, and personal identity.

In the conclusion of Book I (T 1.4.7.1-15, SBN pp. 263-274), Hume pauses to recapitulate the journey of his inquiry and evaluate his arguments. Hume's gloomy approach to his own conclusions is due to the acknowledgement that following the faculty to make "demonstrative and probable reasonings" offers no reliable justification for human understanding.

2.1.2 Shattered beliefs

After rehearsing sceptical arguments about space, time, existence of external objects, causation, immaterial substances, reason, and personal identity throughout Book I of the *Treatise,* Hume remains unable to explain the origin of these notions. This failure leaves his desire for knowledge about human nature unsatisfied. This is the source of his feelings of despair.

Hume gives two senses to the word *imagination.* For him, what we call reason falls under one of these senses and, hence, it has to be understood as a specific form of the imaginative activity of the mind. This is based on Hume's distinction between two kinds of principles guiding the imagination. Some principles are "permanent, irresistible, and universal; such as the customary transition from causes to effects, and from effects to causes," these consistent and solid principles are the foundation

of all human thought and action—what Hume calls reason. Other principles are "changeable, weak, and irregular." These latter principles, says Hume, are avoidable and unnecessary to mankind, and they are used in the systems of ancient metaphysicians to produce fictions such as "substance and accident" and all sorts of creative activities. (T 1.4.4.1-2, SBN pp. 225-226). When Hume distinguishes reason from the imagination, he opposes the latter faculty's capacity to engage in "demonstrative and probable reasonings" (T 1.3.9.19 n. 22, SBN p. 117 n. 22) to looser or unregulated forms of association of ideas.

According to Hume, modern philosophy embraces only the first kind of principles of the imagination, or what he calls reason. Modern philosophy, he notes, claims that secondary qualities such as "colours, sounds, tastes, smells, heat and cold" are nothing but impressions of external objects in the mind of the observer. He agrees that these impressions do not resemble the qualities of the perceived objects due to the variation of those impressions while the object remains the same. Such variation can take place due to the health and constitution of men as well as the external situation and position of objects (e.g. fire communicates an impression of pleasure or pain according to its distance in relation to the observer) (T 1.4.4.3-4, SBN p. 226).

But modern philosophers also claim that there are real or primary qualities of objects such as "extension and solidity, with their different mixtures and modifications; figure, motion, gravity and cohesion." Hume disagrees with such claims, noting that the use of what he calls reason leads one into utter scepticism regarding the existence of external objects. He argues that proving the real existence of primary qualities alone is impossible because these cannot be perceived without relying on secondary qualities, such as "colours, sounds, tastes, and smells" (T 1.4.4.6, SBN p. 228). Secondary and sensible qualities are unreliable because they are nothing but perceptions or modifications of the mind. They are variable and generally uninformative about the perceived object—certain foods may taste different to

different persons, according to their state of health. As an example, Hume notes that one cannot conceive the solidity of an object without conceiving its extension, which in turn cannot be conceived without relying on its secondary qualities, such as colour. In other words, one cannot comprehend the idea of solidity in itself, without reference to the secondary qualities of objects. But secondary qualities are unreliable, so primary qualities are as unreliable as secondary qualities in knowing the real existence of objects. In conclusion, says Hume, there are no grounds to prove the existence of objects by using reason alone (T 1.4.4.5-15, SBN pp. 227-231).

Hume argues that one can believe in the existence of external objects thanks to either "reason alone" or the imagination. But his sceptical arguments show that reason alone is insufficient to justify such belief. Even though, says Hume, past experience allows one to grasp the conjunction of objects, and the habit of such repeated experience conduces one to expect the same behaviour in the future, neither experience nor habit are founded on what he calls reason (T 1.4.2.47, SBN p. 212; T 1.4.2.54, SBN p. 216). Only the vivacity of one's ideas—not what Hume calls reason—can aid in thinking from causes and effects, (T 1.4.2.21-22, SBN pp. 197-198) and believing in the existence of external objects that are no longer present (T 1.4.2.14, SBN p. 193). Therefore, one is left with the imagination in order to justify the existence of external objects. But the imagination also seems an unreliable foundation for knowledge. So one must choose between "a false reason and none at all" (T 1.4.7.7, SBN p. 268), which is very frustrating.

Hume shows how consolation is hard to achieve after grasping the dissatisfying conclusions that the love of truth has led one to discover. The expressive force with which Hume articulates such state of despondency is worth citing at length:

> My memory of past errors and perplexities, makes me diffident for the future. The wretched condition, weakness, and disorder of the faculties, I must employ in my enquiries, encrease my apprehensions. And the impossibility of

> amending or correcting these faculties, reduces me almost to despair, and makes me resolve to perish on the barren rock, on which I am at present, rather than venture myself upon that boundless ocean, which runs out into immensity. This sudden view of my danger strikes me with melancholy; and as 'tis usual for that passion, above all others, to indulge itself; I cannot forbear feeding my despair, with all those desponding reflections, which the present subject furnishes me with in such abundance (T 1.4.7.1, SBN p. 264).

In this confessional passage[32] Hume is aware that melancholy incites one to wallow in one's own misery, making it hard to avoid a despondent and solitary state.[33] For Hume, all the human faculties are insufficient to grasp the truth. Moreover, these discoveries put a temporary halt to any project of contributing to the understanding of human nature.[34] In close connection with the expression of his disappointment towards his intellectual faculties, the way Hume understands the operations of the mind reinforces his discouragement:

> No wonder a principle so inconstant and fallacious [the imagination] shou'd lead us into errors, when implicitely follow'd (as it must be) in all its

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[32] The passage shows the use of a literary style filled with pathos that communicates the sadness and despair of a frustrated intellect. Yet, the invention of such style cannot be attributed to Hume. According to Stephen Menn (2003), there is evidence of an established genre of confessional autobiographies in the literary tradition that originates in Galen's writings and where the autobiographical content is adapted to the demands of the context and is used in the search for method of inquiry. On the basis of Menn's work, I believe that Hume's confessional style in T 1.4.7 (SBN pp. 263-274) is reminiscent of other writings of philosophical discovery written as confessional autobiographies, such as Saint Augustine's *Confessions* ([397-400] 1991) and Descartes' *Discourse on the Method* ([1637] 1965).

[33] In connection with Hume's melancholic *personae*, Robert Fogelin (2009) offers an interesting study of Hume's sceptical crisis. He identifies four different epistemological voices, or characters, throughout Hume's *Treatise*: The confident, the melancholic, the modest, and the vulgar or common sense voice. Fogelin argues that all of these narrative characters genuinely belong to Hume and that there is a continuous plot, within the *Treatise,* throughout which each epistemological voice is developed.

[34] In my opinion, Hume's temporary step back from philosophical inquiry is consistent with the development of his philosophical project. In relation to this, Robert Fogelin (1985) claims that Hume's scepticism is not only compatible with his "science of human nature," but that his sceptical arguments are entrenched in a naturalistic program of research. Fogelin sees Hume as a moderate sceptic and he makes an effort to strike a balance between Hume's radical scepticism and his naturalism. The work of David Fate Norton (1994, 2002) runs along similar interpretative lines.

> variations. 'Tis this principle, which makes us reason from causes and effects; and 'tis the same principle, which convinces us of the continu'd existence of external objects, when absent from the senses. But tho' these two operations be equally natural and necessary in the human mind, yet in some circumstances they are directly contrary, nor is it possible for us to reason justly and regularly from causes and effects, and at the same time believe the continu'd existence of matter.[35] How then shall we adjust those principles together? Which of them shall we prefer? (T 1.4.7.4, SBN pp. 265-266).

In this passage, Hume explains that human reason is based on a fallacious and contradictory principle. The imagination, which is a fundamental aspect of reasoning, can also lead to errors. This problem is relevant because it adds to the fallibility that Hume discovers in reason, which in turn boosts his despondency.

Other aspects of human understanding are also exposed as discouraging. Hume mentions that the principle, which connects a phenomenon with its cause,[36] does not rest on the perceived relation of the objects but, rather, on the inquirer's habit of observing this relation and his expectation to perceive the same relation. So, the belief of causality between objects is acquired by an act of the senses and custom, instead of what Hume calls reason. Hume questions how far one should yield to the imagination, since there is no other justification for one's beliefs concerning the principle connecting cause and effect. He concludes that neither of the two forms of the imagination (T 1.4.1.3-10, SBN pp. 181-185) are reliable sources for human understanding (T 1.4.7.5-7, SBN pp. 266-268). The view of these limitations in what Hume calls reason leaves one, or so Hume believes, without a reliable guide to validate knowledge, plunging one into a dilemma as to which course of action to follow:

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[35] Hume refers here to the contradiction between the absurdity of asserting the existence of objects without relying on the impressions of their sensible qualities, such as their colour, sound, taste, etc.—impressions wholly dependent on the observer—and the feeling the observer gets from his senses that external objects exist independently (T 1.4.5.15, SBN p. 231).

[36] For an explanation of Hume's relation of causation cf. T 1.3.2.1-8, SBN pp. 73-76.

> Shall we, then, establish it for a general maxim, that no refin'd or elaborate reasoning is ever to be receiv'd? Consider well the consequences of such a principle. By this means you cut off entirely all science and philosophy: You proceed upon one singular quality of the imagination, and by a parity of reason must embrace all of them: And you expressly contradict yourself; since this maxim must be built on the preceding reasoning, which will be allow'd to be sufficiently refin'd and metaphysical. What party, then, shall we choose among these difficulties? If we embrace this principle, and condemn all refin'd reasoning, we run into the most manifest absurdities. If we reject it in favour of these reasonings, we subvert entirely the human understanding. We have, therefore, no choice left but betwixt a false reason and none at all (T 1.4.7.7, SBN p. 268).

However, there is a positive side to this seemingly adverse discovery. Nature[37] cures one of "philosophical melancholy and delirium" by relaxing one's sceptical inclinations or by giving a lively impression to one's senses. Indeed, Hume explains that vivid distractions, such as dining, board games, good company, and conversation, allow one to forget the despairing outcome of an unsatisfied love of truth:

> Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mind, or by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate all these chimeras. I dine, I play a game of back-gammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when after three or four hours' amusement, I wou'd return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strain'd, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any farther (T 1.4.7.8-9, SBN p. 269).

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[37] In Book III of the *Treatise,* Hume distinguishes between several senses of the term nature and he underlies how equivocal this term can be. He highlights three different definitions of the word nature: as opposed to miracles, as opposed to rare and unusual, and as opposed to artifice (T 3.1.2.7-9, SBN p. 473-475). By the term nature I mean the innate or essential qualities of the mind that produce belief due to lively impressions. In relation to my interpretation of the term, Hume writes: "'Tis happy, therefore, that nature breaks the force of all sceptical arguments in time, and keeps them from having any considerable influence on the understanding" (T 1.4.1.12, SBN p. 187).

Keeping in mind Hume's approach, one can appreciate the link between the eighteenth century usually prescribed remedies against melancholy, such as company, business, and diversion, and Hume's recognition that amusements and lively impressions can save one from sceptical melancholy. Because they are unpleasant, the uneasiness and emotional pain associated with sceptical melancholy push one away from abstruse reasonings. This repugnancy towards fruitless speculations—and the engagement in amusements and lively impressions—saves one from loneliness and gloom, and allows one to experience pleasure in life by interacting with others.

Hume acknowledges that nature forces one to engage in the common affairs of life and hold ordinary beliefs such as the existence of objects. Yet, while enjoying the pleasure of common life, memories of past abstract philosophical inquiries may arise in the mind. By temporarily rejecting abstruse reasonings and giving in to the lively impressions of common life, Hume adopts a moderate form of scepticism (T 1.4.7.10, SBN pp. 269-270), which contrasts with his own interpretation of the radical scepticism of the Pyrrhonists[38] (T 1.4.1.7, SBN p. 183; *Abstract* 27, SBN p. 657). This yielding to lively sensations, Hume argues, is consistent with his scepticism:

> These are the sentiments of my spleen and indolence; and indeed I must confess that philosophy has nothing to oppose to them, and expects a victory more from the returns of a good-humour'd disposition, than from the force of reason and conviction. In all the incidents of life we ought still to preserve our scepticism. If we believe, that fire warms, or water refreshes, 'tis only because it costs us too much pains to think otherwise. Nay if we are philosophers, it ought only to be upon sceptical principles, and from an inclination, which we

[38] In a subsequent work, the first *Enquiry,* Hume will openly acknowledge the link between Pyrrhonism and a moderate kind of scepticism, as he writes: "There is, indeed, a more *mitigated* scepticism or *academical* philosophy, which may be both durable and useful, and which may, in part, be the result of this Pyrrhonism, or *excessive* scepticism, when its undistinguished doubts are, in some measure, corrected by common sense and reflection" (EHU 12.24).

> feel to the employing ourselves after that manner. Where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to. Where it does not, it never can have any title to operate upon us (T 1.4.7.11, SBN p. 270).

Don Garrett reads this passage as proposing an epistemic principle, which he calls the "Title Principle" (1997, pp. 234-235). The principle does not altogether forbid abstruse reasonings. Rather, it allows refined philosophical speculations only to the extent that one dwells on topics that naturally attract one's interest. This principle allows one to refuse the products of the imagination that are "changeable, weak, and irregular" because—except in the case of external objects—nature dispels these suggestions. One can assent to the lively impressions of the imagination that are "permanent, irresistible, and universal" because their force cannot be destroyed by abstruse and refined reasonings. One may accept these beliefs, even though they offer no convincing explanation when analysed through reason alone.

On the other hand, this principle says that one must reject the type of abstruse reasoning that subverts itself, goes against one's interests, and is incompatible with nature. According to Garrett, following this principle allows one to avoid the dilemma of having to choose between "a false reason and none at all" (T 1.4.7.7, SBN p. 268). I agree with Garrett and think that his interpretation constitutes an elegant solution to the problem of having to choose between two conflicting aspects of human understanding.

Indeed, Hume shows that the love of truth may pull one back into philosophical speculations, albeit not exactly under the same conditions as before. He claims that one can return to philosophical inquiries after having experienced lively impressions. After having been amused and enjoyed the company of others, it is fine to indulge one's curiosity and go back to abstruse inquiries. These philosophical investigations will not be the same type as the one performed before, because the inquirer would have already experienced the frustration accompanying unanswered sceptical

arguments and discovered the way to avoid the dilemma of having to choose between "a false reason and none at all" (T 1.4.7.7, SBN p. 268).

For Hume, one's curiosity may be triggered by not being able to explain conflicting values. By this I mean the incapacity to explain, for instance, why I approve one object over another (T 1.4.7.12, SBN pp. 270-271). Such lack of an explanation can be a source of uneasiness,[39] which is explained by the contrast of a natural inclination to approve, or find more beautiful, one object over another. Hume mentions that he is interested in understanding the passions that govern him, the principles of moral good and evil, and the nature and foundation of government.[40] Moreover, he expresses that no other endeavour can give him more pleasure than the pursuit of knowledge. The reason for this, says Hume, are naturally sprung feelings compelling him to contribute to the instruction of mankind and acquiring a name by his discoveries. Such pursuit is to be followed by him through harmless philosophy—as opposed to the more dangerous religion or superstition—which limits itself to the study of phenomena of the visible world and which only generates "mild and moderate sentiments"[41] (T 1.4.7.12-13, SBN pp. 270-272).

Hume also notes that not all persons are inclined to inquire about phenomena, either visible or invisible. He notes that "many honest gentlemen" limit their lives to business and amusement—without the need to pursue any philosophical, religious, or

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[39] Louis Loeb (2002) offers a close examination of Hume's treatment of uneasiness when there is conflict between beliefs. For particular instances of the use of the term "uneasy" cf. T 1.4.1.10, 1.4.2.37, and 1.4.7.12 SBN pp. 185, 205, and 271; for "uneasiness" cf. T 1.4.2.37, 2.3.10.12, SBN pp. 205, 453; for "stability" cf. T 1.3.11.9, SBN p. 127; for "steadiness" cf. T 1.3.7.7, 1.3.12.6, SBN pp. 629, 133.

[40] Hume explores these subjects in Books II and III of his *Treatise*.

[41] In the *Natural History of Religion* (NHR 11.5), Hume compares the harmless pretentions of philosophy with the violence resulting from the corruption of scholastic religion. See also NHR 15.3, where Hume praises the "calm, though obscure, regions of philosophy" in contrast with the dangers of superstition.

superstitious speculations about the world—and they do well to keep themselves to their domestic affairs and recreations. Although Hume does not explicitly mention why these persons do well to keep themselves within the sphere of common life, I suppose that a curiosity or need to speculate beyond common life is a sort of weakness that some, philosophers as well as religious and superstitious persons, are passionately driven to. Hume says that he wishes he could communicate "a share of this gross earthy mixture" to founders of systems, whose "fiery particles," or what I interpret as wild imaginations[42], need to be moderated (T 1.4.7.14, SBN p. 272). Interestingly, Norton and Norton mention that Hume's reference to "earthy mixture" is an allusion to the four elements that form the ancient theory of humours or temperaments[43] (2000, p. 489).

On the other hand, says Hume, during the last two thousand years philosophy has regrettably allowed an unrestrained use of the imagination, which has often resulted in the creation of many chimerical systems whose topics and ideas are removed from practice and experience. In opposition to this imaginary way of doing philosophy, Hume aims at creating steady philosophical principles, free from chimerical speculations, which will stand the test of careful examination. He mentions that if he can furnish such steady principles, he thinks he will contribute to human knowledge. The hope of doing so saves him from the despondent mood that he experiences from time to time. Hume invites those readers who are inclined to philosophize to follow him. This does not mean, however, that people cannot be taught to be philosophers, but that only those with the appropriate disposition will benefit from following Hume's speculations.

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[42] I use the term "wild imaginations" here because in the following sentence of Hume's passage he refers to the role of "warm imagination" in philosophy and the limited place it ought to have in a philosophical system (T 1.4.7.14, SBN p. 272). In this context, the term "wild imagination" is used to make a contrast with a moderate use of imagination.

[43] For more about the theory of humours or temperaments see section 1.2.1 of this thesis.

Hume also says that the true sceptic probes the world without becoming overwhelmed:

> If the reader finds himself in the same easy disposition, let him follow me in my future speculations. If not, let him follow his inclination, and wait the returns of application and good humour. The conduct of a man, who studies philosophy in this careless manner, is more truly sceptical than that of one, who feeling in himself an inclination to it, is yet so over-whelm'd with doubts and scruples, as totally to reject it. A true sceptic will be diffident of his philosophical doubts, as well as of his philosophical conviction; and will never refuse any innocent satisfaction, which offers itself, upon account of either of them (T 1.4.7.14, SBN p. 273).

Reading this passage it may seem odd that Hume thinks a sceptic can have convictions since, by his own definition, a sceptic holds that all is uncertain (T 1.4.1.7, SBN p. 183). But I take Hume is referring in the above-quoted passage to a moderate kind of scepticism, which allows assenting to lively impressions under circumstances where appealing to sceptical arguments may seem forced and unnatural.[44] Earlier in the *Treatise*, Hume says that if one holds the beliefs that fire warms and water refreshes it is only because to think otherwise is very difficult (T 1.4.7.11, SBN p. 270) and in his *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* one of his characters, Cleanthes, says that the task of any reasonable sceptic is to "reject abstruse, remote and refined arguments; to adhere to common sense and the plain instincts of nature [[45]]; and to assent, where-ever any reasons strike him with so full a force, that he cannot, without the greatest violence, prevent it" (DNR 3.7).

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[44] This approach is not in conflict with that of Sextus and the Pyrrhonists, who also allow beliefs that are prompted by mere appearances. Cf. section 1.2.1 of this thesis.

[45] By the term nature I understand the innate or essential qualities of the mind that produce belief due to lively impressions. See note 37 of this thesis.

Although Cleanthes' voice may not express Hume's beliefs, it offers an approach to scepticism that has certain resemblance with Hume's above-quoted claim (T 1.4.7.14, SBN p. 273).

Also in support of my reading of Hume's moderate scepticism, he says that it is acceptable and desirable both to engage in abstruse reasonings involving sceptical principles and to express non-dogmatic certainty, about particular things, at particular moments "by the present view of the object" (T 1.4.7.15, SBN pp. 273-274), which is a reminder of the importance that Hume gives to the natural tendency to accept evident matters.

2.1.3 The link between Hume's scepticism and the medical tradition on melancholy

Throughout the first chapter of this thesis I've shown that strong disappointments, abstruse and excessive studies, isolation, and lack of amusements and physical activity are some of the causes that eighteenth-century physicians associate with melancholy. Interestingly, all these elements are present, either explicitly or implicitly in Hume's discussion of his philosophical investigations in the conclusion of Book I of his *Treatise*. In this section I show that Hume's approach to scepticism has a crucial resemblance with some of the remedies prescribed against melancholy in the eighteenth century. Understanding this is paramount to unlocking Hume's views on the connection between scepticism and melancholy.

The implications of the scepticism described in T 1.4.7 (SBN pp. 263-274) are problematic because they point out the difficulty of justifying any claim to knowledge. They also provoke a profound physical and emotional impact,

reminiscent of Hume's *Letter to a physician.*[46] The conclusion of Book I of the *Treatise* portrays the mechanism by which someone can plummet into a painful emotional state due to an unsatisfied love of truth. If further explored, the concluding remarks of Book I help to better understand the nature of Hume's scepticism. Hume's findings appear to create a major setback in the endeavour to establish a science of human nature.[47] Indeed, it seems impossible to validate the authenticity of one's own beliefs, when the evidence for them stems either from the imagination or an abstruse reasoning that subverts itself.[48]

Immoderate grief stemming from the loss or longing of something beloved or a strong disappointment, claims Mandeville, can be a trigger for melancholy.[49] Clearly, Hume's account of melancholy in the conclusion of Book I of his *Treatise* is triggered by a strong disappointment, as he faces the dilemma of having to choose between two contradictory sources of knowledge—the imagination (or loose imagination) and what he calls reason (or rule-governed imagination).[50] Grief also figures amongst Cheyne's long list of symptoms of melancholy.[51] The interpretation that I suggest is that, for Hume, it is the disappointment of unfulfilled expectations of grasping the truth that may drive a curious and intellectually inclined person towards a state of despondency. I suggest that the discoveries about the operation of the human mind exposed throughout Book I of the *Treatise*, and the difficulty in justifying certain beliefs, are the elements that constitute Hume's sceptical crisis.

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[46] Cf. section 1.1 of this thesis.

[47] In contrast with my reading, Baier (1991) downplays the importance of Hume's scepticism. Her view on Hume's epistemology in the *Treatise* is that he is not a sceptic, but that he builds a more solid epistemological and moral system by questioning the prevailing knowledge paradigms of his time (i.e. rationalism) and constructing a new "scientific" approach to mental phenomena.

[48] Cf. section 2.1.2 of this thesis.

[49] Cf. section 1.3.4 of this thesis.

[50] Cf. section 2.1.2 of this thesis.

[51] Cf. section 1.3.5 of this thesis.

Early works on melancholy also associate it with constant thinking and worrying, as Rufus of Ephesus has noted.[52] The excessive intention or fixation of the mind on a single thing, sometimes observed in studious persons, described by Arbuthnot,[53] as well as the fixation of the mind on one object, according to Johnson's definition of melancholy,[54] is relevant to establish another link between the medical texts of the eighteenth century and Hume's sceptical melancholy. To see the connection, one must consider that Hume's philosophical efforts revolve around the idea of establishing a science of human nature, which he intensely pursues as it is shown in the dramatic conclusion of Book I of the *Treatise*.

As it will be explained in the following section, the love of truth plays a crucial role in motivating the avid intellectual to pursue her work. Hume's account of sceptical melancholy is reminiscent of a medical tradition of conceiving melancholy as a disease of frustrated intellectuals. The sceptical arguments that Hume develops throughout Book I of the *Treatise* come to a crescendo by the end of said book. He conveys that the strength and scope of such sceptical arguments can catch hold in a very compelling manner. Despair, solitude, and sadness may be triggered by an unsatisfied love of truth. Such frustration stems from the disappointment that the expectations of the fruits of abstruse reasonings do not live up to one's desires.

Other important aspects of Hume's portrayal of sceptical melancholy are the lack of company and the influence that others may have in dispelling bouts of philosophical despondency. In Book II of his *Treatise*, Hume mentions how some claim that losing hold of external objects can be a cause of despair and he agrees that the mind is inadequate to entertain itself, which explains the constant search for amusements in

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[52] Cf. section 1.2.1 of this thesis.

[53] Cf. section 1.3.3 of this thesis.

[54] Cf. section 1.3 of this thesis.

other objects. Those objects excite the mind in a vigorous way that could never take place in solitary and quiet moments.

Hume says that, of all amusements, including gaming, hunting, and business, nothing excites and agitates the spirits as much as company can—that is, the communication of sentiments with another rational being (T 2.2.4.4, SBN pp. 352-353). In relation to loneliness, the history of the concept of melancholy shows how for some medieval physicians, such as Constantinus Africanus,[55] religious and solitary people are prone to this disease, and how solitude is a cause of melancholy for which occupations, distractions, employment, physical labour, and pleasant company are the best remedies (Burton, *Anatomy* 1.2.2.6).

Analyzing the eighteenth-century conception of melancholy, particularly the writings of Burton and Mandeville that refer to the avid intellectual, contributes to a better understanding of Hume's sceptical despondency. Such conception proves useful in grasping both the emotional state of the sceptical philosopher and the nature of Hume's own scepticism. But in order to further understand Hume's conception on the subject of sceptical melancholy, one needs to pay closer attention to the driving force of all philosophical inquiries.

2.2 The love of truth

Hume shows that the unfulfilled pursuit of knowledge—the love of truth—may plunge one into a profound sceptical crisis. Based on my interpretation of Hume's observations, I claim that only those who possess the right combination of character traits—and are able to develop these traits under the appropriate circumstances—will

[55] Cf. section 1.2.2 of this thesis.

be strongly driven by the passion for "curiosity, or the love of truth" (T 2.3.10.1-12, SBN pp. 448-454). These persons will be prone to inquire about the true nature of things and some may even adopt a strong sceptical attitude that is conducive to sceptical melancholy.

Hume notoriously claims that "reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions" (T 2.3.3.4, SBN p. 415). According to him, what he calls reason, alone, cannot motivate any action; passion also plays a fundamental role in influencing one's behaviour (T 2.3.3.1-6, SBN pp. 413-415; T 2.3.5.1, SBN p. 422; T 3.2.1.16-19, SBN pp. 483-484). Book II of the *Treatise* explores the development and mechanism of the passions, which for Hume are secondary impressions, or impressions of reflection.[56]

In the concluding section of Book II (T 2.3.10.1-12, SBN pp. 448-454), Hume explains a very peculiar passion, that of curiosity, or the love of truth, which does not seem to fit squarely within his categorization of direct and indirect passions.

Hume distinguishes between "direct" or "indirect" passions. Direct passions are those that occur forthwith from pain or pleasure, such as "desire, aversion, grief, joy, hope, fear, despair and security" (T 2.1.1.3-4, SBN pp. 276-277) and are directed to what causes them. On the other hand, indirect passions, such as "pride, humility, love, and hatred" also have their origin on pleasure and pain but are always directed to persons (either oneself or others). Hume calls this mechanism the "double relation of impressions and ideas" and he explains it succinctly in this way: "Men are vain of the beauty of their country, of their county, of their parish. Here the idea of beauty plainly produces a pleasure. This pleasure is related to pride. The object or cause of this pleasure is, by the supposition, related to self, or the object of pride. By this

[56] For a summary of Hume's characterization of impressions and ideas, see the opening paragraphs of section 2.1.1 of this thesis.

double relation of impressions and ideas, a transition is made from the one impression to the other" (T 2.1.9.6-7, SBN p. 306).

Evidence that the love of truth does not fit nicely in Hume's classification is not only found in the complexity with which Hume describes curiosity or the love of truth, but also in the fact that he dedicates a separate section to this passion (T 2.3.10, SBN pp. 448-454). Moreover, Hume explicitly acknowledges the odd features of curiosity, or the love of truth by saying: "'Tis an affection of so peculiar a kind, that 'twoud have been impossible to have treated of it under any of those heads [i.e. direct and indirect passions], which we have examin'd, without danger of obscurity and confusion" (T 2.3.10.1, SBN p. 448). The love of truth plays a fundamental role in motivating Hume's inquiry concerning human nature, so perhaps this is also why he dedicates a separate section to its examination.

For Hume, the love of truth is "the first source of all our enquiries." This claim is significant because it suggests that a passion for discovering the unknown is a necessary condition for taking any inquisitive action. According to Hume there are two kinds of truths: Those consisting in the "proportions of ideas" (such as mathematical truths attained through reasoning), or those in "the conformity of our ideas of objects to their real existence" (such as the simple comparison of two bodies by measurements, as opposed to the more challenging comparison made through mathematical reasoning) (T 2.3.10.2, SBN p. 448).

Now, Hume claims that the first kind of truth alone is insufficient to provide considerable pleasure. In spite of involving a certain level of genius and effort, it lacks the importance of applying the discovery to do something useful (T 2.3.10.4, SBN pp. 449-450). In line with the aforementioned examples, mathematical truths *per se* are not as pleasurable as when they are applied to help solve a concrete problem or building an ingenious device. The practical application of mathematical

truths shows their usefulness and importance. In sum, any pleasure derived from the love of truth involves two necessary and sufficient elements: The exercise of intelligence and the prospect of grasping or making a useful discovery.

Hume mentions that a passion for "curiosity, or the love of truth" can be explained by the pleasure derived from the action of the mind in difficult and challenging tasks. Such claim explains why an easy intellectual task cannot provide any considerable pleasure. Yet, not all difficult and challenging tasks produce pleasure. The end result must promise either to be useful or important, or provide the lover of truth with something to be proud of. The utility, importance, or the recognition gained by the goal being sought is crucial to keeping one's attention and appealing to continue an intellectual pursuit.

With this approach in mind, Hume explains the mechanism of curiosity, or the love of truth, in two emblematic passages. The first one compares philosophy to hunting:

> To illustrate all this by a similar instance, I shall observe, that there cannot be two passions more nearly resembling each other, than those of hunting and philosophy, whatever disproportion may at first sight appear betwixt them. 'Tis evident, that the pleasure of hunting consists in the action of the mind and body; the motion, the attention, the difficulty, and the uncertainty. 'Tis evident likewise, that these actions must be attended with an idea of utility, in order to their having any effect upon us (T 2.3.10.8, SBN p. 451).

One may rightly object that hunting, a leisure activity reserved for the eighteenth-century upper classes, is far from being useful or important. How can the leisureliness of hunting be related to the hard and abstruse thinking of the scholar who spends his days confined in a study room? Moreover, how can the joy associated with the discovery of scientific or philosophical truths be compared to the mundane pleasure of chasing down and killing a beast?

Keeping in mind Hume's relaxed approach towards knowledge is crucial to understanding his motivation in comparing the leisurely activity of hunting with the apparently solemn endeavour of philosophizing. As mentioned earlier,[57] near the end of the conclusion of Book I, Hume mentions the careless manner of a philosopher that, amidst all the seriousness and importance of his endeavour, takes his task light-heartedly:

> If the reader finds himself in the same easy disposition, let him follow me in my future speculations. If not, let him follow his inclination, and wait the returns of application and good humour. The conduct of a man, who studies philosophy in this careless manner, is more truly sceptical than that of one, who feeling in himself an inclination to it, is yet so over-whelm'd with doubts and scruples, as totally to reject it. A true sceptic will be diffident of his philosophical doubts, as well as of his philosophical conviction; and will never refuse any innocent satisfaction, which offers itself, upon account of either of them (T 1.4.7.14, SBN p. 273).

For Hume, a philosophical quest involving a playful and careless engagement with the pursuit of truth is the rightly sceptical standpoint. I believe that Hume is here referring to a moderate kind of scepticism, which allows assenting to lively impressions under circumstances where appealing to sceptical arguments may seem forced and unnatural.[58] Opposed to such standpoint is the solemn philosopher who discards all philosophical pursuits due to the extreme doubts and worries they provoke.

In a different passage, Hume compares philosophy to gaming, where players are not only interested in the prospect of profits, but also in the entertainment and excitement derived from gaming itself. Hume's comparison shows the ludic aspect of engaging with the pursuit of truth:

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[57] Cf. section 2.1.2 of this thesis.

[58] For a more developed explanation of my interpretation concerning the claim that Hume is advocating a moderate kind of scepticism, cf. section 2.1.2 of this thesis.

> If we want another parallel to these affections, we may consider the passion of gaming, which affords a pleasure from the same principles as hunting and philosophy. It has been remark'd, that the pleasure of gaming arises not from interest alone; since many leave a sure gain for this entertainment: Neither is it deriv'd from the game alone; since the same persons have no satisfaction, when they play for nothing: But proceeds from both these causes united, tho' separately they have no effect. 'Tis here, as in certain chymical preparations, where the mixture of two clear and transparent liquids produces a third, which is opaque and colour'd (T 2.3.10.9, SBN p. 452).

Again, sagacity and light-heartedness are present in this example. But no game would engage one's attention without the prospect of winning or losing something. As that of any avid philosopher, the behaviour of an eager player is guided by a strong passion. The passion of gaming causes the player to search an elusive gain at the risk of loosing something, while the love of truth motivates the activity of the philosopher. In the case of the avid gamer, the losses are normally monetary. In the case of the philosopher, the things at stake are the youth, health, and money he must invest in attaining the truth. Indeed, Hume acknowledges that a commitment to philosophy is a risky gamble: "[M]any philosophers have consum'd their time, have destroy'd their health, and neglected their fortune, in the search of such truths, as they esteem'd important and useful to the world" (T 2.3.10.4, SBN p. 450).

Section 1.1 of this thesis explored how Hume experienced physical and mental troubles due to his initially excessive love of truth. The symptoms that Hume describes in his *Letter to a physician* may be linked to what he later writes in the *Treatise,* regarding the unpleasant emotional symptoms caused by an excessive and unsatisfied love of truth. In this respect, his biography may have influenced his philosophical conception of sceptical melancholy.

Moreover, there is a clear parallel between what Hume says about the perils of being carried away by a passion for knowledge and what Robert Burton says in the section of his *Anatomy* dedicated to explaining "Love of learning, or overmuch Study." In

that section, Burton writes, in regards to lovers of truth, that there is "[n]o labour in the world like unto study. It may be, their temperature [*sic*] will not endure it, but striving to be excellent to know all, they lose health, wealth, wit, life, and all" (*Anatomy* 1.2.3.5).

But explaining the love of truth is not sufficient for fully understanding its role in forging Hume's moderate scepticism; the origin of such a passion must also be accounted for. An answer may be found by taking a closer look at the character traits triggering curiosity.

2.2.1 The origin of the love of truth

How can the origin of curiosity be accounted for? I interpret Hume's theory of the passions as suggesting that there may be certain natural character traits, such as attentiveness, ambition, and inquisitiveness,[59] which are conducive to developing the passion of curiosity or the love of truth. These character traits are inherent to their possessor and cannot be learned, acquired, or controlled. Given the appropriate environmental circumstances, the possessor of the appropriate combination of character traits will be predisposed towards a contemplative and inquisitive attitude—a passion for truth and knowledge. In some persons, such passion, if carried too far, may develop into a thorough sceptical attitude conducive to sceptical melancholy.

Nothing besides the search for truth would provide a curious person, under the appropriate circumstances, with the kind of pleasure that this passion naturally

[59] This list of character traits is not exhaustive.

induces one to pursue. As mentioned earlier,[60] Hume believes that the main motive for any action is passion, not what he calls reason. He also claims, in contrast with numerous ancient and modern views, that reason *alone* is unable to govern one's passions (T 2.3.3.1-10, SBN pp. 413-418; T 2.3.8.13, SBN pp. 437-438; T 3.3.1.18, SBN pp. 583-584). More particularly, concerning the love of truth, Hume writes:

> I cannot forbear having a curiosity to be acquainted with the principles of moral good and evil, the nature and foundation of government, and the cause of those several passions and inclinations, which actuate and govern me. I am uneasy to think I approve of one object, and disapprove of another; call one thing beautiful, and another deform'd; decide concerning truth and falshood, reason and folly, without knowing upon what principles I proceed. I am concern'd for the condition of the learned world, which lies under such a deplorable ignorance in all these particulars. I feel an ambition to arise in me of contributing to the instruction of mankind, and of acquiring a name by my inventions and discoveries. These sentiments spring up naturally in my present disposition; and shou'd I endeavour to banish them, by attaching myself to any other business or diversion, I *feel* I shou'd be a loser in point of pleasure; and this is the origin of my philosophy (T 1.4.7.12, SBN p. 257).

In this passage, Hume is acknowledging that one may not help feeling a strong need to understand human nature and contribute to human knowledge. He describes a compelling desire to know why and how one makes moral evaluations, why there are governments and laws, and the nature of their role in human life. He mentions the uneasiness of not knowing the proper foundation for valuing one object over another, and the proper justification for calling something true or false.

More importantly, this passage illustrates how the passion of curiosity may compel one to reflect upon the motivation for rational inquiry. Hume shows that answering these questions can fulfil one's ambition to contribute to human progress, an accomplishment that could make one feel proud. Hume also recognizes that there

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[60] Cf. beginning of section 2.2 of this thesis.

may be no other activity in the world that one would rather do than to continue with a philosophical inquiry, fuelled by a passion for truth.

The role that the love of truth and melancholy have in the development of scepticism can be explained as follows. The pleasure of the prospect of knowing the truth motivates the process of rational inquiry. However, when no significant progress has been accomplished in satisfying curiosity, the pain and uneasiness associated with ignorance push the inquirer into an abyss of doubt.

Curiosity, or the love of truth is, thus, a necessary condition for the development of a sceptical outlook. Without the passion of curiosity, there is no motivation for asking penetrating questions and dogmatic beliefs remain unchallenged. The link between curiosity and scepticism should be no surprise. Traditionally, a sceptic is not a person who questions beliefs for the mere sake of doubting, but an inquirer whose curiosity prevents him from accepting dogmatic answers.[61]

Finally, it should be noted that Hume's conception of sceptical melancholy does not portray this condition as widespread. Only those who have a natural passion for the love of truth, and who develop such passion thanks to the appropriate circumstances, may encounter the uneasiness of sceptical melancholy when their love of truth is unfulfilled.[62]

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[61] The Greek verb "sképtomai" means "to inquire." Etymologically, the term "sceptic" can be interpreted as "inquirer." Cf. Klein (2011).

[62] Although the love of truth is a necessary condition for the development of a sceptical outlook, this does not mean that scepticism, or moderate scepticism, are the only outcomes of this passion. For an acknowledgement of alternative developments to the love of truth cf. section 2.3.2 of this thesis.

2.3 Hume's solution to sceptical melancholy

In this section I claim that melancholy plays a vital role in Hume's philosophical project, as doxastic stability—an equilibrium between conflicting beliefs—is reached through a balancing act between this passion and the love of truth. The tension between these two passions involves a tension between conflicting beliefs because Hume associates the love of truth with the pursuit of knowledge through the use of reason, while linking melancholy with a loss of hope in attaining knowledge. Hume shows that a cautious approach to knowledge can enable one to reap the greatest practical and epistemic advantages without becoming paralyzed by a sceptical crisis. Moreover, he shows that one may learn to live through such crisis by temporarily rejecting abstruse reasonings and reaching doxastic stability.

Initially, the love of truth motivates one to inquire about the mechanism and foundations of human nature. One's doxastic stability is attained thanks to the conflicting attraction and aversion that are caused by the pleasure instigated by the love of truth and the uneasiness associated with sceptical melancholy.

The sceptical crisis that Hume talks about in T 1.4.7.1-15 (SBN pp. 263-274) illustrates how the disappointment due to recognizing the limits of what he calls reason can plunge one into a deep sceptical melancholy. Yet, in spite of such a setback, one's passion for truth may not fade away. One can continue a philosophical project, albeit with the reservation that arises from the disappointing experiences of a sceptical melancholy crisis. Amusements and lively impressions allow one to temporarily stop questioning unjustified beliefs and acknowledge common concepts—such as space, time, existence, causation, reason, and personal identity.

Moreover, the portrayal of Hume's sceptical crisis does not entail that one must reject scepticism *tout court*. In fact, Hume's solution to sceptical melancholy is a moderate

kind of scepticism that shows that one can manage to strike a balance between the natural tendencies to assent common beliefs and the also natural urge to raise doubts about those same beliefs.

It is the feelings of pain and pleasure that motivate the alternation of a point of view about certain basic beliefs, until stability is reached. For instance, the feelings of despondency and pain due to an unfulfilled quest for truth (T 1.4.7.1-2, SBN pp. 263-264) are counterbalanced by either the prospect of losing the pleasurable feeling of curiosity if one decided to stop philosophizing altogether (T 1.4.7.12, SBN pp. 270-271), or giving up the agreeable hope of contributing to the advancement of knowledge (T 1.4.7.14, SBN p. 273). The contrast between feelings of pain and pleasure illustrate the mechanism through which one's scepticism becomes mitigated.

Hume's solution to sceptical melancholy reveals that one cannot escape the uneasiness and pain of being in a state of uncertainty through more philosophizing, because it inevitably lead to more uncertainty. The remedy lies in moderating or temporarily interrupting intense thinking (T 1.4.7.9, SBN p. 269).[63] He thinks that reason (as understood by Hume) alone is of no help in getting rid of the uneasiness caused by excessive and fruitless thinking. It is thanks to distractions, amusements, and the company of others that the sceptic philosopher escapes the trap that his own curiosity, and an excessive trust in rationality, has led him into.

The following passage illustrates Hume's belief in the impotence of moderating reason, for avoiding philosophical despondency:

> Those, who take a pleasure in declaiming against human nature, have observ'd, that man is altogether insufficient to support himself; and that when you loosen all the holds, which he has of external objects, he immediately drops down into the deepest melancholy and despair. From this, say they, proceeds that

[63] T 1.4.7.9, SBN p. 269 is quoted in section 2.1.2 of this thesis.

> continual search after amusement in gaming, in hunting, in business; by which we endeavour to forget ourselves, and excite our spirits from the languid state, into which they fall, when not sustain'd by some brisk and lively emotion. To this method of thinking I so far agree, that I own the mind to be insufficient, of itself, to its own entertainment, and that it naturally seeks after foreign objects, which may produce a lively sensation, and agitate the spirits. On the appearance of such an object it awakes, as it were, from a dream: The blood flows with a new tide: The heart is elevated: And the whole man acquires a vigour, which he cannot command in his solitary and calm moments. Hence company is naturally so rejoicing, as presenting the liveliest of all objects, viz. a rational and thinking Being like ourselves, who communicates to us all the actions of his mind; makes us privy to his inmost sentiments and affections; and lets us see, in the very instant of their production, all the emotions, which are caus'd by any object. Every lively idea is agreeable, but especially that of a passion, because such an idea becomes a kind of passion, and gives a more sensible agitation to the mind, than any other image or conception (T 2.2.4.4, SBN pp. 352-353).

In this quote, Hume points out the fragile state of mind of someone who neglects to pay attention to the lively impressions of external objects, which play a crucial part in holding beliefs. One can readily appreciate that the passions arising from the lively impressions produced by the company of others, are an agreeable cure to sceptical melancholy.[64] By rejecting abstruse reasonings and engaging with others in society, the melancholic state of the contemplative philosopher dissipates. The uneasiness of sceptical melancholy recedes with the interruption of hard questioning and the engagement of one's attention in ordinary life. The mechanism portrayed by Hume to correct an excessive and damaging use of abstruse reasonings, which is expressed as a full-blown and hopeless scepticism in the conclusion of Book I of the *Treatise*, is to reject those difficult reasonings and regain belief by plunging back into normal activities and relations with others.

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[64] There are other examples in Hume's work dealing with the alternation between beliefs, see for instance T 1.4.1.5, SBN p. 181; T 1.4.2.9, SBN p. 190; EHU 12.24-25. For brevity's sake, such additional examples are not discussed here.

The alternation between the sceptical views experienced during quiet philosophical reflection and the unquestioned acceptance of matters that seem evident in common life plays a crucial role in the development of moderate scepticism. The contrast between the memories of these experiences gives rise to a more balanced doxastic point of view, which is moderate scepticism. The contrast between the feelings caused by two extreme emotional standpoints—the pain and uneasiness of utter doubt, and the pleasure of innocent certainty associated with the beliefs that arise when engaging in society—illustrate how Hume's moderate scepticism is forged.

Hume's solution echoes the prescribed remedies against melancholy in the eighteenth century, which have been explored in the previous chapter. For instance, in the conclusion of his *Anatomy*, Burton prescribes that, in order to maintain good health of body and soul, one must avoid "solitariness and idleness" (3.4.2.6). Such recommendation offers striking similarities with Hume's solution of avoiding philosophical melancholy by engaging in pleasant and amusing distractions, particularly in the company of others.

In a similar way, Mandeville's *Treatise* speaks of men of learning as "*Hypochondriacal* People" who are particularly prone to developing the "Disease of the Learned" due to an excessive use of intellectual faculties and the neglect of their bodies ([1711] 1730, pp. 106-107). One can appreciate that the problem that Mandeville refers to stems from a lack of balance in human activities. Hume illustrates that one manages to avoid such imbalance by temporarily taking a step back from hard reasoning and engaging in diverting activities with others.

Hume's solution reveals that one can avoid the melancholy caused by unanswered philosophical speculations concerning the existence and true nature of space, time, causation, reason, and personal identity by plunging into the world outside the study room. Yet, once the sceptical crisis has been overcome, things in the outside world

won't look exactly the same as before. A hint of scepticism concerning some basic beliefs may linger in the mind, thanks to the memory of the impressions lived through a sceptical crisis.

For Hume, belief fixes an idea firmly in the imagination. That enlivened idea produces a minor kind of pleasure that prevents the discomfort associated with shifting objects of knowledge. A prominent feature of human nature, says Hume, is the disagreeableness associated with the experience of sudden and strong changes in objects. Doubt causes alterations in thought, abruptly transporting one's mind from one idea to another. This violent alteration induces pain and uneasiness. Moreover, the uneasiness due to the instability and inconstancy of an object is related to the degree of interest in that particular object.[65]

Hume's solution to sceptical melancholy is best understood when weighted against such uneasiness. The feelings of pain due to the doubt and instability regarding an object in which one is interested work as warning signs, telling one to momentarily step away from abstruse reasonings. In a similar way, the allure of the pleasurable feelings associated with the hope of attaining certainty and stability regarding an object of interest motivates further inquires. The upshot is that the contrast of the pleasurable attraction of certainty against the uneasiness occasioned by doubt moderates any excessive hopes of attaining the truth through rational inquiry. This way, the feelings of pain and pleasure modify the scope of one's commitment to common beliefs.[66]

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[65] This interpretation was directly inspired by Louis Loeb's work and it does not differ from his view (2002).

[66] Further evidence confirming Hume's portrayal of a balanced doxastic position can be found in the conclusion of Book II of his *Treatise*, which deals with curiosity, or the love of truth. In the closing paragraph of Book II (T 2.3.10.12, SBN pp. 453-454), Hume expounds the pleasant advantages of belief and the uneasiness caused by disbelief.

Having expounded Hume's solution to sceptical melancholy, and before moving to the next section, which highlights the virtue of moderate scepticism, it is important to clarify certain aspects of what has been said so far.

2.3.1 Hume's solution and his deterministic standpoint

Given Hume's theory of the will, the interpretation I am offering might seem to be challenged. On the one hand, my interpretation of Hume's solution to sceptical melancholy underscores the prescription of temporarily rejecting abstruse reasonings; on the other hand, Hume's deterministic theory suggests that human actions are always determined by antecedent motivations and are, therefore, not under the agent's control (T 2.3.1.5, SBN p. 401). Thus, Hume prescriptive attitude is undermined by his deterministic conception of the will.

Hume uses the word "ought" numerous times throughout his *Treatise*[67] and suggests that one can choose a course of action when he says that "[w]here reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to. Where it does not, it never can have any title to operate upon us" (T 1.4.7.11, SBN p. 270) or that "[i]n all the incidents of life we ought still to preserve our scepticism. If we believe, that fire warms, or water refreshes, 'tis only because it costs us too much pains to think otherwise" (T 1.4.7.11, SBN p. 270). These recommendations have a normative salience, which is apparent in Hume's use of the modal "ought". This suggest, as in the case of any normative prescription, that one is not forced or determined to act according to it since it is possible to recognize the normative force of a prescription while resist acting according to it. The apparent contradiction between Hume's

[67] The word "ought," which suggests taking certain course of action, is used 58 times throughout Hume's *Treatise*. This fact reveals the importance that Hume gives to normative sentences, an apparently strange thing to do for someone, like Hume, who also endorses a deterministic theory.

determinism about action and the quasi-normative prescription expressed in recommendations like the "Title Principle"[68] needs to be solved if one is to claim that Hume offers a solution to sceptical melancholy.

It seems awkward to say that Hume is prescribing a solution against melancholy when one is already determined to avoid sceptical melancholy due to causes beyond one's control, that is, by nature.[69] It seems that avoiding the pain and uneasiness that arise due to an excessive use of rationality would save the philosopher from sceptical melancholy regardless of Hume's solution.

Perhaps looking at Hume's stance on what he calls "liberty and necessity," can help to elucidate this point. Hume compares the question of whether human actions are indifferent to influence—as opposed to determined by antecedent causes—to the question of whether there is a necessity governing the operation of external bodies (T 2.3.1.1-2.3.4.10, SBN pp. 399-422). For Hume, one is unable to penetrate into the force, or causal connection, governing both the events of human beings and of external bodies. At best, one is only able to imagine a more or less predictable outcome governing these events by observing their constant conjunction and generating an association—through the habit of observing such constant conjunction—of the cause and effect involved in such events and inferring a necessity in one's mind.

According to Hume's observations about the will and human events, it is consistent to say that there is no certainty regarding whether one can willingly regulate the love of truth. The only plausible explanation—the one offered by Hume—is that only

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[68] Cf. section 2.1.2 of this thesis, where Don Garret's interpretation of the "Title Principle" is explained.

[69] By the term nature I mean the innate or essential qualities of the mind that produce belief due to lively impressions. See note 37 of this thesis.

another passion, such as the pain and uneasiness caused by sceptical melancholy, can counteract the love of truth.

It seems strange that, for Hume, the alternation of sceptical doubts and the pursuit of activities that distract from these doubts seem to occur by a mechanism over which one has no control. It is not thanks to the will or what Hume calls reason, but to a passion (e.g. sceptical melancholy), that the impulse and activity associated with another passion (e.g. the love of truth) is balanced. The balance resulting from the contrast between these conflicting passions has a crucial role in shaping Hume's moderate scepticism.

But Hume's theory of the will is not actually a threat to my view. I believe that a compatibilist approach can solve this problem. Hume's deterministic standpoint does not exclude any recommendation to avoid melancholy and my interpretation of his solution to sceptical melancholy is compatible with his deterministic standpoint. To further explain this compatibilist approach it is important to look at how Hume understands the will, which, for him, is nothing but an impression:

> Of all the immediate effects of pain and pleasure, there is none more remarkable than the WILL; and tho', properly speaking, it be not comprehended among the passions, yet as the full understanding of its nature and properties, is necessary to the explanation of them, we shall here make it the subject of our enquiry. I desire it may be observ'd, that by the *will*, I mean nothing but *the internal impression we feel and are conscious of, when we knowingly give rise to any new motion of our body, or new perception of our mind.* This impression [...] 'tis impossible to define, and needless to describe any farther; for which reason we shall cut off all those definitions and distinctions, with which philosophers are wont to perplex rather than clear up this question (T 2.3.1.2, SBN p. 399).

In this passage, Hume is saying that the will is the impression of the feeling of acting or perceiving, and that one can only understand it by introspection—not by definition. Hume avoids any association between a voluntary faculty and what he

understands by the will. This is important because Hume's notion of the will does not entail that the will can be controlled, since the will is nothing more than an impression and one cannot control impressions.

In relation to this, Hume also claims that if absolute freedom or "chance" existed, this would imply that human actions have no cause, they would be random and could not be ascribed to their author (T 2.3.2.6, SBN p. 410), which would be an obvious contradiction because there can't be effects without causes (T 2.3.1.18, SBN p. 407). Hume advocates a conception of liberty that equates it with the absence of any violent and physical obstruction to human acts, that is, freedom from constraint (T 2.3.2.1, SBN p. 407). This is relevant because, for Hume, the freedom to act is nothing more than the absence of impediments to act and one cannot act without a cause.

Keeping this in mind, it is reasonable to say that the cure prescribed by Hume is not incompatible with his theory of determinism. As long as one has freedom from constraint, getting to know Hume's solution may form part of the causes that motivate one to avoid sceptical melancholy. By providing a remedy, Hume is merely showing the way to those whose circumstances may impede them to see clearly that rejecting abstruse reasonings is the best solution to alleviate the symptoms of an unsatisfied love of truth. In coherence with his view of freedom and the will, Hume's solution to sceptical melancholy is nothing but another cause that may influence one's action.

Hume's advice is offered for a good reason: If one is to avoid sceptical melancholy, one ought to reject abstruse reasonings. Of course, this remedy may happen by itself: the pain and uneasiness that arise due to an excessive use of rationality may force one to stop this behaviour. But following Hume's remedy could also influence the behaviour of the stubborn thinker *before* the pain and uneasiness that arise due to an

excessive use of rationality causes her to act. In any case, Hume's theory of liberty and necessity shows that, if she is to be cured, no constraints must impede the stubborn philosopher from stopping abstruse reasoning.

Although I am unable to prove that one can *decide* to follow Hume's remedy, I have shown that Hume's deterministic standpoint is compatible with my interpretation of his solution to sceptical melancholy and that one may reject abstruse reasonings by following his recommendation before the pain and uneasiness that arise due to an excessive use of rationality forces one to stop this behaviour.

That being said, a further clarification needs to be given. I interpret that one becomes a moderate sceptic thanks to the combination of appropriate natural character traits such as inquisitiveness, attentiveness, ambition, curiosity[70]—which are conducive to developing the passion of curiosity or the love of truth—as well as the appropriate external circumstances, such as having the appropriate resources to develop one's endeavours, not being constrained by superstitious authorities, etc. In other words, I interpret that one's love of truth and the appropriate external circumstance are the elements that allow one to become a moderate sceptic. This seems to lead to the conclusion that any prescription to become a moderate sceptic would have no effect without the appropriate character traits and circumstances. Such conclusion is inaccurate.

Although the appropriate character traits and circumstances are necessary elements in becoming a moderate sceptic, a prescription to temporarily avoid abstruse reasonings can contribute to becoming a moderate sceptic—if this prescription is followed. Knowledge of such prescription would be nothing more than another

[70] These character traits are inherent to their possessor and cannot be learned, acquired, or controlled. They develop through their use, given the appropriate environmental circumstances. See section 2.2.1 of this thesis.

element in the mix of circumstances contributing to the development of the moderate sceptic.

Before concluding section 2.3 of this thesis, another crucial aspect of my interpretation needs to be clarified. It concerns the different outcomes that the love of truth can cause and that diverge from the path that I've described.

2.3.2 Other possible outcomes motivated by the love of truth

In a nutshell, my interpretation starts with a person who possesses the right mix of character traits (such as attentiveness, ambition, curiosity, and inquisitiveness), while living under the appropriate circumstances (such as a community where knowledge is valued and where there are no physical or moral constraints to search the truth). Now, her character traits may develop in different directions. She might be interested, for instance, in questions regarding how the universe works. But if this person's use of reason is motivated by the desire for solving fundamental questions concerning certain ideas—such as space, time, existence of external objects, causation, immaterial substances, reason, and personal identity—then she will eventually be confronted with sceptical arguments.[71]

Now, depending on the kind of mix of her character traits and circumstances, this person may deal with sceptical arguments in different ways. For instance, he may become a radical sceptic, such as Pyrrho, and become comfortable with not finding a solution to sceptical riddles—provided the liveability problem is solved.[72] On the other hand, a slightly different person—someone with a stronger curiosity—may not

[71] Cf. section 2.1.1 of this thesis.

[72] Cf. note 11 of this thesis.

accept an unsatisfied love of truth and pursue further investigations. These investigations may lead her into the dilemma of having to choose between "a false reason and none at all" (T 1.4.7.7, SBN p. 268).[73] This dilemma will plunge this person into a loss of hope attaining the truth, which could turn into a full-blown sceptical crisis.

The pain and uneasiness of the melancholy triggered by an unsatisfied love of truth will act as warning signs that this is not the right path to follow. Now, the pain and uneasiness that arise due to an excessive use of rationality may cause this person to stop indulging in abstruse reasoning and shift her attention towards distractions, company, and lively impressions. Alternatively, this person may find a solution to sceptical melancholy thanks to the advice found in the works of some of the intellectuals who have written about this problem, such as Hume or the medical scholars who prescribed remedies against the "Disease of the Learned" in the eighteenth century.[74]

A person lacking the symptoms of uneasiness and pain due to an unsatisfied love of truth might be perfectly satisfied with her situation and avoid any philosophical inquiries. Hume acknowledges that this is an acceptable stance. He even praises the attitude of the person who lives her life without any further inquiries into fundamental questions:

> I am sensible [...] that there are in *England*, in particular, many honest gentlemen, who being always employ'd in their domestic affairs, or amusing themselves in common recreations, have carried their thoughts very little beyond those objects, which are every day expos'd to their senses. And indeed, of such as these I pretend not to make philosophers, nor do I expect them either to be associates in these researches or auditors of these discoveries. They do

[73] Cf. section 2.1.2 of this thesis.

[74] Cf. section 1.3 of this thesis.

> well to keep themselves in their present situation (T 1.4.7.14, SBN pp. 272-273).

But a person who possesses the character traits of attentiveness, ambition, curiosity, and inquisitiveness, and who lives under the appropriate circumstances, will be motivated to satisfy her passion. This is where the distinction between different circumstances is crucial in determining the kind of outcome appropriate to the one who loves truth. For instance, some historical or cultural circumstances may channel a person's curiosity towards religious or superstitious investigations. A good historical example of this kind of person would be a member of the Dominican Order whose character traits and living circumstances motivate him to devote his intelligence to understanding the truths of the Church. A person with the same passion for knowledge, but under different historical or cultural circumstances, may channel her passion for knowledge towards the generally harmless and modest speculations of philosophy (T 1.4.7.13, SBN pp. 271-272).[75] It is the latter kind of person who will benefit the most from Hume's solution to sceptical melancholy. This person will not reach doxastic stability by completely rejecting abstruse reasonings. Instead, moved by her character traits and circumstances, she will allow herself a return to refined philosophical speculations on topics that naturally attract her interest.[76] Reaching doxastic balance, the latter kind of person will be able to face the limits of reason while avoiding the dilemma of having to choose between "a false reason and none at all."

After accounting for the problems of determinism and alternative outcomes to curiosity, I will conclude my interpretation of Hume's solution to sceptical

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[75] Full citation below, cf. section 2.4.1 of this thesis.

[76] Cf. section 2.1.2 of this thesis, where Don Garret's interpretation of the "Title Principle" is explained.

melancholy with a discussion of the moral advantages of moderate scepticism, and the role that virtuous character traits have therein.

2.4 Virtue and moderate scepticism

I hereby suggest that, by Hume's own standards, a moderate sceptic can be considered a virtuous person—that is, a person with virtuous character traits.[77] If true, this claim reinforces my reading of Hume's scepticism in the *Treatise* by showing that moderate scepticism can have a place not only in Hume's theory of knowledge and his explanation of the passions, but also in his moral theory.

Moderate scepticism can be understood as fostering two separate but complementary forms of virtue: Epistemic and practical. First, the moderate sceptic is cautious about committing to "dogmatic" beliefs. The usefulness of this aspect of her scepticism lies in the avoidance of error and deception. Second, moderate scepticism helps in avoiding sceptical melancholy, which may hinder a good life. In order to elaborate these two claims, I will first briefly explain what Hume means by virtue and the role that he gives to sympathy in his account.

For Hume the power of sympathy lies in the communication of affections and sentiments between persons (T 3.3.1.7, SBN pp. 575-576). It can be explained thanks to the similarity in nature and operation of minds, which are susceptible to communicate emotions through different forms of expression. Hume offers the example of one person observing the effects of a passion in the voice and gesture of

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[77] In this respect, a link could also be established between Aristotle's doctrine of the mean, expounded in the *Nichomachean Ethics* (1106a25-1109b25), as characterisation of virtue, and Hume's doxastic moderation. A further development of such link may point towards a "virtue ethics" reading of Hume's moral theory in the *Treatise*. See, for instance, the work of Slote (2001). This line of research may be worth exploring in a different project.

another. The observer associates these effects with their causes, forming such a lively idea that he experiences the passion himself. Although the observer has no direct access to another person's passions, he is aware of their effects or causes since he can note the same effects in association with his own passion. The result of this process, says Hume, is the inference that one person makes about the passion of another (T 3.3.1.6-7, SBN pp. 575-576).

Examining moral sentiments, Hume claims that approval (or condemnation) of mental qualities can happen in four different ways. The virtuous mental qualities are noticed, from a common point of view, to be either: 1) useful to other observers, 2) useful to their possessor, 3) immediately agreeable[78] to other observers, or 4) immediately agreeable to their possessor (T 3.3.1.28-30, SBN pp. 590-591).

The principle of sympathy allows one person to approve or disapprove the mental qualities and sentiments of others, even if remotely related. This principle is crucial to understanding virtue and vice because it allows the observer to make inferences about the mental qualities of others. Hume offers the example of the approbation of the mental quality of someone who is generous in her narrow circle, while the observer, who does not belong to that circle, is therefore not directly benefited by her generosity. Sympathy allows the observer to share the pleasure of those benefited by the mental quality of the generous person, thus morally approving her (T 3.3.3.2, SBN pp. 602-603).

For Hume, virtues are relatively stable and durable mental qualities (character traits, dispositions or intentions), which produce the sentiment of pleasure or approbation in the form of love (of others) or pride (of self). In the same way, vices are those

[78] That is, a mental quality directly perceived as agreeable without any further reflection about its potential usefulness.

relatively stable qualities of mind that produce the sentiment of pain or disapprobation in the form of hatred (of others) or humility (of self).

In addition, Hume distinguishes between artificial and natural virtues. Artificial virtues are those that are constituted as human conventions—that is, they are not natural and intrinsic characteristics of human nature. Artificial virtues have been developed over time to accommodate contingent circumstance of living in large and complex societies. Artificial virtues may provoke sentiments of moral approval, but not all the time, since sometimes the actions motivated by these virtues may seem to be contrary to the individual or public good. Examples of artificial virtues are justice, promise-keeping, allegiance, and modesty (T 3.2, SBN pp. 477-573).

On the other hand, natural virtues stem from, and are inherent to, human nature. They have always motivated human behaviour, regardless of the living circumstances of its possessor. Natural virtues always produce, through sympathy, moral approval when observed to produce human action. Examples of natural virtues are generosity, friendship, and compassion (T 3.3, SBN pp. 574-621).

Keeping this distinction in mind, I claim that moderate scepticism results from the combination between the appropriate mix of character traits—which Hume would call natural virtues—and the right circumstances. Mental qualities, such as attentiveness, ambition, and inquisitiveness that develop under the appropriate circumstances, motivate their possessor to love and seek the truth. Although these character traits may be considered virtuous separately, it is the proper combination of them that is of particular interest. The right combination of mental qualities possessed by the moderate sceptic is judged as virtuous because it is, factually, or potentially, useful to its possessor, or others, in her narrow circle.

Now that Hume's conception of virtue has been accounted for, I will expound on the epistemic and practical virtues of moderate scepticism.

2.4.1 Moderate scepticism as epistemic virtue

According to Hume, rejecting abstruse reasonings (by distractions, the company of others, and lively impressions) effectively saves the sceptic philosopher from melancholy. But the pain and uneasiness caused by doubt are not trifling experiences. These feelings form an integral part the mechanism through which the character of the moderate sceptic is shaped. Hume shows that moderate scepticism is the outcome of balancing an immoderate passion for truth. Moderate scepticism is useful or agreeable to its possessor and it can also be useful or agreeable to others surrounding him. I claim that moderate scepticism is motivated by virtuous character traits, such as attentiveness, ambition, curiosity, and inquisitiveness that develop under the appropriate circumstances.

To start, one may look at a passage, from the conclusion of Book I of Hume's *Treatise*, which emphasizes the useful and agreeable benefits inherent in analyzing and questioning the validity of beliefs through a moderate philosophical approach:

> 'Tis certain, that superstition is much more bold in its systems and hypotheses than philosophy; and while the latter contents itself with assigning new causes and principles to the phaenomena, which appear in the visible world, the former opens a world of its own, and presents us with scenes, and beings, and objects, which are altogether new. Since therefore 'tis almost impossible for the mind of man to rest, like those of beasts, in that narrow circle of objects, which are the subject of daily conversation and action, we ought only to deliberate concerning the choice of our guide, and ought to prefer that which is safest and most agreeable. And in this respect I make bold to recommend philosophy, and shall not scruple to give it the preference to superstition of every kind or denomination. For as superstition arises naturally and easily from the popular opinions of mankind, it seizes more strongly on the mind, and is often able to disturb us in the conduct of our lives and actions. Philosophy on the contrary, if just, can present us only with mild and moderate sentiments; and if false and extravagant, its opinions are merely the objects of a cold and

> general speculation, and seldom go so far as to interrupt the course of our natural propensities (T 1.4.7.13, SBN pp. 271-272).

In this passage, one can appreciate Hume's warning against the widespread and immodest tendency of humans to speculate beyond measure, invent myths and hypotheses beyond available evidence and common life, and hold superstitious beliefs. Against the allure of an excessive use of the imagination in elaborating unwarranted beliefs, Hume praises the "mild and moderate sentiments" of philosophy. Choosing such an approach proves to safeguard one against the dangerous extremes of superstition and wild fantasy.

In line with this passage, moderate scepticism can and does have a positive effect in one's life. At first, feeling the force of sceptical arguments may cause disagreeable effects, such as the melancholy crisis experienced by Hume by the end of Book I of the *Treatise*. Yet, eventually, these same arguments may help foster more reliable beliefs.[79] In turn, more reliable beliefs become a sign of possessing the appropriate mental qualities, which may be either useful to other observers, or their possessor or immediately agreeable to other observers, or their possessor.

In line with this argument, Lorne Falkenstein (1997) notes that, for Hume, someone who has once been convinced of the force of sceptical arguments will have an important advantage over someone who hasn't. She will be compelled to accept only "statistically guided causal inferences in preference to the dictates of 'unphilosophical' belief-forming mechanisms" (pp. 60-61).[80]

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[79] By more "reliable" beliefs I mean those beliefs that have passed the test of a moderate sceptical scrutiny.

[80] In relation to the concept of "statistically guided causal inference," Falkenstein (1997) explains that "Hume takes it that most of our causal inferences are more deliberate and result from our consciously counting up confirming and contrary instances, subtracting the latter from the former, and considering the belief in the causal connection to fall as far short of certainty as the remainder resulting from the subtraction falls short of the original number of confirming experiments. In this

Falkenstein agrees that a sceptical crisis can have a positive and desirable outcome, in spite of being initially disagreeable. Those who have felt a sceptical crisis and have been convinced of sceptical arguments will have a much higher standard for accepting beliefs.[81] Put another way, not only can some persons temporarily live without beliefs (i.e. while feeling a sceptical crisis or while questioning, from time to time, their beliefs), but, the temporary suspension of beliefs can and does have a positive and exploratory function for those with the aforesaid naturally virtuous character traits.

Naturally virtuous character traits such as attentiveness, ambition, and inquisitiveness motivate their possessor to love and seek the truth. But, while seeking the truth, their possessor may feel the force of sceptical arguments, causing pain and uneasiness. This discomfort will make the inquirer temporarily stop the research. The combination of these character traits offers a clear epistemic advantage for their possessor. According to Hume's own standard, these character traits—in the right combination and under the appropriate circumstances—are to be judged as virtuous.

A person possessing the above-mentioned character traits, who conducts her inquiries with moderate scepticism, will have an advantage over another person lacking such character traits and whose approach to knowledge lacks scepticism. The character traits that foster moderate scepticism are valued morally since, judging

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case, we deliberately proportion our belief in accord with the results of a calculation, rather than in accord with the felt vivacity of the idea" (p. 36). For Falkenstein (1997), an " 'unphilosophical' belief is indicative of a mind that has not engaged in the kind of reflection that curiosity and a proper respect for the truth demand, and hence of a possible flaw in character " (p. 54).

[81] Such persons will limit their beliefs to their immediate impressions and to beliefs that fall within what Falkenstein (1997) calls " 'second' general rules, such as the rules that causes can never fail of their effects, that the probability of causes is to be judged by statistically sound studies and not by passion and recent anecdotes, and that generalizations are to be drawn on the efficacious features of causes and not their accidental properties. Those who have not done these things, the vulgar, sitting in donut shops and reading tabloid newspapers, will be superstitious, gullible and prejudiced, though they will consider their credulity to be nothing other than 'common sense ' " (p. 59).

from a common point of view, they turn out to be either useful or immediately agreeable to the person possessing them or to others surrounding her.

The advantageous effects of possessing these natural virtues can be enjoyed throughout a lifetime. Indeed, Hume is aware of the significance of moderate scepticism throughout one's life. The following passage is key textual evidence:

> In all the incidents of life we ought still to preserve our scepticism. If we believe, that fire warms, or water refreshes, 'tis only because it costs us too much pains to think otherwise. Nay if we are philosophers, it ought only to be upon sceptical principles, and from an inclination, which we feel to the employing ourselves after that manner. Where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to. Where it does not, it never can have any title to operate upon us (T 1.4.7.11, SBN p. 270).

Hume is affirming his moderate scepticism by telling the reader not to force the use of what he calls reason in cases where its use may seem awkward and inappropriate, but only in cases in which one feels naturally inclined to do so. The passage shows that assuming common life beliefs can be appropriate when lively impressions compel one to accept them. But regardless of one's temporary acceptance of unwarranted beliefs, one may continue to question basic beliefs under the appropriate circumstances—that is, when naturally inclined to apply sceptical arguments. Such a passage is reminiscent of the moderate approach that Hume takes towards his excessive studies in order to remedy the uneasiness caused by his immoderate intellectual efforts.[82]

Moreover, the acceptance of beliefs is not solely based on what Hume understands by reason, but on the practical issue of avoiding subject matters beyond common life that involve metaphysical or dogmatic speculations. These kinds of beliefs can be dangerous and disagreeable to the person holding them or those near her (T 1.4.7.13,

[82] Cf. section 1.1 of this thesis.

SBN p. 271). Some of the moderate sceptic's character traits will prompt her to only accept beliefs that pass the sceptical test, as opposed to beliefs involving myths, superstition, fallacious reasoning, and dogmatic claims. I claim that the appropriate combination of virtuous character traits predispose its possessor towards a moderately sceptical attitude that may help her avoid problematic beliefs.

Now, someone may note that moderate scepticism only solves a self-induced problem—sceptical melancholy—leaving common-life problems untouched. If that is so, what is the advantage a moderate sceptic has over those not facing sceptical crises?

It is important to clarify that natural virtues conducive to a moderately sceptical attitude are not necessary for avoiding questionable beliefs. In fact, one could avoid holding beliefs involving myths, superstition, fallacious reasoning, and dogmatic claims either by chance or through appropriate education—particularly the education received during the most crucial stages of one's development, which is chosen by one's caregivers. However, the content of the appropriate education will ultimately originate from a person motivated by the possession of the aforementioned virtuous character traits[83] (or some other similar character traits conducive to moderate scepticism).

The only sure way to avoid dogmatic beliefs in society is to be guided by those persons who have developed, under the appropriate circumstances, the right combination of character traits. Such persons will have questioned beliefs that most people take for granted but—due to the pain and uneasiness that arise from an excessive use of rationality or thanks to the advice of intellectuals showing how to avoid sceptical melancholy—will not get carried away by an uncontrolled passion to know the truth. In this context, the right combination of character traits, developed

[83] This idea was inspired while reading the conclusion of Falkenstein's (1997) article.

under the appropriate circumstances, is judged as virtuous, not only for being immediately agreeable and useful to its possessor, but also to others.

For instance, Hume is aware of the positive moral judgement that is made about persons who contribute to the advancement of humanity. The following quote from the conclusion of Book III of Hume's *Treatise* serves as evidence of Hume's awareness of others' moral recognition:

> Who indeed does not feel an accession of alacrity in his pursuits of knowledge and ability of every kind, when he considers, that besides the advantage, which immediately result from these acquisitions, they also give him a new lustre in the eyes of mankind, and are universally attended with esteem and approbation? (T 3.3.6.6, SBN p. 617).

In this passage, Hume illustrates the usefulness and immediate agreeableness of virtuous character traits to both their possessor and to others. But, the passage also serves as evidence that Hume hopes that moral recognition could be granted to the philosopher whose pursuit of knowledge contributes to humanity. The positive mood in this passage offers a direct contrast to the straightforward pessimism expressed in the conclusion of Book I.

In this section I have offered arguments and evidence to show that moderate scepticism is epistemically virtuous. In the following section I elaborate on its practical usefulness.

2.4.2 Moderate scepticism as practical virtue

In the *Treatise,* Hume portrays the practical virtue of moderate scepticism through a four-step process. First, the love of truth may drive a person into intense thinking and

deep speculation about common life beliefs. Second, this person may face a dilemma having to choose between two unreliable methods of inquiry (the faculty to make "demonstrative and probable reasonings" and an unrestrained imagination). This leads the person towards sceptical melancholy because both the imagination and what Hume calls reason alone prove insufficient to dispel the doubts that arise through sceptical arguments. This frustration plunges the person into deep despair and suffering. Third, the avoidance of despondency takes place by rejecting abstruse reasonings—diverting one's attention to non-intellectual matters and common life affairs. As the philosophical despair goes away, things seem to be back to normal. Fourth, curiosity and a passion for truth may drive this person back into philosophical speculation. But, after having already lived through the process of sceptical melancholy, this person has learned that a moderate approach to knowledge allows one to question dogmatic beliefs without falling into a state of utter despondency.

For a lover of truth, a life of moderate scepticism presents useful and immediately agreeable advantages compared to a life without any form of scepticism. The appropriate combination of character traits—such as attentiveness, ambition, and inquisitiveness, developed under the appropriate circumstances—and which is conducive to a life of moderate scepticism, is valued as practically virtuous from the common point of view because of the advantages that such character traits offer to both its possessors and to others close to her. The emphasis here is on the advantages that moderate scepticism can offer in *living* better. An excessive love of truth may burden its possessor with sceptical melancholy, and that sort of life can be hard to live if such passion remains unhalted. Hume's remedy—temporarily rejecting abstruse reasonings—proves to be a useful solution to avoid the pits of uncertainty that may hinder a good life.

Although most people doubt, now and then, about particular things, few undergo such a thorough sceptical crisis as the one portrayed by the end of Book I of the *Treatise*. Moderate scepticism proves to be useful and immediately agreeable for those whose love of truth puts them into a state of doubt-induced despondency. In this respect, moderate scepticism is a sign of possessing a combination of character traits that promote practical virtue. Hume's doxastic stability is revealed as a delicate balancing act between questioning one's beliefs through a disciplined use of abstruse reasonings and, when such questioning becomes fruitless and painful, taking a step back and moderating one's passion for truth through a practical engagement in common life.

This dialectic is the characteristic pattern of the moderate sceptic's interaction with the world. Moreover, it is through such a balancing act that the moderate sceptic becomes a better person and is able to contribute to the quality of life of others. These benefits are produced when the lover of truth has learnt how to live without distress, even when her doubts remain unanswered.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have explained how Hume conceives and solves the problem of sceptical melancholy. I have shown that Hume proposes the temporary avoidance of abstruse philosophical reasonings and favours the moderate scepticism that results therefrom.

Hume shows that one can be initially motivated by an excessive passion to know the truth. But a strong hope in the promises of reason is quickly shattered by excessive doubt concerning the justification of certain beliefs. These excessive doubts trigger a profound crisis of sceptical melancholy, which is explained by an unsatisfied love of truth. The emotional pain of sceptical melancholy makes one feel uneasy. Such discomfort provides a motivation for avoiding excessive doubt and thinking, pulling one, at the same time, to seek the lively impressions of common life and company. The eventual moderation of excessive doubt, achieved through distractions and the company of others, alleviates the pain of one's sceptical melancholy.

However, the love of truth eventually brings one back to a dubitative state. This time, however, one's doxastic standpoint is more moderate. One is less committed to and disturbed by doubts, due to having already experienced that sceptical melancholy can be overcome. Alternatively, if one is to temporarily abandon the love of truth and go back to the pleasures offered by distractions and the company of others, one will keep the faint memory of philosophical doubts, lessening—if only marginally—one's commitment to common life beliefs. The alternation caused by the love of truth and sceptical melancholy play a fundamental role in the formation of one's doxastic stability. Hume shows that these two conflicting passions can have a positive role in one's research project.

This interpretation shows important parallels between Hume's solution and the remedies prescribed against melancholy by eighteenth-century scholars. Although Hume writes extensively about the love of truth (T 2.3.10.1-12, SBN pp. 448-454), he dedicates few passages to describing melancholy as a passion. A closer look at England's eighteenth-century conception of melancholy has been helpful in understanding this passion, which is constitutional of Hume's sceptical attitude. Moreover, the historical continuity and discrepancies of theories and treatments of melancholy, from its ancient Greek origins until Hume's time, are useful in enriching the perspective of the eighteenth century conception of this disease.

In the first chapter of this thesis I showed that, in spite of important advancements in medicine, these remedies remain prevalent in the eighteenth century. The findings of such exploration show that the solution depicted by Hume in order to escape a state of despondency is not new. Indeed, remedies consisting of distractions, the pleasant company of others, and moderation in studies are constitutive of both Hume's solution and the traditional conception and remedies against melancholy in eighteenth-century England. The way in which melancholy is treated in the eighteenth century illuminates how Hume suggests avoiding sceptical melancholy: By temporarily rejecting abstruse reasonings.

I have also shown that living through, and overcoming, a sceptical crisis presents important practical and epistemic advantages. One emerges from such crisis with a keener sense of one's limitations in grasping the truth and thereafter avoids making, or accepting, dogmatic (i.e. unwarranted) claims about how things really are. After living through a sceptical crisis, one becomes a bit less naive when confronted with the compelling circumstances in which nature forces one to hold beliefs. The doxastic equilibrium—reached through the contrast of the episodes of sceptical melancholy lived in the study room and the pragmatism lived in common life—gives the moderate sceptic an advantage over the dogmatist. Such an advantage makes the

moderate sceptic a more virtuous person, at least regarding her approach towards knowledge. As Donald Livingston (1998) succinctly puts it: "One result of skepticism is to shape the moral character of the true philosopher" (p. 147). And, by shaping the "moral character," I understand the development of a virtuous disposition towards objects of knowledge. After overcoming a lack of certainty and confidence in the foundation of basic beliefs, the moderate sceptic will have attained a level of moderate caution in regards to the use of reason.

Finally, my approach is significant because it offers an innovative understanding of the nature and scope of Hume's scepticism, which is a hotly debated topic. The evidence and arguments offered in this thesis support the view that Hume's scepticism is of a moderate nature. My position is in conflict with that of other schools of interpretation about Hume's scepticism, such as those who claim that Hume uses sceptical arguments to foster a naturalistic project or what he calls a "science of human nature" (Baier, 1991; Garrett, 1997; Kemp Smith, 1905a, 1905b, 1941; Stroud, 1981); those who portray Hume as a radical sceptic (Beattie, [1783] 1970; Kant, [1783] 2004; Reid, [1764/1785/1788] 1983; Waxman, 2003); those who claim that Hume offers the only "consistent" form of Pyrrhonian scepticism (Popkin, 1951) or who explore how Hume's metaphysical principles and speculations are not inconsistent with his own scepticism (Baxter, 2008). In contrast, the results of my work reinforce the existing school of interpretation supporting the idea of Hume being a mitigated sceptic (Broughton, 2008; Castiglione, 2006; Fogelin, 1985, 2009; Meeker, 1998; Norton, 1982, 1994; Penelhum, 2003; Strawson, 1985).

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