0. These notes are intended as a preliminary report on some work I have been doing in on the phenomenology of melancholy. What I have to offer at this stage is little more than an array of fragments, I fear. There are far more questions than answers; there is no proper conclusion; what little argument I offer is more suggestive than conclusive – if even that. But this is not really intended as a proper paper – more like an early trace of an ongoing obsession.

1. Let me start with my excuse for spending time on this – an excuse that also serves as a kind of hypothesis (or hunch!) that I brought with me to the work. As most of you will know, I have been working in recent years on what I have been calling An Alternate History of Self-Consciousness. I have been looking at ways in which self-consciousness was understood and investigated prior to and independent of the Cartesian and post-Cartesian (and anti-Cartesian) models that have become so familiar. It has been in the context of this project I have been looking (for instance) at Stoic oikeiosis, at Adam’s shame, at Lutheran despair, at Dutch self-portraiture, confessional conscience, etc. All these are resources that I have been trying to exploit in exploring theories of self-consciousness that lie outside the predominant traditional theories of self-consciousness understood in terms of interiority or apperception or error-immunity, … -- the usual suspects.

2. In working on this project I have become increasingly invested in a kind of large-scale hypothesis that applies in all these rather diverse domains, viz. that self-consciousness in this alternate tradition is ontological and normative. I use these words with a guilty conscience, because these are two bits of jargon that seem now to have infiltrated every corner of academic discourse – surely two of the most overused terms in academic English at the moment. (I guess I am just the latest sheep dumbly
following the flock.) But I use these terms because they say exactly what I mean. Self-consciousness is ontological insofar as it tells me something about my mode of being (and perhaps also about the mode of being of the entities around me); it is normative insofar as it provides me with some kind of guidance or (as I prefer it) orientation in the sphere of my endeavors. In some sense or other it tells me which way is up. So my excuse (to get back to that), my hunch, my hypothesis is that one of the pre-Modern headings under which self-consciousness was thematized and theorized and investigated was indeed melancholy. Or to put it another way, the hypothesis is that melancholy is a form of self-consciousness. And if indeed melancholy is a mode of self-consciousness, I want to know how it figures in the context of my broader hypothesis: what kind of ontology does it convey, and what kind of normative orientation is inscribed in it? I advance that hypothesis in the most tentative possible way, as I am not at all sure that it is warranted; so far I have not been able to find any really clear and direct evidence of this link. But I’ll try to come back at the end to consider how things stand with this hypothesis.

3. So that is my excuse for dabbling in an area where – as usual – I have no business, no qualification, no competence. What’s more, this is (as you no doubt already know and as has become evident to me) an area that is already very well studied. I am far from the first to grow self-indulgently obsessed with the phenomenon of melancholy. The history of western thought is, among other things, the history of wave after wave of such obsessions, and they have been very extensively studied – a fact that perhaps provides a kind of indirect evidence for the ancient claim that melancholy is somehow intimately connected to scientific and scholarly activity (both as cause and as effect). I am just the latest fool sucked in.

4. So that is a lot of excuse and apology. Let me try to be a bit more constructive, if only in the interest of mapping our way in. I am loathe to start into this territory with some grand methodological pronouncement, but the fact is that I have had certain methodological maxims (and ambitions?) in mind while I have been working. Let me distinguish three. As already indicated, I am interested in trying to probe the idea that melancholy might be well-understood as a form of self-consciousness, where that requires exploration of the ways in which it orients or disorients, and the ways in which it somehow conveys to the melancholic something about his/her mode of being. So that has been a first methodological maxim: look for forms of ontological self-consciousness or self-awareness at work in melancholy. Ontology also comes into the second maxim, since I am interested in the mode of being of melancholy itself. What kind of thing is it? I’ll return in a moment to try to indicate what I
mean by that question. And thirdly, finally, I am interested in the phenomenology of melancholy. How can/should we describe or articulate the experience of a melancholiac? And (since phenomenology, for me, is not to be construed subjectively) how does the world show itself for one in the grip of melancholia? So those are my three methodological guidelines: ask about the mode of being of melancholy (ontological maxim); ask about the experience of the melancholiac (phenomenological maxim); ask about the forms of self-consciousness or self-awareness in melancholy.

5. Let me pause for a note about terminology. There are, I now see, a range of different terms out there that are obviously interrelated. One sees references to melancholy, melancholia (and then there are variants on both those terms where the ‘h’ is omitted – melancholy, melancholia). One also finds descriptions of melanc(h)oliacs. And I have seen uses of the term ‘melanconia,’ as well as other alternate spellings (e.g., “Melencolia” inscribed on the horizon in Dürer’s famous print). So far in thinking about this I have been using these various terms and spellings rather interchangeably. The one word that has an obvious grammatical distinction is “melancholiac”, although even here the specification of the term will tend to beg some important questions. A melancholiac is a melancholy person (usually a human being, but not always, as we shall see). One might specify this further by saying that a melancholiac is someone who suffers from melancholia, and indeed almost everyone will agree that melancholy, whatever it is, involves a degree of suffering. Beyond this usage varies. A melancholiac might be someone who suffers from a particular disease (as a diabetic is someone who suffers from diabetes). But melancholy might not be a disease. A melancholiac might be someone with a certain a kind of character or personality, or even someone with a certain kind of complexion. Or it might be someone with a distinctive horoscope. Already here we can begin to see the ontological variation coming into view. In thinking this through we also need to remember that melancholy is, among other things, the name for a bodily humour – one of the four basic humours that were distinguished in ancient medicine. What are they? Blood, Phlegm, Choleric (Yellow Bile), Melancholy (Black Bile). A standard thought in medicine and psychiatry for several hundred years was that health required a proper balance of the humours; that different diseases could be traced to different kinds of imbalance in the humours; that different kinds of personality traits were associated with different bodily mixtures of the humours; that medical therapies could be devised to manipulate the humoral proportions. To all this was added at various stages the thought that this had something to do with the stars and (particularly) the planets. So on the terminological front we will want to be
able to distinguish one word that refers specifically to the humour, black bile, and another that can be used to refer to the condition or character of someone in whom that particular humour predominates. I suspect that “melancholy” has sometimes been reserved for the former usage, while “melancholia” has been used for the latter. But for present purposes, anyway, I propose to be loose and messy with my terminology, partly out of uncertainty, but also because any premature fixing of the terms here runs the danger of prejudging the ontological question.

6. One more preliminary. A confession this time. In thinking about these issues, I have had in mind a kind of contrast case: the case of (clinical) depression. I don’t want to go too far into this here; it is a very complicated matter in its own right and I really don’t know enough to speak in an informed way about it. Start with one thing I do know. Shortly after I arrived in Britain there was a formal report that briefly got a lot of attention in the UK, the Layard Report. I am sure it was one of many such reports around the world. The Layard Report was not actually a Government Report; it was written (this is a telling detail) under the auspices of the Centre for Economic Performance (CEP) at the London School of Economics (LSE). CEP organised a working group on Mental Health Policy. Under the leadership of Lord Layard, the Working Group issued a report that dealt specifically with depression and anxiety disorders in the UK. Its main policy recommendation was that the UK needed an additional ten thousand psycho-therapists to address an epidemic of depression and anxiety. The report laid out an economic analysis that purported to show that the investment in this army of therapists would very quickly pay for itself in increased economic activity and saved costs to the NHS and various other government bodies. The report had nine co-authors/signatories; the first two named authors are Stuart Bell (South London and Maudsley NHS Trust) and David Clark (Institute of Psychiatry, Kings College London). One of the headline conclusions of the report: one in six Britons suffers from depression or anxiety disorder.¹

7. So that is one thing I know: according to the experts, there is a lot of depression and anxiety out there. But Layard and Co. also think that it can be fixed – or at least substantially reduced. (That is the first sentence of the second paragraph of their

¹ Here is how this point is put in the first paragraph of the report: “Crippling depression and chronic anxiety are the biggest causes of misery in Britain today. They are the great submerged problem, which shame keeps out of sight. But if you mention them, you soon discover how many families are affected. According to the respected Psychiatric Morbidity Survey, one in six of us would be diagnosed as having depression or chronic anxiety disorder, which means that one family in three is affected.” Layard et. al., The Depression Report: A New Deal for Depression and Anxiety Disorders (London, London School of Economics, 2006), page 1, emphasis original. There is a lot worth commenting on in this paragraph, but for now I resist the temptation.
report.\(^2\) I am not going to go into their proposal here, because I want to turn to a second question: what exactly is depression? (For now, at least, I want to focus on the case of depression rather than anxiety.) I emphasize the verb in that question because I want it to be heard in a certain register. I am not here asking about what causes depression, nor about its symptoms or other social or economic effects. I am not asking how best to treat it. I am interested in all those things, to be sure. (Given the scale of the phenomenon these are questions that should interest everyone, I think.) But for here and now I want to ask a question that lies one level deeper: what kind of thing is depression? What is its (mode of) being?

8. I should really add a paragraph at this point (or perhaps a book?), in which I indicate just what kind of question I have in mind here. In fact one of my fears in all this is that I am using this sort of language without being able to say exactly what I mean by it. But if the ontological question I have in mind can be difficult to specify exactly, it is not hard to ease our way into it, along the following, perhaps too-familiar line of thought. Think about a textbook, a hammer, an isosceles triangle, an act of unanimous consent, the tone of politics in Washington … . These are all things that are (entities). I would say that they are all real things, in some sense (not just pretend or imaginary), but we don’t need to fight about that. They are all objects in Husserl’s very broad sense that there are objective truths to be discovered about them. But they seem quite plainly (!) to differ in their mode of being. They seem to be beings of different types. (If one were careful and intellectually responsible, one would now add an account of just what that means. In particular: what is the difference between simply saying that they are different and saying that they are of different ontological types? I am interested in the answer to that question, but I don’t propose to address it directly here.)

9. So what kind of thing is depression? What is its mode of being? I don’t know the answer to that, but I do have a source. Or rather, thousands upon thousands of sources. They don’t answer the question, exactly, but they do seem to indicate and presuppose an answer. I have in mind, par exemplar, the piece of paper that comes wrapped up in a box of Prozac tablets, or the pamphlet that is handed out by the psychiatrist (or, increasingly, by the GP) who prescribes it. I have in mind the websites and instructional videos and countless other new-media documentation that are intended to help patients and their care-givers cope with a diagnosis of clinical depression. The content of these sources has recently become much contested, but

\(^2\) “That is the bad news. The good news is that we now have evidence-based psychological therapies that can lift at least a half of those affected out of their depression or their chronic fear.” (ibid., emphasis original)
there is a common core that can be found in the vast majority of them. So what do they say?

10. Here is a kind of prototype.
   - Clinical Depression is a disease of the brain.
   - It is a chemical imbalance in serotonin and dopamine in the nervous system.
   - It is different from just ‘feeling blue’.
   - It is like diabetes.
   - Its symptoms include … [insomnia or hypersomnia, chronic fatigue, loss of interest in daily activities, inability to concentrate, loss of appetite, loss of interest in sex, recurrent chronic thoughts of death, suicide ideation …].
   - Like diabetes it can be managed but not cured.
   - It is crucial to avoid the stigma of mental illness.

11. I have got a lot to say about these seven bullet points. But most of it has been said already. For my purposes here I just want to think about the ontology. What is the mode of being of depression, according to this standard accounting? Well the bullet points don’t address that question directly, but they seem to presuppose an answer. First and foremost, depression has the mode of being: disease. Already to describe depression in this way is to situate it in a whole array of further concepts and practices. If it is a disease then it must have symptoms and causes; in order to deal with it one goes to medical experts at their clinics; there is some healthy state to which it is contrasted, etc. But I think that the last bullet point is also crucial in fixing the ontology. There is an alternative to the medico-pathological ontology of depression. What is the alternative? We could stigmatize it. It could engender shame, as Lord Layard et. al. warn. We could see it as some kind of moral failing. But no one should be ashamed to their diabetes, and similarly no one should be stigmatized for their mental illness. Depression is not a moral reality but a medical one.

12. Now melancholy is not depression. Let me be clear about that. One would badly misunderstand both if one simply equated them. And indeed, I hope to show, melancholy could not be depression, since the two notions belong to quite different ontological types – perhaps indeed to different ontological epochs. Nonetheless, one could spend some intriguing time cataloging the similarities …  

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3 This by itself is not so much an answer as it is a marker for a further line of investigation. What is the mode of being of disease? Foucault’s Birth of the Clinic.

4 The place to start in such a comparison would be to find some of the ancient catalogues of symptoms of melancholia. Panofsky offers a number of rich leads in this connection. Those ancient catalogues vary quite
13. But I am not going to do that here. Because I don’t want to talk further about depression now. It’s too depressing. Officially, I brought it up only to show one way in which one can get a glimpse of the kind of ontological question I have in mind, and one way in which one might approach an answer. In that Prozac pamphlet we find an explicit manifestation of an elaborate implicit account of what depression is. It is an understanding of the being of depression that is also implicit in the way in which we deal with depression – how we think about it, how we conduct research into it, what kind of public policy we adopt towards it, how we treat it (both in the narrow medical sense of ‘treat’ and in the broader sense which might be translated into “sich verhalten zur”). So if you want to know what kind of being depression has, one strategy is to tease it out of those practices and the text that accompanies them.

14. OK, that was all by way of set up. Let’s get to the matter at hand. I didn’t mention my fourth methodological maxim, but now I’ll show it. I propose to organize my investigation around visual representations. So below are a pair of artworks to get us started. The oil painting on the left is by Domenico Fetti (sometimes spelled ‘Feti’). It is in the Louvre. The work on the right is by Castiglione. It is an etching, and there seem to be several variants. This one is currently in storage in the Prints and Drawings room in the British Museum.

15. We need to proceed carefully now. It is very easy to start saying more than one knows -- to exercise one’s prejudices in considering these sorts of works. I know that there is an official excuse for the use of prejudices [Vorurteile] in hermeneutic investigations of this sort, and I don’t mean to suggest that we could avoid them altogether. But the kind of work that I want to do here imposes special demands. I want to think about these works across a considerable chronological and ontological distance. And I very much want to know what these painters were seeing and showing – I don’t just want to read my modern understanding back into their work. That, after all, is the whole point of Alternate History: to learn something that we didn’t know already.

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broadly, but there are points where the symptom lists coincide quite closely with the modern symptoms for clinical depression.

5 Actually, what is in the Louvre is a copy. (Dirty little secret about the Louvre: lots of copies!) There is another copy (or perhaps the original?), with some variation, in the Gallerie dell’Accademia, Venice.

6 Neither work is dated. Blunt estimates the date of Castiglione’s print as 1648. Blunt A. The Drawings of G. B. Castiglione and Stefano della Bella, in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen at Windsor Castle (London, 1954). The Louvre dates Fetti’s painting in the range 1618-1623.
16. So let’s start with what facts we can find. Both Fetti and Castiglione are 17th century Italians. According to my copy of the *Oxford Companion to Western Art*, their dates are as follows: Domenico Fetti, 1588/9-1623; Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione, 1609-1664. They are standardly described as part of the Italian Baroque. From the dates we can see that there is a bit of overlap, but not much. Castiglione was about fourteen when Fetti died. And yet it should also be clear that there is considerable proximity in their works. We find in both cases a similar scene. How should we describe it? A solitary figure sits or kneels, hand-to-head, face downcast. Immediately before each figure is a skull. They are in a scene of decay (crumbling walls), surrounded by a common collection of objects: books, artistic equipment (a palette and brushes, tied in a cloth), a tethered dog, a large sphere, etc. We also see in each case a set of technical instruments: a square ruler (?), compass, a celestial globe (I’ve seen it variously described as a “spherical astrolabe” or an “Armillary Sphere”). There are differences, to be sure, of which more below. But this should be enough to show that we have here two workings of a common theme.

17. I think that there is enough evidence out there to show that there was in fact a fairly distinct group (or tradition) of painters of the Italian Baroque – stretching through most of the 17th century – interested in the painterly representation of scenes
of this sort. The most important third member of this tradition is Salvator Rosa (1615-1673), a close contemporary of Castiglione’s and a notorious figure in his time. There is also a recently-much-celebrated woman painter, Ambrosia Gentileschi (1593-1652/3), as well as the short-lived but intriguing Giovanni Serodine (1600-1630). I am sure that there are others as well – works known to each other, borrowing themes from one another’s work, in some cases definitely known to one another personally, sharing a common debt to the representational innovations associated with Caravaggio. So let’s treat the two works above as visible tips of a larger whole. I include below a couple of further examples of works from the representational tradition I am concerned with. These are not as tightly interconnected as the first two, but show something of the wider tradition. The first is by Serodine, the latter is Rosa’s self-portrait, which hangs in the Met.

18. But set aside the larger whole for now in order to focus on the tip. One thing that is particularly notable here for me is the motto on Castiglione’s print: *Ubi Inletabilitas Ibi Virtus.* “Where [there is] *inletabilitas* there [is] virtue.” If we read Castiglione’s etching in light of its motto, and if we read Fetti’s painting retrospectively in light of Castiglione’s, then we might allow ourselves to describe the two works as representations of *inletabilitas*. So what exactly is that?

19. Here we come to a first dead end. There is a special term in philology for a word of which there is only one known occurrence: *hapax legomenon.* As far as I have been able to tell, *inletabilitas* is a *hapax legomenon*. It is not in any of the Latin dictionaries that I have consulted. If you do a search on Google books or Google

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7 This last claim – about Caravaggio – is one that I have seen in some art historical sources. I don’t yet know what it means, exactly, but record it here for further investigation.

8 Thanks to David McNeill for teaching me this bit of jargon, and for a lot of other help on matters philological.
scholar you will find a couple of dozen hits, but all of them track back immediately to Castiglione’s print. This fact has not made curators and art historians shy about proposing (rival) translations of it. Some say that *inletabilitas* means melancholy. Others associate it specifically with grief or grieving: “where there is grief, there is virtue.” In her Castiglione catalog, Ann Percy follows a suggestion from Richard Bernheimer, who reads *inletabilitas* as a non-standard spelling of *inlaetabilitas*, which is in turn formed from *inlaetabilis* – an adjective that, when applied to persons, means gloomy or cheerless. Hence Percy’s depressing translation: “virtue lies where there is imperviousness to joy”. But none of these translations are actually supported by any evidence, so it seems best to say that we don’t really know what *inletabilitas* means. At least I don’t know. If we reject Bernheimer’s hypothesis about the misspelling, then the Latin root would seem to be *letum* (n., death) rather than *laetus* (adj., glad, joyful). That would fit with the morbid themes in both works. But what about death is being explored here? And how exactly is this deathly theme connected to virtue?

20. I have yet to find any direct and respectable methods for answering these questions. So I propose to resort to indirect and disreputable methods instead. (Welcome to my hermeneutic house of cards.) In the motto on Castiglione’s print we find a thought taken out of its theoretical context. In order to make any sense it must be sustained by a conception of virtue (broadly speaking, an ethical theory), by an understanding of *inletabilitas* (whatever that is), and ultimately (so say I) by an ontology of the human condition – an understanding of the being of man. I don’t know what that sustaining context was, exactly. But we might go some way towards identifying it if we can uncover the context that sustains the images themselves. In short: what is the representational tradition in which these figures (in these poses and with these accompanying objects) made sense to the viewers for whom they were originally intended – or indeed for the artists themselves? It is mainly this strategy that I want to pursue in what follows. If we can contextualize the images in this way, then perhaps we will be able to contextualize the motto as well. So what I now want to argue is that there is indeed quite a rich and complex sustaining context for these

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9 See for instance Richard Wallace, *Art Bulletin* 50:1 (1968), 23: “Where there is melancholy, there also is virtue.”

10 This is the translation proposed by Saxl, Panofsky and Klibansky in their magisterial work, *Saturn and Melancholy*, p. 390. It is followed, for instance, by Victor Coelho in *Music and Science in the Age of Galileo* (Springer, 1992), 113.

11 I have yet to trace the source for Bernheimer’s original suggestion. I expect that it is found in the text accompanying a reproduction of the print in *Art in Italy*, which seems to be an old exhibition catalog from the Detroit Institute of Arts. For Percy’s translation, see Percy, Ann, *Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione: Master Draughtsman of the Italian Baroque* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1971), 35. Bridget Gellert Lyons adopts an interpretation similar to Percy’s, claiming that the condition on virtue is “the melancholic’s incapacity for being cheered up.” See her *Voices of Melancholy: Studies in Literary Treatments of Melancholy* (Routledge, 1971), 104.
representations of *inletabilitas*. Indeed I think that we can distinguish three of them: one specifically Christian, one pagan and astrological, and one that we might call philosophico-psychiatric. At the time of Fetti and Castiglione, all three of these traditions were undergoing significant modifications. For now I propose to consider each of these representational traditions in turn. But ultimately we will need to think about the distinctive cocktail that results if one mixes them.

21. To make a start on this we can begin with a bit of cataloging history. Nowadays, at the Louvre, Fetti’s painting is listed under the title, *La Mélancolie*, but when it was originally acquired in 1685 it was catalogued under the title *La Madeleine pénitente*. “The Penitent Madeleine” is a long-established mode of representation of Mary Magdalene, the Christian saint, described in the New Testament as an intimate friend of Christ. So from very early on, it seems, and for quite a long time thereafter, Fetti’s figure showed up as a saint.

22. In order to make sense of this we need some iconographic history. In Medieval icons and statuary, the saints and apostles were identified with reference to certain standard attributes – objects or poses or bodily features closely associated with the stories of their lives. In this Medieval tradition, Mary Magdalene was standardly identified by two attributes: an (alabaster) jar, and extravagant hair. The two attributes derive from a story from the New Testament. Someone named Mary, described by Luke as “a notorious sinner,” is depicted as bathing the feet of Christ with her tears, wiping them with her hair, and anointing them with perfumed oil from an alabaster jar. (See Luke 7:37-38, John 11:2, 12:3.) A seventh century papal sermon pronounced this Mary to be the same as Mary Magdalene (though the identity claim was later disputed). Accordingly, Medieval iconographic representations of Mary Magdalene characteristically portray her as a penitent, eyes raised in prayer seeking forgiveness for her sinful life, either holding or accompanied by a jar. I need to find some good hi-res exemplars of this tradition, but here are a few placeholders for now, along with a well-known Renaissance example (Titian, 1530) from the same representational tradition:
23. But by the time of Fetti and Castiglione (and 17th century catalogists in Paris), something quite different was underway. A new mode of representation of Mary Magdelenene appears and increasingly predominates. First, representations of Mary in scenes from the New Testament (at the Cross, at the tomb, bathing Christ’s feet) came to be supplemented by scenes from widely circulated stories about her life after the events reported in the Gospels. According to one fanciful but nonetheless influential story, Mary Magdalenene was set adrift in a rudderless boat with no sails or oars, and eventually washed ashore in the South of France. There she converted the population of Provence to Christianity, and then lived most of the remainder of her life in a solitary grotto, living a life of contemplation (she is often named as the patron saint of the contemplative life) and doing penance for her sins.

24. In sixteenth century representations of Mary we thus begin to see a number of characteristic changes. Increasingly, Mary is now represented as a solitary figure in her grotto. Her upward-looking, penitential posture gives way to a downward looking pose, sometimes with hand on cheek or chin. And in a number of works of this period she had acquired a pair of new attributes: alongside her jar of oil we now find a skull and book. Below are some examples from El Greco, Da Vinci, Seracini, Gentileschi, and the School of Bruegel the Elder (detail) respectively. The penitent Mary Magdelene has become the Maudlin Mary.

25. So we can now see why and how Fetti’s inletabilitas painting might indeed have been catalogued initially as a Mary Magdelene. It shows a female figure, alone in a
desolate setting, head downcast, accompanied by what had become Mary Magdelene attributes: a skull, a book, a jar. Her pose of melancholy – if indeed that is what it is – connects the figure to the then-predominant pose associated with ‘Madeleine’.

26. Before leaving Mary it is perhaps worth mentioning two other, somewhat less pervasive 17th century attributes associated with her. There is, first of all, a tradition of representing her playing the lute – an instrument that figures in Castiglione’s print. There is also a tradition of representing her with a skull and mirror, as in Georges de la Tour’s famous rendering (mid 17th century, known to philosophers nowadays from the cover of Nagel’s *Mortal Questions*). The mirror is sometimes said to be a symbol of vanity – one of the sins over which Mary is perhaps penitent. But of course the mirror is also a well-established symbol of reflection, contemplation and … self-consciousness.12

27. So that is one representational context relevant to (at least the reception of) Fetti and Castiglione – the 17th century representation of a Christian Saint. Turn now to a second context. The figure in this case is the Roman god Saturn. For now, let me illustrate the genre with a single, late 16th century print, this one due to Zacharias Dolendo, following a design by Jacques (Jacob) de Gheyns the Younger.13 Saturn sits on one large sphere while holding a smaller, very dark one, which he seems to be measuring with the compass he holds in his right hand. In the background we can see a mountainous terrain. Saturn’s pose and demeanor seems to be one of dejection or melancholy, head resting wearily on hand. The motto reads: “*Atra, animaeque animique lues aterrima, bilis Saepe premit vires ingenii et genii.*” I don’t yet have a good translation of that motto (Help!), but we can straight away recognize one part of it: “*Atra*” means black; “*bilis*” bile. In English, “atrabilousness” is the Latinate equivalent of our Greek-derived term “melancholy.” And indeed De Gheyn’s design for Saturn originally derived from a series of four prints illustrating the four humoural temperaments.

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13 Zacharias Dolendo after Jacques de Gheyn II, *Saturn as Melancholy* (1595-96); Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum.
28. I don’t know nearly as much about this as I would like to know. But allow me here to simply offer a few observations and make a few dogmatic claims that would need in due course to be supported by evidence. We can note, first of all, that the work here (which is in this respect representative of a much larger genre) links the figure of Saturn both to melancholy (both the humour and the temperament associated with it) and to the activity and equipment of mathematics and science.

29. But what kind of science, exactly? The sphere and compass have long been used as attributes for the mathematical sciences, and geometry in particular. But here the measurement of the sphere is explicitly tied up with astronomical measurements. For the smaller sphere (the one Saturn holds) is a celestial globe, upon which Saturn takes his measurements; the band which encircles it is the zodiac, marking the astrological signs. So we have here a mix of themes that were themselves closely woven together in 16th and 17th century thought: the figure of Saturn, the activity of scientific measurement, astrology, and melancholy. The elements of this mix have a long and rich history. Saturn (the god) had long been portrayed as a dark and brooding figure; Saturn (the planet) was associated in astrology with brooding contemplation, but also with scientific and artistic productivity. To be born with a horoscope in which Saturn was ascendent was long thought to produce a melancholy temperament. A particularly important accounting of all this can be found in Ficino’s fascinating book *On Life (de Vita, 1487)*, which elaborated an enormously influential theory of melancholy, composed in the context of a kind of astro-medical health manual for students and scholars.

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14 *The* authoritative discussion of this is of course Saxl, Panofsky and Klibansky, *Saturn and Melancholy*, cited above. I am ready to bet that this is the most-cited out-of-print book of the 20th century. When I last searched the online booksellers there were no copies, new or used, available for sale anywhere at any price. It took me months just to get a copy through interlibrary loan.
organized around the question of how scholars should manage (and exploit) their distinctive occupational hazard: an excess of black bile.\(^{15}\)

30. As you can see, there is a lot more work to be done on this point. But while some of what is to be learned here is quite abstruse history of astrology, there are two points that immediately matter for me. I don’t know yet how to defend them properly, so allow me simply to report (purport?) them. First, to a certain kind of audience in the 17\(^{th}\) century, the connection between Saturn and melancholia probably bordered on a kind of folk psychological common sense. Nowadays you and I might have various generic preconceptions about the psychology of, say, a middle child; in the 16\(^{th}\) and 17\(^{th}\) century there was an analogous common sense about someone with a Saturn-dominant horoscope. They could be expected to be brooding, contemplative, lovers of night-time and solitude, perhaps morbid -- but also capable of extraordinary achievements in the fine and liberal arts and science (though not, like a Jupiter-dominant character, in politics or the practical arts.) Secondly, in their day, the attributes we see in the de Gheyn design, particularly when put alongside a brooding figure, were quite explicit attributes of the melancholic personality (or of the personification of melancholy). And of course we see these attributes -- compass and sphere (along with other measuring devices) -- in both of our \textit{inletabilitas} works, alongside an object (the spherical astrolabe) that was itself a tool both for the study of the positions of the stars and planets and for a task that was inextricably tied thereto: the calculation of horoscopes. In the context of this representational tradition, then, the figures in Castiglione’s and Fetti’s prints can well be described as “saturnine types.”

31. Already with these last comments we are edging toward the third contextualizing representational tradition that I want to consider – the one I propose to call philosophico-psychiatric. In our own time, the study of astronomy, astrology, physiology, theology, geometry … -- these are all sharply distinguished fields of study. But in the time of Fetti and Castiglione, these various fields of study formed one intricate whole. And that whole was itself inextricably tied up with what we might as well call \textit{psychiatry}. If you or your loved one is suffering from some kind of mood disorder, if you find you just can’t get yourself out of bed in the morning, if you suffer from insomnia or hypersomnia or ‘suicide ideation’, then the first thing to do is

to calculate the proportions of your bodily humours. And what is the chief instrument for doing that? A spherical astrolabe or Armillary Sphere, together with the tools and theorems used in geo-astronomical calculation.

32. So far we have looked at representations of gods and saints; the final representational tradition to consider pertains specifically to philosophers. We can start with Raphael’s famous and familiar School of Athens (c. 1509) – now endlessly reproduced as the banner on philosophy department websites. Raphael shows us a large gathering of figures – more than fifty in all -- standing together on the portico of a vast hallway. Many of the figures are identifiable, most notably the central figures of Plato and Aristotle – the former pointing up and the latter down. Alexander the Great is recognizable by his sword and helmet. A number of the other figures have recognizable symbolic significance: a group of mathematicians crouch around a slate debating figures; a group of astronomers hold a pair of celestial spheres. In the extensive art historical literature on the School one can find identifications of many of the figures. The one instructing the mathematicians is said to be Euclid; the one with the large celestial globe is Ptolemy. Other identifiable figures include Socrates, Parmenides, Anaximander, Pythagoras, Zeno, Epicurus, … -- alongside a number of lesser known figures as well. The fresco also notoriously includes figures who were not Athenians at all, including Hypatia of Alexandria, Averroës (who did not live until the 12th Century A.D.) and Raphael himself. A number of the figures were modelled on Raphael’s own contemporaries (most notably the presentation of Plato in
the form of da Vinci), thereby subtly marking the Renaissance claim to an intellectual and cultural standing equivalent to the Ancients.

33. Of all the figures in Raphael’s fresco, however, the one that matters for my purpose is a solitary figure in the foreground. Most of Raphael’s figures are shown in groups, often in heated discussion. But there are two prominent exceptions. One is the Cynic, Diogenes, lounging barely dressed on the steps of the portico – a reference to his notorious indifference to the proprieties of society. The second solitary figure sits at a block of marble at the foot of the steps, pen in hand, but looking away from what he has written. His eyes are downcast; his face is mainly in shadow; his head rests on his hand; he has a dark complexion. Among the philosophers of Athens, it seems, there is at least one melancholiac. According to the sources, the solitary figure is Heraclitus, presented in the guise of Raphael’s contemporary, Michelangelo.

34. But now The School of Athens is High Renaissance – c. 1509. By the time we get to the 17th century, significant changes were underway. Both in literary and in visual sources we find a well-established tradition of the representation of a melancholy Greek philosopher. But where Raphael had set his melancholiac in the company of others, the seventeenth century melancholy philosopher is shown in a lonely isolated place. Where Raphael’s philosopher is surrounded by other human beings, the 17th
century melancholiac is surrounded by animals (and/or their carcasses). But the most important change concerns the identity of the philosopher in question. Whereas in Raphael’s *School* it was Heraclitus who is shown as the melancholiac (at least if we are to trust the sources), by the time we get to the 17th century the melancholiac is Democritus. Here is an example from circle I have been examining: Salvator Rosa’s painting of *Democritus in Meditation*.  

35. Rather than tackling Rosa’s Democritus directly, it will help to advert briefly to an unusual 17th century English source: Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*. I don’t have any reason to think that Burton’s book was actually known to painters of the Italian Baroque, but for present purposes that doesn’t much matter. The key thing is that Burton provides an explicit explanation for the linking of Democritus and melancholy – an explanation that itself draws on sources that were certainly also known in Rome.  

36. *The Anatomy of Melancholy* is, to say the least, and idiosyncratic work. Burton himself lead quite a conventional academic life: he was an Oxford scholar, a distinguished fellow and librarian-for-life of Christchurch College. But his famous book has a kind of madcap quality, ranging at considerable length in a wildly unsystematic fashion over an enormous array of topics and modes of presentation. The book was first published in 1621, and then in many revised and continually rewritten editions throughout the balance of Burton’s life. My *abridged* edition runs to nearly 800 pages; a recent complete edition exceeds 1300! For my purposes here I am particularly interested in the editions from 1628 on; these editions carried an elaborate frontispiece, accompanied by an explanatory poem. But I haven’t yet mentioned the most important point. Burton’s eccentric project, his lifework on the problem of melancholy, was

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written under the penname ‘Democritus Junior’. To give a sense of the man and the work, we should include here the full title of his work:

THE ANATOMY OF MELANCHOLY: WHAT IT IS WITH ALL THE KINDS CAUSES SYMPTOMS PROGNOSTICS & SEVERAL CURES OF IT. IN THREE PARTITIONS WITH THEIR SEVERAL SECTIONS MEMBERS & SUBSECTIONS PHILOSOPHICALLY MEDICINALLY HISTORICALLY OPENED & CUT UP, BY DEMOCRITUS JUNIOR, WITH A SATIRICAL PREFACE CONDUCING TO THE FOLLOWING DISCOURSE.

37. So what is it, for Burton in 1621, that links melancholy with the figure of Democritus? I won’t try to provide a complete answer to this question, but will content myself with two clues from Burton’s text. The primary and most explicit clue comes from Burton’s ten-part frontispiece, together with the accompanying ten-stanza poem (in both Latin and English) provided to explain it. The first of the ten panels on the frontispiece shows Democritus. The first stanza of the accompanying poem (“The Argument of the Frontispiece”) explains it as follows:

Old Democritus under a tree,
Sits on a stone with book on knee;
About him hang there many features,
Of Cats, Dogs and such like creatures,
Of which he makes anatomy,
The Seat of black choler to see.
Over his head appears the sky,
And Saturn, Lord of Melancholy.

38. This first clue is elaborated in a pair of stories that Burton recounts in his 75-page opening epistle to the reader.17 I can’t possibly recount all the detail here, but confine myself to a summary of the essentials.

39. Burton’s first story concerns two gods: Charon is escorted by Mercury to a high place – “such a place where he might see all the world at once.” Mercury asks

17 “Democritus to the Reader”: this lengthy opening epistle is accompanied by a second, this one in verse (Latin and English) in which Burton addresses his own book. (“Go forth my book into the open day …”)
Charon what he makes of what he sees. The picture he reports offers is pretty discouraging. He compares men to hornets, always stinging one another, suffering from countless diseases, and constantly engaged in fighting over all manner of “toys and trifles, and such momentary things.” Charon concludes that men are mad: “‘O fools, O madmen!’, he exclaims, ‘mad endeavors, mad actions, mad, mad, mad … a giddy-headed age.’”

40. Burton’s second story follows seamlessly upon the first; in concerns two philosophers and a famous doctor. Heraclitus, undertaking a “serious meditation of men’s lives,” falls to weeping, “and with continuous tears bewailed [men’s] misery, madness, and folly.” But Democritus “burst out laughing, their whole life seemed to him so ridiculous.” The citizens of Democritus’ home town, Abdera, take him to be mad, and send for Hippocrates, the physician, “that he would use his skill upon him.” When Hippocrates arrives, a mass of townsfolk escort him out to where Democritus lives, in an isolated place outside of town. Here is Burton:

Hippocrates found Democritus in his garden in the suburbs, all alone, sitting upon a stone under a plane tree, without hose or shoes, with a book on his knees, cutting up several beasts, and busy at his study. …

Hippocrates, after a little pause, saluted him by his name, whom he resaluted, ashamed almost that he could not call him likewise by his, or that he had forgot it. Hippocrates demanded of him what he was doing: he told him that he was “busy in cutting up several beasts, to find out the cause of madness and melancholy.”

There follows an extraordinary exchange between Democritus and Hippocrates, one that I can only commend that you read for yourself. Among other things Democritus expands at length on the folly of men, the “vanities and fopperies of the time,” and the corresponding dearth of “virtuous actions.” At the conclusion Hippocrates emerges and tells the crowd that they were “very much deceived to think him mad.”

41. Burton’s particular telling of this story is his own, but in its essential details it is found in [pseudo-classical sources that were widely known in the 16th and 17th century. What matters immediately for our purposes are the three lines of connection that Burton establishes between Democritus and melancholy. One connection is psychological: Democritus was himself a melancholiac – a diagnosis hinted at among

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20 A full text online edition is found here: [http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/b/burton/robert/melancholy/complete.html](http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/b/burton/robert/melancholy/complete.html). To find this passage search for the string <see all the world at once>.
ancient historians and reiterated by Burton at the outset of his ‘satirical preface’. Burton:

Democritus … was a little wearish old man, very melancholy by nature, averse from company in his latter days, and much given to solitariness.21

A second is physiological: Democritus is credited with the discovery of the physiological source of black bile – or at least with the quest to discover it. The third connection is, well, psychiatric. Or perhaps we should say ethico-psychiatric. As a first approximation we might put the point as follows: Democritus’ physiological search for the source of black bile is itself driven by a psychiatric diagnosis: the vast majority of human beings are mad. Democritus seeks the source of their madness in the hope of redirecting them from vanities to virtue. **But these three lines of connection are themselves interconnected.** Burton strongly suggests that Democritus’ ethical, psychiatric, and physiological insights are themselves due in part to his own psychological condition. Is it precisely because of their melancholia that Heraclitus and Democritus are able recognize the ethico-psychiatric condition of mankind, and to respond to it in the distinctive ways that they do? Democritus lives a life apart, outside the city, in a solitary and contemplative form of life. But his circumstance is not one where he is cut off from the world. On the contrary, Burton’s story emphasizes his knowledge of the world, and in particularly the distinctive perspective from which he is able to “view the whole world at once.” It is from this perspective, and in the frame of mind associated with it, that Democritus achieves the insight for which Hippocrates and Burton give him credit. But for the ordinary citizens of Abdera, this perspective is very readily mistaken for madness. Burton:

> So corrupt is our judgment, we esteem wise and honest men fools. Which Democritus well signified …: the Abderites ‘account virtue madness,’ and so do most men living.22

42. I am coming to the end of my time, and also near the end of what I know. Before concluding, I do want to spend a few moments considering whether and how Burton’s stories would have been available to our painters of the Italian Baroque. I won’t go into too much detail about this (tempting a topic though it is), but it will be worth noting one or two details.

43. There are two sets of literary sources that are pertinent here, both of which are richly reflected in the painterly tradition. The first can be found in the short vignettes

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of Lucian, the ancient playwright whose works inspired many Renaissance artworks. Two short plays are particularly relevant for our purposes. In the acerbically ironic *Philosophies for Sale*, Lucian recounts a comic auction, in which Zeus tries to auction off some of his excess stock of philosophers. He never does manage to find any buyers. At one point the auctioneer brings out Heraclitus and Democritus, who are to be auctioned off in a single lot. But when the pair are brought to the auction block, one is weeping and the other laughing hysterically. Here is the crucial excerpt from the Buyer’s interview with Democritus:

**BUYER**

Zeus! What a contrast! One of them never stops laughing, and the other is apparently mourning a death, as he weeps incessantly. What is the matter, man? Why are you laughing?

**DEMOCRITIAN**

Dost thou need to ask? Because to me it seemeth that all your affairs are laughable, and yourselves as well.

**BUYER**

What, are you laughing at us all, and do you think nothing of our affairs?

**DEMOCRITIAN**

Even so; for there is nothing serious in them, but everything is a hollow mockery, drift of atoms, infinitude.

**BUYER**

No indeed, but you yourself are a hollow mockery in very truth and an infinite ass. Oh, what effrontery! Will you never stop laughing?

In this version from Lucian, then, to which can be traced a rich representational tradition of “the laughing and weeping philosophers”, the characteristic demeanor of Democritus is explicitly linked to his distinctive metaphysical vision – an infinite drift of atoms. One of the first Italians to take up this theme visually seems to have been Rosa, in an untitled sketch which shows a laughing (?) and a weeping figure standing either side of a sphere.23

44. Lucian is also Burton’s source for the story about Charon and Mercury. The remarkable short play, *Charon*, tells the story of the ferryman from the underworld, visiting the world of the living for the first time. He

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23 For a discussion, see Wallace (1968): *Art Bulletin* 50:1, [fill ref]
tells his friend Mercury that he must see this world of which he has heard so much, and which his customers in the underworld are all so sad to leave behind. In Lucian’s telling we once again find the emphasis on gaining a view of the whole world. After he has been convinced to show Charon around, Mercury asks where he would like to go, what he would like to see.

CHARON
You must do the best you can for me. I know nothing of the matter, being a stranger up here.

HERMES
The main thing [to men holon] is get to a high place, so that you can perceive everything.

Accordingly, the two proceed to build a tower of mountains (Pelion, Ossa, Oeta, Parnassus) from which they can gain the requisite view of the whole.

45. I cannot here undertake to recount the details of Lucian’s vision of what ensues. Suffice to say that the view from the top is by measures absurd and pathetic. Charon is particularly confused by the people digging deep holes in the earth. What are they looking for? Gold. Do they find it? No, mostly they die looking. And what do they do when they do find gold? They bury it in the ground for safe-keeping. It is just this sort of detail that sets Democritus to laughing; the whole human situation is just ridiculous.24

46. One final detail is worth mentioned before leaving Lucian. In the final line of Charon, as Mercury takes his leave and the mountains of Greece are put back into place, Charon thanks Mercury for his tour. The final lines of the vignette should be noted:

Charon:
I am much obliged to you, Hermes; the service shall be perpetuated in my records. Thanks to you, my outing has been a success. Dear, dear, what a world it is! --And never a word of Charon!

The madness of world, it seems – what Burton had called “the vanities and fopperies” of human endeavor – is linked by Lucian in a familiar trope to the absence of any thought given to human mortality.

47. The final source to mention here is a remarkable set of texts attributed to Hippocrates – apocryphal letters that probably date from the 1st century AD. A Latin translation of the Greek text was published in Rome in 1525 and was an immediate

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24 check to see where this gold story appears. The joke about the golden swords is in Lucian, I think. What about the digging?
success. Subsequent editions appeared in Paris (1544), Basel (1579) and Venice (1588). Letters 10-17 presents the story (told from Hippocrates’ point of view) that Burton recounts in his Anatomy.

48. Once again it should be clear that there is a marker here for further investigation. But rather than pursuing this path further here, I want to bring the discussion back to the artworks, and then see what conclusions – however fragile – we might hazard as a basis for further research.

49. What I want to propose, first of all, is that we find a third representational tradition for our Inletabilitas works in the 17th century representation of Democritus as melancholiac. In Castiglione’s print we find a figure, seated [on a stone?], under a tree in a lonely place in a pose of melancholy contemplation, accompanied by a dog and cat. As we have seen from Burton and from the pseudo-Hippocratic sources, this is a setting that that in 17th century was associated with Democritus at Abdera. In pose of the figure and in the accompanying objects we find what had become the standard attributes for melancholy, a condition that was closely associated with the figure of Democritus.

50. I am keenly aware of that this evidence is as yet rather circumstantial. Once again, however, the most interesting evidence comes from the contemporary reception. Whether or not Castiglione intended his figure as a reference to Democritus, it seems to have been seen as such by the peers in his own circle. For when Rosa comes to portray Democritus under his tree, he borrows his compositional format and elements of his technique from Castiglione’s print. The loan is clearest not in Rosa’s painting (above) but in the associated print. Here is Castiglione’s Inletabilitas and Rosa’s Democritus side by side:

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It is worth noting that Rosa’s print also has a motto: *Democritus omnium derisor in omnium fine defigitur*: “Democritus, the mocker of all things, is stopped by the end of all things”.

51. This is the point in the proceedings where one might well be expecting some conclusions. What is the ontology of melancholy? Is it a form of self-consciousness? What is *inletabilitas* and how exactly is it related to virtue? At this point, I fear, I am not ready to answer any of these questions. So in place of a proper conclusion, perhaps we might switch briefly from the art historical to the phenomenological mode. Consider someone in the throes of what Lord Layard would describe as a clinical depression. One of the familiar manifestations of severe depression is a debilitating incapacity to engage in the ordinary practical affairs of everyday life. It is common for severely depressed patients to report that they simply cannot find the will to get themselves out of bed in the morning.

52. What is the phenomenology of such a circumstance? I’m not at all sure how best to answer that question. But if one tried to sum up such an experience in a proposition … , if the patient could back away from their abyss far enough to be able to undertake a phenomenological description … , what would their proposition be? Suppose, perhaps, that it is something along these lines:

> Do you know what? *None of this stuff* is worth doing. Indeed, perhaps *nothing* is worth doing. All the things that people invest

28 This is Wallace’s translation. What does “defigitur” mean?
themselves it, work for, fight for, get out of bed for …, the digging for 
gold, the burying of it back in the ground … . None of it is worth 
pursuing.  

Now in the ontological milieu in which Clinical Depression finds its place, these sorts of thoughts are a symptom of disorder, of illness, of something which requires treatment. It is not my purpose here to challenge that diagnosis. The sadness and suffering that such thoughts express certainly can be incapacitating. But perhaps with some imagination we can work ourselves around to a different sort of ontological milieu, one in which that sad suffering thought expresses a certain kind of fundamental ethical truth. Certainly we are heir to a range of ethical traditions which are committed to something like this thought. In Stoicism, for instance, and in many forms of Christianity, one finds the insistent claim that the things for which men typically strive and struggle are in fact not worth struggling for. But in those traditions this despairing thought is typically balanced by another. These things are not worth pursuing, but something else is: a life of right action, perhaps, or a future life with God. But the purest, most extreme form of depressive despair would renounce even this balancing condolence or hope. “What difference does it make whether one lives well or ill? And why would I hope for immortal life? Wouldn’t that just be infinitely more of the same?” In its most abject form, the scope of the depressive thought would be wholly unrestricted. Nothing whatsoever is worth pursuing. Could it be, could it possibly be, that in this unrestricted thought there is some internal connection to virtue?  

53. Surely not. Surely the unrestricted depressive thought is just a straightforward error. Some things are worth doing. Human affairs may very often be misguided; Democritus was right to find them laughably absurd. But the examples in his diatribe are unfairly one-sided, over-emphasizing the vain and the pointless and the absurd. Where in his tale are the balancing accounts of human kindness, human inventiveness, human justice, human pleasure and beauty? Why, when he reports from his mountain top view, does Charon say nothing of the happiness associated with, say, an exchange of wedding rings, made from gold dug out of the ground by some brave and unrelenting prospector? If the voice of the depressive says that nothing is worthwhile then his vision is an ethical danger, and the imbalance in his humours or neuro-chemicals is a disorder worth rectifying. And indeed there is a large body of research to show that he is likely, in his exit survey, to express gratitude for the help he received in escaping his condition of psychic distress and ethical delusion.  

\footnote{Taylor Carman has suggested to me a pithier version of this thought: \textit{Nothing matters}. (Now there is a sentence worth analyzing! \( \forall x [\neg Mx] \)? )}
54. I am not sure what more I can say. To be quite frank, I am afraid to say more. But somehow, in Democritean *inletabilitas*, there is a further elusive thought to be had. In the thought of the whole, from the perspective from which one faces the world as a totality, in a circumstance, in these artworks, which is intimately tied up with a confrontation with the death of an Other, the melancholic thought is *not* a disorder, but an insight tied up somehow with virtue.