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Dr. George Cheyne, Chevalier Ramsay, and Hume's Letter to a Physician

JOHN P. WRIGHT

The publication of a new intellectual biography of George Cheyne¹ provides a “propitious” occasion for “a thoroughly skeptical review”² of the question which has long exercised Hume scholars, whether Cheyne was the intended recipient of David Hume’s fascinating pre-*Treatise* Letter to a Physician,³ the letter which describes his own hypochondriacal physical and mental symptoms and gives an account of his early philosophical development.⁴ Hume’s nineteenth-century biographer, John Hill Burton, argued that Hume was probably writing to Cheyne,⁵ while Ernest Mossner claimed to definitively refute that hypothesis in an article entitled “Hume’s Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot,” published in 1944.⁶ Anita Guerrini’s intellectual biography does not discuss Cheyne as a possible recipient of Hume’s letter, but she does present a well-rounded picture of this interesting eighteenth-century physician from which we can judge his appropriateness as its addressee. In the following discussion I will make use of the biographical material found in this new biography of Cheyne, as well as other sources, to show that Mossner’s arguments are less than definitive, and that it would be wrong to dismiss the possibility that the letter was sent to George Cheyne.⁷ This is a possibility that, for reasons that I will make clear, makes good biographical and philosophical sense. At the same time, it is important to keep a proper suspense of judgment as Burton did, for the evidence that the letter was either intended for or actually sent to Cheyne is not definitive.

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Burton, who first published the autobiographical letter of the 22-year-old Hume in 1846, narrowed down the possible addressees of Hume's letter to either Cheyne or John Arbuthnot. He also pointed out that it is possible that the letter was never sent, and that the ten and a half page manuscript is only a neatly written draft, rather than a fair copy of an actual letter. Nevertheless, Burton thought he could identify the unnamed addressee on the basis of the internal evidence of the manuscript and the records of Scottish physicians practicing in England at the time. In the letter, Hume refers to the intended recipient as his "Countryman, a Scotchman [,] . . . a skilful Physician, a man of Letters, of Wit, of Good Sense, & of great Humanity."⁸ Further he writes that he is consulting him because he is a person "of great Learning beyond [his] . . . own Profession" who is acquainted with the "Motions of the Mind" he has described in his letter, and that "Fame pointed [him] . . . out as the properest person to resolve my Doubts . . ." about the cure of his disorder.⁹ Burton tells us that "the first name that suggested itself . . . was Arbuthnot, whose fine genius was just then flickering in the socket."¹⁰ (John Arbuthnot had been ill for some time, and died a year later.) But he then added that "a more full consideration showed to my satisfaction that it must have been destined for Dr. George Cheyne." His main reason for settling on Cheyne was that Cheyne's immensely popular *The English Malady* (1733) had recently been published, and that "there is a certain unison of tone between Hume's letter and this book." Burton quotes a portion of Cheyne's own long autobiographical account of his own disease in *The English Malady*. Cheyne's autobiography begins with the claim that "I passed my *Youth* in close study, and almost constant Application to the *abstracted Sciences*, (wherein my chief pleasure consisted) and consequently in great *Temperance* and a *Sedentary Life*"; it is followed by the reflection that any overindulgence in food or drink led to physical and psychological problems.¹¹ He goes on to describe these in great detail for 39 pages, along with a history of his life. Burton also quotes a section of the book in which Cheyne describes how a studious and sedentary life causes the symptoms he is describing. He begins by stressing that "the Works of *Imagination* and *Memory*, of *Study*, *Thinking*, and *Reflecting*, from whatever Source the Principle on which they depend springs, must necessarily require bodily Organs"¹² and then goes on to point out that "since this present Age has made Efforts to go beyond former Times, in all the Arts of *Ingenuity*, *Invention*, *Study*, *Learning* and all the contemplative and sedentary Professions . . . the Organs of these Faculties being thereby worn and spoil'd, must affect and deaden the whole *System*, and lay a Foundation for the Diseases of *Lowness* and *Weakness*."¹³ (Hume writes in his letter that "'tis a Weakness rather than a Lowness of Spirits which troubles me."¹⁴) Since

Hume's whole letter is focused on a description of how his intense studies for the last five years have broken his own health, Burton concluded that this, along with fact that he fits all the personal characteristics described by Hume, renders "the conjecture probable" that Cheyne was the intended recipient of the letter.¹⁵

In his claim to definitively refute Burton's favored hypothesis, Mossner put forward three arguments. There are, he declares, "three separate disqualifications, any one of which would have sufficed in itself" to show that "Hume's physician was not Dr. Cheyne."¹⁶ In the first place, he argues that Hume clearly assumes that the addressee of the letter is in London, and that he would have had good evidence from *The English Malady* itself that Cheyne's practice was in Bath. Secondly, Cheyne was a proponent of a hypothetical system of medical philosophy, which Hume would have opposed on philosophical grounds. Finally, Mossner dismisses Cheyne on grounds of his religious beliefs: Cheyne, he says, "has frequently been termed mystical and fanatical" (145). Summarizing his arguments in *The Life of David Hume*, Mossner says that Cheyne is "definitely disqualified . . . because he was no longer practising medicine in London and . . . because he would almost certainly have taken offense at Hume's remarks on philosophy and religion."¹⁷

Let us begin with Mossner's point that the young Hume would not have written Cheyne because the latter would have taken offence at Hume's views on religion. What are the remarks about religion in the letter at which Cheyne was supposed to take so much offense? Hume writes:

I have notic'd in the Writings of the French Mysticks, & in those of our Fanaticks here, that, when they give a History of the Situation of their Souls, they mention a Coldness & Desertion of the Spirit, which frequently returns, & some of them, at the beginning, have been tormented with it many years. As this kind of Devotion depends entirely on the Force of Passion, & consequently of the Animal Spirits, I have often thought that their Case & Mine were pretty parrallel, & that their rapturous Admirations might discompose the Fabric of the Nerves & Brain, as much as profound Reflections, & that warmth and Enthusiasm which is inseparable from them. (HL 1: 17)

It is not easy to see what Cheyne would have found to take issue with in these remarks. Would it not be natural for a patient to write him about his major interest, the relation between the state of the mind and that of the body, whether or not the mental state were connected with religious exercises or, as in Hume's case, with abstract philosophical reflections? Hume goes on to

point out that he himself has not “come out the Cloud so well as [the mystics] commonly tell us they have done” and that he is worried about whether he will ever recover. This would seem to be a rather good question to address to a physician who wrote about the affliction from which Hume suffered. Possibly the linking of mystics and fanatics would have offended Cheyne. But why would anyone think that Hume would have been concerned about offending people’s religious sensitivities, especially in 1734, long before experience had shown him how his lack of concern about these sensitivities could backfire on himself? Ten years later in 1744, after being asked to comment on William Leechman’s *On the Nature, Reasonableness, and Advantages of Prayer, . . . A sermon*, Hume can’t resist the joke of calling him a “rank Atheist.”¹⁸ He implied something similar, though in a much more polite way, when he wrote to Francis Hutcheson in 1739.¹⁹

Mysticism was a topic which interested Hume both at the time he wrote the Letter to a Physician and later, as did many other religious phenomena. We have no evidence as to what precise books of mystics Hume was referring to in the letter. His observation, quoted in the last paragraph, clearly relates to what mystics call ‘the dark night of the soul.’²⁰ As we have seen, Hume says they write of frequently experiencing a “Coldness and Desertion of the Spirit” and that such an experience sometimes lasts many years. Mme. Guyon, the French mystic who was at the center of the movement to which Cheyne and his friend Alan Michael Ramsay belonged,²¹ writes of a period of seven years in which she finds herself in a “state of deprivation of all support, whether exterior or interior.”²² In this condition she finds herself “weak and . . . powerless” (p. 183). Hume later thought profoundly about the psychology of the mystical preoccupation with the ‘love of God’, and was willing to allow that through the association of ideas mystics may become convinced of the genuineness of such a feeling.²³ In the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, “mysticism” is characterized by Philo as the theory that asserts “the absolute incomprehensibility of the divine nature.”²⁴ Cleanthes accuses Demea of being a *mystic* (“[H]ow do you MYSTICS . . . differ from sceptics or atheists . . . ?”), and Demea in turn counters by calling him an “*anthropomorphite*” (158ff.).

It is true that while Hume regarded mystical religion to be a cause of the symptoms of hypochondria, Cheyne wrote about it in *The English Malady* as a cure. Although the late Roy Porter considered *The English Malady* to be Cheyne’s “most secular book,”²⁵ he also noted that “religious meditations afforded [Cheyne] fortitude” at the same time as “medicines strengthened his body” (xxxix). Guerrini also argues that Cheyne regarded the adoption of a spiritual regimen based on his study of mystical writings as a major part

of his own cure.²⁶ At the same time she points out that he was aware of the extensive literature on “religious melancholy” which suggested the opposite.²⁷ Moreover, she stresses that, in spite of his influence on John and Charles Wesley, founders of Methodism, Cheyne himself was wary of any kind of religious enthusiasm or fanaticism (161).

Mossner claimed that an influential earlier book of Cheyne, his *Philosophical Principles of Religion Natural and Revealed*, “has frequently been termed mystical and fanatical and is, to say the least, a religious, philosophical, mathematical curiosity” (145). He does not cite his sources, or try to substantiate this claim by reference to the book. In her biography of Cheyne, Guerrini argues that “despite its extensive borrowings from other authors, the *Philosophical Principles* was a strikingly original work” which showed that Cheyne “understood very well many . . . implications of Newton’s work” (78). Early critics of the 1705 first edition of Cheyne’s book had complained that his account was mainly derivative, based on the natural religion of Bentley’s Boyle lectures (79). However, Guerrini points out that “Cheyne was the first of the self-proclaimed Newtonians to provide an account of short-range attractions,” an account which became central for the Newtonian theory of chemical attraction over the next half century. Hume himself may have drawn on Cheyne’s account of natural religion in the *Philosophical Principles* in formulating his discussion of the argument from design in Part II of his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. Cleanthes echoes Cheyne’s claim that by ‘nature’ he understands “this vast, if not infinite, *Machine* of the *Universe* . . . consisting of an infinite Number of lesser *Machines*”;²⁸ and Cheyne’s claim that analogy provides a secure basis from an inference from part to whole could have provided a basis for Philo’s subsequent criticisms of the argument.²⁹

The revised second edition of Cheyne’s work contained significant mystical reflections. The book had been originally published under the title *Philosophical Principles of Natural Religion* in 1705, but a new edition was published under the title *Philosophical Principles of Religion, Natural and Revealed* in 1715 when the deist controversy was raging and it was necessary to rewrite the book to avoid the charge of Deism. Cheyne’s own physical and spiritual crisis at this time, extensively discussed by Guerrini, made it natural for him to do so in any case. As a result, the book was issued with the revised title, and he stressed on the limits of natural knowledge in establishing religious principles (*Obedience and Depression*, 85–6). Cheyne now revived Newton’s own earlier neo-Platonic views on the “continuum between matter and spirit” (87). His interest in mysticism entered the argument when, in interpreting Newton’s Rules of Method, he argued that “analogy . . . governed the actions of both the universe and the soul, for gravity and the love of God were aspects of the

same ‘great and universal Principle.’” But we need to consider whether Cheyne’s analogy between universal attraction and mystical dependence on the love of God really is as much an anomaly as Mossner suggests. It was the human dependence on the love of God, which above all characterized the quietism of Cheyne, Ramsay, and their Scottish Episcopalian friends. We shall return to the question of whether there is any evidence that Hume avoided people with such beliefs in a moment.

Mossner’s argument that Cheyne is disqualified as the intended recipient of Hume’s letter because he would have taken offense at Hume’s philosophical principles is particularly weak. He bases this claim on Hume’s statement in his letter that “the moral Philosophy transmitted to us by Antiquity, labor’d under the same Inconvenience that has been found in their natural Philosophy, of being entirely Hypothetical, & depending more upon Invention than Experience” (HL 1: 16). Mossner points out that Cheyne himself was a defender of a hypothetical system of medical philosophy and claims he would therefore would have been offended by Hume’s claim to found philosophical conclusions on experience. It is true that Cheyne had first made his name as a defender of the ‘iatromechanical’ school of medicine, under Archibald Pitcairne, professor of medicine at Edinburgh in the 1690s. According to Mossner, he never renounced this hypothetical Newtonian system. However this is not entirely true. Cheyne distanced himself from his earlier medical views in the preface to his *Essay on Health and Long Life* (1724).³⁰ Guerrini points out that in the next year Thomas Morgan criticized Cheyne in his *Philosophical Principles of Medicine* “for apparently abandoning his iatromechanical principles” (153). Moreover, Cheyne appealed to experience at key points in his writing, for example, in *The English Malady* when he cited experiments to refute the accepted animal spirit hypothesis for muscular motion,³¹ and when he claimed to have found clinical evidence to question the accepted ideas about the relation of mind and body.³²

What are we to make of what Mossner considers to be his strongest argument, namely that Cheyne’s practice was in Bath, not London? According to Mossner, if Hume had been aware that Cheyne’s practice was in Bath rather than London, as he could have ascertained from reading the case histories in *The English Malady*,

he would never have stated in his letter: “As I am come to London in my way to Bristol [, I have resolved, if possible, to get your Advice, tho’ I shou’d take this absurd Method of procuring it].” Certainly, if Hume had really wished to consult Cheyne, he would have done so from Bristol, within easy reach of Bath.³³

I agree that Hume would have had good reason to believe that Cheyne was in Bath.³⁴ Hume's words certainly imply that *he was writing* from London. But do Hume's words imply that the *physician he was writing to* was in London? I believe they can be given another reading. Hume states a few lines before those just quoted that he is "just now hastening" to Bristol, where he has arranged to take up a position with a merchant. He may well have posted the letter in London to a physician in Bath or, what is more likely, posted the letter in Bath, which was a stage on the road to Bristol. In any case, Hume clearly expected to receive the reply containing medical advice by mail,³⁵ and could as easily have given a return address in Bristol as one in London. In either case, he had to find a way to retain his anonymity—his "absurd Method of procuring" advice. He could, for example, have had the reply delivered to 'the young Scottish Gentleman' at a certain inn in either London or Bristol. Moreover, in spite of the fact that he is writing anonymously, Hume may either consciously or unconsciously have desired a face-to-face meeting with the physician—if he received a sympathetic reply. Given the proximity of Bristol to Bath, this would have been easily accomplished. This opens up a tantalizing possibility that makes sense in the light of subsequent events.

When Hume wrote the Letter to a Physician in March or April of 1734, he had every intention of giving up his studies until he got well. But on September 12 of the same year, barely five or six months later, he is writing from Rheims after having in the meantime visited Cheyne's friend, the Chevalier Ramsay in Paris. He writes that he was "received" by Ramsay "with all imaginable Kindness" and he has letters of introduction from Ramsay to "two of the best Families in Town" and to "one of the most learned [men] in France."³⁶ It is also likely that it was through the connections of the Chevalier that Hume moved to La Flèche less than eight months later,³⁷ where, for the next two years, he "composed" most of his *Treatise of Human Nature*.³⁸ The continued close connection between Hume and the Chevalier throughout his time in France is suggested by the fact that on way back to Paris from La Flèche after completing his draft of the *Treatise* Hume wrote his friend Michael Ramsay that that he is "oblig'd to put all my Papers into the Chevalier Ramsay's hands."³⁹ Of course, by this time, Hume gained a good distance intellectually from the Chevalier: he writes his friend Michael that he is sorry to have this obligation to the Chevalier because "tho' he be Freethinker enough not to be shockt with my Liberty; yet he is so wielded to whimsical Systems, & is so little of a Philosopher, that I expect nothing but Cavilling from him." But we are interested in a time three years earlier when Hume first went to France. The question arises how Hume's plans came to change so quickly after spending only a few months in Bristol, and how he ever came to be the protégé of

the Chevalier, a man who was deeply involved with Catholic philosophical circles in France.

George Cheyne's close connections with Chevalier Ramsay dated from the first decade of the eighteenth century, when they were both involved with a group of writers and thinkers—mainly Scottish Episcopalians—interested in a quietist form of mysticism. Three early letters from Cheyne to Ramsay survive indicating a close friendship between the two men (*Obesity and Enlightenment*, 79–83); there is circumstantial evidence that their intellectual relationship continued long after Ramsay went to France in 1710 where he became secretary to Archbishop Fénelon, and later to the famous French mystic Madame Guyon. In 1737 Nathaniel Hooke lived in Cheyne's house in Bath while translating Ramsay's allegorical novel *Travels of Cyrus* (*Obesity and Enlightenment*, 137). According to Guerrini, Ramsay and Cheyne shared theological beliefs and had a "passionate belief in toleration and in the evils of sectarianism" (182).

If Hume had actually consulted Cheyne in Bath during his brief stay in Bristol, might not the physician have advised him to go abroad and given him a letter of introduction to the Chevalier? Hume's comments about mysticism in the letter, far from putting Cheyne off, may have suggested to him that Hume and his philosopher friend in Paris may have common interests.

It is true that there are other possible sources for Hume's connections with the Chevalier Ramsay besides Cheyne. Ramsay's biographer G. D. Henderson speculated that Hume got in touch with the Chevalier either through his friend Michael Ramsay (who was the Chevalier's distant cousin), or Dr. John Stevenson, an Edinburgh physician.⁴⁰ Michael had a later connection with the Chevalier in the 1740s,⁴¹ but he was not yet born when the Chevalier left Scotland in 1710 and there is no indication that the latter kept close ties with his remote family back in Scotland. Stevenson is a more likely source for Hume's introduction to the Chevalier than Michael Ramsey. He was an old friend who had gone to school with the Chevalier in Ayrshire; he also came to suggest Hume's name to the Chevalier as a translator of his "Chinese Letters" in 1742.⁴² Moreover, it is possible that Stevenson was the physician whom Hume consulted in 1729–30, four years before he left Scotland. Hume reported that this physician first diagnosed him as having "the Vapors" and later "the Disease of the Learned" (HL 1: 14); Stevenson had submitted a dissertation on the hypochondriac passion (another name for vapors) for his M.D. in Harderwyck in Holland in 1710.⁴³ There is reason to think that the expression "the Disease of the Learned" has a Dutch origin.⁴⁴ But even if Stevenson had been his physician earlier, it does not seem likely that Hume would have written back to him in Edinburgh from Bristol in 1734

to seek advice on his life. On the other hand, Cheyne, who was close by, may well have furnished him with a letter of introduction to the Chevalier, judging that the two would have had common interests in subjects such as Stoicism and mysticism, which Hume discusses in the letter.

As we have seen, on Mossner's view, Hume would not have written Cheyne because the latter "would almost certainly have taken offense at Hume's remarks on philosophy and religion." But, given the views that Cheyne and Ramsay share, would Ramsay not similarly have taken offense at Hume's attitudes to philosophy and religion? Yet we know that Hume put himself in the hands of Ramsay, who was much more involved with offbeat philosophy and religious mysticism than Cheyne.

How did Hume ever end up in France, far away from all his friends and family contacts? There is anecdotal evidence about how he fell out with his employer because he insisted on correcting the grammar of his letters.⁴⁵ But there still has to be some positive attraction to France, which seems to be no part of his original plan when he left Edinburgh.⁴⁶ In "My Own Life," Hume writes: "In 1734, I went to Bristol with some Recommendations to eminent Merchants; but in a few Months found that Scene totally unsuitable to me. I went over to France, with a View of prosecuting my Studies in a Country Retreat . . ."⁴⁷ But we know that Hume first went to Paris where he met with the Chevalier and then spent a number of months at Rheims (not at the "Country Retreat" of La Flèche). Of course, it is also clear from the letters of both men that within the three years Hume spent in France they had a falling out and became critical of each other's philosophies.⁴⁸ In writing a literary autobiography at the end of one's life one can find a straightforward pattern in which everything appears to lead in one direction. But in the process of a real life there are many twists and turns and meetings which lead one to one's ultimate goal.⁴⁹

This is not the place to consider at length Mossner's favored hypothesis—that the addressee of the Letter to a Physician was Dr. John Arbuthnot. Mossner writes: "To the anguished and inhibited Hume of 1734 Arbuthnot would have seemed the perfect consultant, the embodiment of his ideal of the man of letters during an Age of Enlightenment. How flattering to the aspiring young philosopher to be associated with such a hero . . ."⁵⁰ I have no doubt that if the mature Hume were to have sought out a medical advisor, all other things being equal, he would have sought out Arbuthnot over Cheyne. Certainly, Arbuthnot was far more the sort of person Hume would have wanted to associate with as a friend. To mention only one circumstance, Arbuthnot was a superb satirist and this was a form of writing Hume clearly came to admire (although he recognized his own limitations in this genre).

Moreover, Arbuthnot well fits the description Hume gives of his addressee as a person “of great Learning beyond [his] . . . own Profession.” (At the same time it must be recognized that Cheyne also fits Hume’s description: he had written a book on the calculus⁵¹ and another on natural and revealed religion.) However, Mossner goes on to claim that “Arbuthnot was also an expert precisely where Hume required an expert”⁵² and then refers to Arbuthnot’s last publications, which were medical: *An Essay concerning the Nature of Aliments, and the Choice of them, according to the Different Constitutions of Human Bodies* (1731) and *An Essay concerning the Effects of Air on Human Bodies* (1733). But Arbuthnot never claimed any expertise regarding the “Disease of the Learned”⁵³ or related disorders like “Vapors”⁵⁴ from which Hume supposed himself to suffer, and neither of the books mentioned by Mossner even touches on these disorders. They are scientific studies of human physiology, not clinical studies, as were the medical writings of Cheyne.⁵⁵ It is striking that in the second edition of Arbuthnot’s *An Essay Concerning the Nature of Aliments*, published in 1732, in which he added “Practical Rules of Diet in the various Constitutions and Diseases of Human Bodies,” hypochondria or vapors is conspicuously absent.⁵⁶ Moreover, there are no biographical case studies, as in Cheyne’s *English Malady*, which could have served as a model for Hume’s own description of his illness in his letter.

In spite of Mossner’s attempt to downplay the value of Cheyne’s own medical writings in favor of those of Arbuthnot (“His [Arbuthnot’s] medical treatises, with the exception of the Harveian Oration of 1727, were called forth by way of reaction to the extremism of Cheyne.”⁵⁷), Arbuthnot himself shows genuine admiration for Cheyne. He begins *An Essay Concerning the Nature of Aliments* by praising what is undoubtedly Cheyne’s best and most successful publication, namely his *Essay of Health and Long Life* (first published in 1724; it reached a seventh edition the next year). He calls Cheyne “his learned and worthy Friend” and says that the book gives “Proof both of his Judgment and Humanity.”⁵⁸ (Compare here Hume’s panegyric regarding his addressee at the beginning of the Letter to a Physician.) Arbuthnot wrote that Cheyne’s book “was received by the Publick with the Respect that was due to the Importance of its Contents” and “it became the Subject of Conversation, and produc’d even Sects in the dietetick philosophy.” This last comment leads Mossner to write of “Cheyne’s (food) faddism” because of his advocacy of a vegetarian and milk diet for those who suffer from digestive disorders. I am not sure we are all as prepared as Mossner to dismiss vegetarianism, but it must be noted that Cheyne himself, in *The English Malady*, is explicit that he is not advocating a vegetarian diet for most people (Preface, iv–v).

Anita Guerrini's study of George Cheyne gives a good account of the esteem with which Cheyne was regarded in his own day. This was also nicely summarized by Charles Mullett in 1943, followed by a caution about how Cheyne should be regarded from the point of view of later generations: "If his place is not at the top in medical history, one should not overlook the fact that in his own day George Cheyne appeared to many people of admitted competence a veritable apostle of Aesculapius. The judgment of later generations must not be allowed to supersede entirely a man's contemporary reputation."⁵⁹ Certainly, our present day judgment as to Cheyne's eminence as a physician and writer should not cloud our speculations about the addressee of the *Letter to a Physician* written by the ill, young, aspiring philosopher, David Hume.⁶⁰

It is possible that the letter was never sent, as both Burton and Mossner point out. But it is also possible that it was. And if it was sent, it is possible that a relationship developed between Hume and the physician for whom it was intended. If Cheyne was indeed that physician it is possible that that relationship would have led Hume to Cheyne's friend Chevalier Ramsay in Paris. Of course, this is not certain; there is no way without more evidence to properly weigh this possibility. But it does seem clear that it is a possibility which it behooves Hume's biographers to take seriously rather than dismissing it out of hand on the basis of weak arguments based on the location of the addressee of the letter and what offence he may have taken to Hume's philosophical and religious views. Mossner is just wrong to claim to have categorical proof dismissing Cheyne as the intended recipient of the letter. While we need to maintain a degree of scepticism and suspense of judgment, there are reasons to think that Hume's *Letter to a Physician* might have been actually sent to Cheyne and that it was through Cheyne that Hume was led to establish his important connection with the Chevalier Ramsay.

NOTES:

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1 Anita Guerrini, *Obesity & Depression in the Enlightenment: The Life and Times of George Cheyne* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000).

2 The words are Ernest Mossner's from "Hume's Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot, 1734: the Biographical Significance," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 7 (1944): 135–52, esp. 142. Mossner, of course, is referring to a "thoroughly skeptical review" of John Hill Burton's hypothesis, while I intend to review Mossner's own unqualified dismissal of that hypothesis in his own article and subsequent book.

3 Letter to a Physician [Hume to Dr. George Cheyne], March or April, 1734, *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig, 2 vols., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), 1: 12–18. (Hereafter, referred to as HL plus the volume number and page.)

4 For an insightful reconsideration of the bearing the letter on Hume's early philosophical development see M. A. Stewart, "Hume's Intellectual Development," in eds. Marina Frasca-Spada and Peter Kail, *Impressions of Hume* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, forthcoming).

5 John Hill Burton, *Life and Correspondence of David Hume*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1846), 1: 42–7.

6 See note 2, above.

7 See also Luigi Turco, *Lo Scetticismo Morale di David Hume* (Bologna: Cooperativa Libreria Universitaria Editrice Bologna, 1984), 24–28.

8 HL 1: 12.

9 HL 1: 18.

10 Burton, 42.

11 George Cheyne, *The English Malady: or, a Treatise of Nervous Diseases of all Kinds, as Spleen, Vapours, Lowness of Spirits, Hypochondriacal, and Hysterical Dis-tempers, & c.* (London and Bath, 1733), 325; cf. Burton, 44–5.

12 *The English Malady*, 53; cf. Burton, 43–4.

13 *The English Malady*, 53.

14 HL 1: 17. I take Hume to be denying that he is feeling depressed, even though (as we would now say) he recognizes that he is suffering from depression. It is remarkable that he says this even at this difficult period of his life. In "My Own Life" Hume stresses that he has always had a cheerful disposition.

15 Burton, 43.

16 "Hume's Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot," 146.

17 Ernest Mossner, *The Life of David Hume*, second edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 84n.

18 Hume to Mure, June 30, 1743, *New Letters of David Hume*, ed. Raymond Klibansky and Ernest Mossner (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 10–14, esp. 11. The letter is addressed to Mure, but it is clear from the many corrections to the manuscript which Hume puts in the letter that he expects it to be passed on to Leechman. Hume expresses surprise the next year when Leechman (as well as Hutcheson) opposes his candidacy for the Edinburgh Chair of Moral Philosophy on grounds

that he "was a very unfit Person for such an Office" (Hume to Mure, August 4, 1744, HL 1: 55–9, esp. 58).

19 Hume to Hutcheson, March 16, 1740, in HL 1: 38–40, esp. 39–40.

20 Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* (London: Methuen, 1912), 3rd ed., chapter 9, specifically discusses Mme. Guyon under this topic. He says that "psychologically considered, The Dark Night is an example of the law of reaction from stress. It is a period of fatigue and lassitude following a period of sustained mystical activity" (455).

21 G. D. Henderson, *Mystics of the Northeast* (Aberdeen: The Third Spalding Club, 1934), 14ff. See below for further discussion of the significance of this connection.

22 *Autobiography of Madame Guyon*, 2 vols., trans. Thomas T. Allen (London, 1898) 1: 182. She also writes that "le vol d'esprit cause foible au corps" (*La vie de Madame Jeanne Marie Bovieres de la Mothe Guion*, Seconde Partie (Cologne, 1720), 35).

23 "The mystics certainly have associations by which their discourse, which seems jargon to us, becomes intelligible to themselves. I believe they commonly substitute the feelings of a common amour, in the place of their heavenly sympathies: and if they be not belied, the type is very apt to engross their hearts, and exclude the thing typified." (Hume to Joseph Spence, October 15, 1754, HL 1: 201). By the "type" here, Hume is referring to the general idea of love, while "the thing typified" is ordinary sexual love.

24 *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Norman Kemp Smith, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1947), 172.

25 *George Cheyne: the English Malady*, ed. Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1991), xliv, note 35.

26 See the opening chapter entitled "A Soul in Crisis" (*Obesity & Depression*, pp. 3–21); Guerrini discusses Cheyne's autobiography with more perspicacity in an earlier article entitled "Case History as Spiritual Autobiography: George Cheyne's 'Case of the Author,'" *Eighteenth-Century Life* 19 (1995): 18–27.

27 *Obesity & Depression*, 11. Cheyne had discussed religious melancholy in his *Essay on Health and Long Life* (London, 1724); see op. cit., 4th ed. (London, 1725), 157.

28 Op. cit, fifth edition (London, 1736), 2. Cleanthes asserts (*Dialogues*, 143) that the universe is nothing "but one great machine, subdivided into an infinite number of lesser machines, which again admit of subdivisions, to a degree beyond what human senses and faculties can explain." This and the following parallel between Cheyne's *Philosophical Principles* and Hume's *Dialogues* were noted by Robert Hurlbutt in *Hume and the Design Argument*, revised ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963), 141.

29 Cheyne writes that those "who are Masters in the noble Art of just *Analogy*, may, from a tolerable Knowledge in any one if the *Integral* Parts of Nature, extend these Contemplations more securely to the Whole, or to any other *Integral* Part less known" (op. cit., 5); Philo's discussion of the weakness of the analogy which stands

at the root of the argument from design begins on 144 of the *Dialogues*; on 148 he states that “so far from admitting . . . that the operations of a part can afford us any just conclusion concerning the origin of the whole, I will not allow any one part to form a rule for another part, if the latter be very remote from the former.”

30 See op. cit., 4th ed. (1725), Preface, esp. ii–vii.

31 *The English Malady*, part 1, chapter 9, 77 ff.

32 *The English Malady*, part 1, chapter 8, section 2, 68ff. and part 3, chapter 4, 307–11.

33 “Hume’s Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot,” 144; cf. HL 1: 18. The “absurd Method” was apparently to seek the advice of the physician anonymously.

34 In *Obesity and Depression*, Guerrini writes that that Cheyne “visited London infrequently” and that “his 1725 visit was the first, and the last, for several years” (*Obesity & Depression*, 137). The published letters that Cheyne writes at this time are from Bath.

35 Hume may have inferred that Cheyne gave medical advice by correspondence from the letter by Dr. Cranstoun of Jedburgh printed in *The English Malady* (311ff.). That he actually did so is clear from his *The Letters of George Cheyne to the Countess of Huntingdon*, ed. Charles F. Mullett (San Marino, Calif: Huntington Library, 1940).

36 See HL 1: 19–23, esp. 22.

37 The chief attraction of La Flèche for Hume was almost certainly the library at the famous Jesuit College there. Ramsay’s connections with the Jesuits at this period are suggested by the fact that this very year he published an article “Le Psychomètre ou Réflexions sur les différens caracteres de l’Esprit” in the Jesuit journal, *Mémoires pour l’Histoire des Sciences & des beaux Arts*, April, 1735. On the dating of Hume’s move to La Flèche see Hume to James Birch, May 18, 1735, printed in E.C. Mossner, “Hume at La Flèche, 1735; An Unpublished Letter,” *University of Texas Studies in English*, 37 (1958): 30–3.

38 “My Own Life,” in HL 1: 1–7, esp. 2.

39 See Hume to Michael Ramsay, Tadeusz Kozanecki, “Dawida Hume’a nieznanne listy w zbiorach Muzeum Czartoryskich (Polska),” *Archiwum Historii Filozofii i Myśli Społecznej*, 9, (1963): 133; reprinted in R.H. Popkin, “So, Hume did read Berkeley,” *Journal of Philosophy*, 61 (1964): 73–8). This remark indicates a far closer relationship than implied in the Chevalier’s comments about Hume in his 1742 letter to Dr. John Stevenson. See below, note 48.

40 G. D. Henderson, *Chevalier Ramsay* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1952), 205.

41 Henderson, *Chevalier Ramsay*, pp. 7–8. Michael met the Chevalier in Paris in September 1742 while traveling as a tutor to the nineteen year old 10th Earl of Eglinton. He attended the Chevalier’s funeral on May 6, 1743.

42 Mossner, *Life*, 94.

43 See R. W. Innes Smith, *English-Speaking Students of Medicine at the University of Leyden* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1932), 224. The entry reads: "Stevenson, Joannes. Scoto-Britannus, Jan. 5, 1709, et. 21. Med. M.D. Harderwyck, June 12, 1710. Expos. casum de passione hypoch, ut et Apho. LVII, sect. 4 et 6. Def. positiones . . ." Innes Smith reports that Harderwyck was simply a degree granting institution which granted M.D.'s to many students from Leyden, including Boerhaave himself (p. xiv). Stevenson became a member of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh on May 6, 1729 (see the College Minutes).

44 Given the subject of Stevenson's dissertation and the location in which it was written it would be very surprising if he did not know of a book published by a fellow Leyden medical alumnus the following year. In 1711, Bernard Mandeville, who had defended a thesis on animal automatism at Leyden in 1689, published his *A Treatise of the hypochondriack and hysterick Passions...* (it was renamed *A Treatise of the hypochondriack and hysterick Diseases...* in the third edition of 1730). It is very likely that Hume's physician had read Mandeville's book and that this is the source of the reference to "the Disease of the Learned" in the letter, as well as Hume's own analysis of the cause of the disease. Mandeville wrote that persons who suffer from the symptoms he discusses "are oftner Men of Learning, than not; insomuch, that the *Passio Hypochondriaca* in High Dutch is call'd *Der Gelahrten Krankheydt*, the Disease of the Learned' (1730), 106). Hume's own discussion of the cause of the disease as a "Want of Spirits" (HL 1: 13); or "waste" of spirits (14) reflects the analysis in Mandeville's book. I have discussed these parallels between Hume's letter and Mandeville's book in my *The Sceptical Realism of David Hume* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1983), 190-1 and 236-7, notes 10-13.

It should be noted that while Cheyne does not use the expression "Disease of the Learned," the passage from *The English Malady* quoted above describes the illness given that name by Mandeville and Hume.

45 Mossner, *The Life of David Hume*, 90. Mossner's source appears to be J. Latimer, *Annals of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century* (Bristol, 1893), 184-90.

46 He may, however, have had a theory that led him to foreign parts. In the *Treatise*, Hume illustrates his principles of pride and humility by the example of "men of good families, but narrow circumstances . . . (who) leave their friends and country, and rather seek their livelihood . . . among strangers, than among those acquainted with their birth and education" (*Treatise of Human Nature*, 2.1.11.13; SBN 322.)

47 Op. cit., HL 1: 2.

48 See the text connected with note 39 above, for Hume's criticism of the philosophy of Ramsay in 1737. Nevertheless, Hume later writes of Ramsay as an author of "taste and imagination" in a footnote to Section xiii of his "Natural History of Religion"; he also writes of Ramsay's great amount of "humanity" which, in spite of his religious orthodoxy, caused him rebel "against the doctrines of eternal reprobation and predestination" (see David Hume, *Four Dissertations* [1757], reprint edited by John Immerwahr [Bristol: Thommes Press, 1995], note, 99ff.). In his letter to Dr. John Stevenson of 1742, the Chevalier writes that Hume "seems to

me far from being a True master of metaphysicks, which as mathematicks their companion or rather branch, is the apex of human reason. That bright Ingenious young Spark does not seem to me to have acquir'd a sufficient Stock of solid Learning, nor to be born with a fund of noble Sentiments, nor to have a genius capable of all that Geometrical attention, penetration and Justness, necessary to make a True Metaphysician" (Mossner, *Life*, 94).

49 See Patricia Spacks, *Imagining a Self: Autobiography and Novel in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), esp. chapter 1.

50 Mossner, "Hume's Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot," 149.

51 *Fluxionem methodus inversa* (London, 1703). The book, was shown to Arbuthnot, Gregory, and even Newton himself before publication. Guerrini writes that "after its publication Bernouilli described it in a letter to Leibniz as 'a most remarkable little book, stuffed with very clever discoveries,' but he also pointed out several errors." The book caused a great deal of controversy because, in an attempt to ingratiate himself with Newton, Cheyne implied Newton's priority over Leibniz as discoverer of the calculus. Newton was furious with Cheyne and implied in the Advertisement to the *Opticks* (1704) that Cheyne had plagiarized him. De Moivre criticized Cheyne's book in print for its "many errors." See *Obesity and Depression*, 69–71.

52 Mossner, *The Life of David Hume*, 5.

53 HL 1: 14; cf. 18. Hume's states in the letter that his physician back in Scotland has told him he has "the Disease of the Learned."

54 Hume accepts his physician's diagnosis of "Vapors" for the disease he was suffering from in 1729 (HL 1: 14); but later in his letter he writes of "the Difference between my Distemper & common Vapors" (HL 1: 17).

55 Arbuthnot does not claim originality for his book *An Essay on the Nature of Aliments* (second edition (London, 1732): he states in his preface that it is based on the writings of others such as Herman Boerhaave and Peter Shaw. In the Preface to *An Essay Concerning the Effects of Air on Human Bodies* he says that he founds his reasonings on nothing "but Matter of Fact" (x).

56 Op. cit., 240ff. Under the rules for "Chronical Diseases," Arbuthnot includes "Melancholy or Madness," but he has no interest in the milder forms of the former, which relate to Hume's disorder.

57 Mossner, "Hume's Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot," 148.

58 John Arbuthnot, *An Essay on the Nature of Aliments*, Preface.

59 Charles Mullett, *The Letters of Doctor George Cheyne to Samuel Richardson* (1733–1743) (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1943), 8.

60 Mossner argues that Hume was cured of his illness simply by writing the letter ("Hume's Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot," 149–52; *Life*, chapter 7, "Recovery through Catharsis," 81–91.) This argument is challenged by Luigi Turco on the pages of his book cited in note 7. Turco argues that Hume was clearly still in his intellec-

tual and psychological crisis when he wrote the letter and that, by claiming that the crisis was solved, Mossner obscures its philosophical importance for understanding the central sceptical themes of the *Treatise* (see esp 65, 69 and 72).

In the light of Mossner's view that Hume was cured by catharsis it is important to note that Hume continued to suffer from digestive difficulties all his life. Writing to Adam Smith during Hume's last illness, Joseph Black reports that Hume "has been all his life subject to fits of Diarrhea which returned at pretty regular intervals . . ." (Joseph Black to Adam Smith, n.d. [probably May or June, 1776], NLS Hume MS 23158). From Black's letter it is clear that Hume himself put this down to his genetic constitution, which he said was the same as that of his mother.

