

# THE THEORY OF THE HUMOURS

**Humour, OED:** four cardinal humors, blood, phlegm, choler, and melancholy or black choler, “by the relative proportions of which a person’s physical and mental qualities and disposition were held to be determined.” Refers to temperament.

**Temperament: OED:** “In the natural philosophy of the middle ages: the combination of supposed qualities (hot or cold, moist or dry) in a certain proportion, determining the nature of a plant or other body; characteristic nature” (3254). Climate was determined by temperament (thus, temperature). Connection to race and place? “The bodily habit assigned to [the mixture of humors], as a sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic or melancholic temperament.”

**Sanguine, OED:** “ruddy countenance and a courageous, hopeful, and amorous disposition” (2636). Used in phrenology. Opposed to “saturnine temperature.” In 1874, Carpenter, “Small brains and great activity, betoken what are known as the sanguine and nervous temperaments.”

**Phlegmatic, OED:** watery and insipid. Difficult to move. “Not easily excited to feeling or action; lacking enthusiasm; cold, dull, sluggish, apathetic; cool, calm, self-possessed.”

**Choleric, OED:** “Having ... billious ‘complexion’ or temperament.” “Of a hot or fiery nature” (all 404). “Inclined to wrath, irascible, hot-tempered, passionate, fiery...”

**Melancholy, (OED 1763):** “The condition of having too much ‘black bile’; the disease supposed to result from this condition; in early references its prominent symptoms are sullenness and propensity to causeless and violent anger, and in later references mental gloom or sadness. From the 17th C onwards the word was used without its aetiological implication...” Examples imply that melancholy humors can cover the body (jaundice), and that the humor itself is black in color (melan). “Irascibility, ill-temper, anger, sullenness.” “In the Elizabethan period and subsequently, the affectation of ‘melancholy’ was a favorite pose among those who made claim to superior refinement.” Melancholy blood was dirty, thick.

**Element:** fire

**Humor:** hot and dry

**Qualities:** choler (yellow bile)

**Complexion:** choleric (irascible, passionate, bilious)

**Zodiac Signs:** Aries, Leo, Sagittarius

**Corresponding Planet:** Mars (the lesser evil)

**Element:** earth

**Humor:** cold and dry

**Qualities:** melancholy (black bile)

**Complexion:** melancholic (sullen, dejected, bad-tempered)

**Zodiac Signs:** Taurus, Virgo, Capricornus

**Corresponding Planet:** Saturn (the greater evil)

**Element:** air

**Humor:** hot and moist

**Qualities:** blood

**Complexion:** sanguine (ardent, cheerful, venereal, liberal)

**Zodiac Signs:** Gemini, Libra, Aquarius

**Corresponding Planet:** Jupiter (the greater fortune)

**Element:** water

**Humor:** cold and moist

**Qualities:** phlegm

**Complexion:** phlegmatic (cold, dull, apathetic, cool, calm)

**Zodiac Signs:** Cancer, Scorpio, Pisces

**Corresponding Planet:** Venus (the lesser fortune)