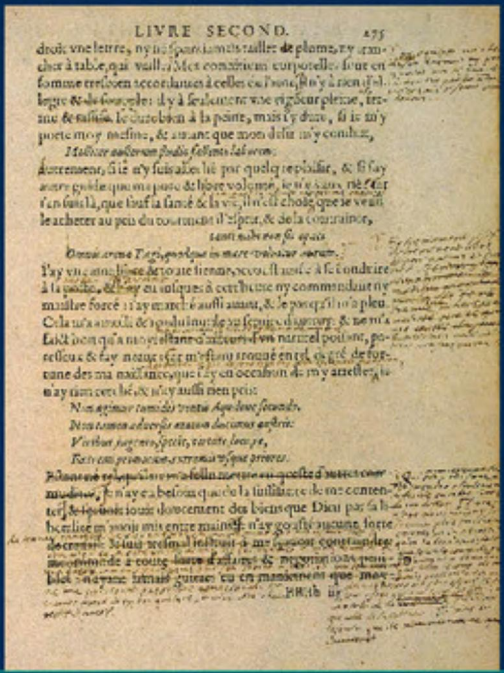
LIVRE SECOND. 275

droit vne lettre, ny ne sçache iamais taailler de plume, ny accorder à table, qui vaille. Mes conditions corporelles soient en somme telles en accordances à celles de l'ame, si j'y a rien eu de legier & de fou, elle y a seulement vne rigoureuse pleine, ferme & reglée. Ie cherchois à la peine, mais i'y donne, si ie m'y porte moy mesme, & autant que mon desir m'y conduit.

*Nullius addictus iurare in verba magistri*

Autrement, si ie n'y fusse allé, ie fusse encore allé par quelque poinct, & si j'ay autre goûst que mon propre & libre volonté, ie ne sçaurois me l'exprimer, car i'en sçais là, que tout la science & la vie, il n'est chose que ie veuille le acheter au peu du contentement d'esprit, & de la constance,

*tanti mihi non sit opacis*

*Omne aurum Perarque dives in mare transferre nauem.*

I'ay vne ame libre de toute tirannie, ouverte, & fort encline à toute chose, & mesmes à toutes les nouvelles conditions de la fortune, dont il y en a fort peu qui me facent peur. I'ay eu autrefois de grandes commodités de ma fortune, & ores ie me trouve fort commodément sans elles. I'ay autant de santé, que ie puis desirer, & telle que ie puis desirer, accompagné de plusieurs esperances & promesses de vie, & de bien, & n'ay aussi rien de reste.

*Non equidem insidior venturo Augure laetus,*
*Non tamen abnegem si quando oracula certa*
*Verbaque iam grauis, cecinit vaticinator Apollo,*
*Ista ego praecipuum cunctis mihi Phoebus honorem*

Plaisir ne regrette, si ce n'estoit peut-estre vne curiosité vaine & inquiete, de n'avoir eu besoin que de la suffisance de me contenter, & de jouir doucement des biens que Dieu par sa bonté liberale m'avoit mis entre mains. N'ay goûté aucune sorte de certaine selon mon naturel [illegible] ny [illegible] accompagné à cette heure d'vne grande & [illegible] bien n'ayant iamais gouste en ma maison que mon

# Montaigne and the Life of Freedom

FELICITY GREEN

CAMBRIDGE

IDEAS IN CONTEXT

# MONTAIGNE AND THE LIFE OF FREEDOM

FELICITY GREEN
*Trinity College, Cambridge*

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# *Contents*

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# *Conventions*

## TEXTS

References to the *Essais* are by book, chapter and page number to the following editions:

P *Les Essais*, eds. Jean Balsamo, Michel Magnien and Catherine Magnien-Simonin. Paris: Gallimard (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade), 2007.

V *Les Essais de Michel de Montaigne*, ed. Pierre Villey, revised by V.-L. Saulnier, re-edited with a preface and supplement by Marcel Conche. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2004.

F *The complete Essays of Montaigne*, translated by Donald Frame. Stanford University Press, 1958.

The Pléiade edition (P) is based on the first posthumous edition of the *Essais* (1595). All quotations are taken from this text, which provides the most complete version of Montaigne's work.[1] The Villey-Saulnier edition (V), for many years the standard version of the *Essais*, is based on the 'Bordeaux Copy', a working copy of the 1588 text with extensive emendations in Montaigne's own hand. Cross-references to this edition are provided for the convenience of the reader.

The order of certain chapters in the 1595 edition differs from that of earlier editions, due to the displacement of one chapter (*That the taste of good and evil depends in large part on the opinion we have of them*) from I.14 to I.40. In what follows, then, I.25, for example, refers to *On the education of children*, and not to *On pedantry*.

## TRANSCRIPTIONS

Montaigne revised the *Essais* continually and extensively over a period of two decades, inserting subtle emendations, lengthy *allongeails* and whole

[1] For a more detailed discussion, see Green 2009.

new chapters as he went along. I have therefore chosen to identify the text with the complete set of its versions and revisions, rather than with its most advanced state. This decision has led me to depart from the Pléiade edition in two important respects: by reinstating the letters conventionally used to signal successive stages in the composition of the *Essais*, and by including earlier variants rejected in the final (1595) recension of the text.

Superscript letters are used as follows: $^{A}$ refers to the text of the first edition, published in 1580; $^{B}$ to material added between 1580 and 1588; and $^{C}$ to all later additions. I have used <angle brackets> to identify those passages where the 1595 text diverges from the Bordeaux Copy. Text present in an earlier state of the work but excised or replaced in later revisions is indicated with a single line of deletion.

The original spelling, punctuation, capitalisation, italicisation and paragraphing have been preserved. However, I have expanded all contractions and changed 'i' to 'j' and 'u' to 'v' in accordance with modern typography (except when quoting from Latin). All Greek words, phrases and titles have been transliterated.

## TRANSLATIONS

Donald Frame's version of the *Essais* (F) has provided the starting point for all my translations of Montaigne into English. However, I have frequently taken the liberty of modifying Frame's text to reflect Montaigne's choice of language with greater accuracy. Moreover, because Frame based his translation on the Bordeaux Copy, I have supplied my own translations for those passages added to the 1595 text. When using editions of classical texts for which facing-page translations are provided, I have used these as my starting point, while sometimes modifying them in the interests of a more literal rendering of the original text. All other translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

When translating Montaigne, I have rendered *liberté* as 'liberty' and *franchise* as 'freedom'. I have, of course, been constrained to adopt 'free' and 'freely' as translations of *libre* and *librement*, for which there is no direct English equivalent. In addition, I have occasionally translated *franc* and *franchement* as 'frank' and 'frankly', in contexts carrying a narrower connotation of boldness or plainness in speech. It seems to be the case, more generally, that *franchise* in Montaigne's usage places slightly more emphasis on the moral character of the free man (his fearlessness, his magnanimity), whereas *liberté* tends to draw attention to the lack of dependency and attachment that makes such virtues possible. This distinction is not,

# *Introduction*

This book explores the relationship between self-examination, self-regulation and human freedom in a late Renaissance text: the *Essais* (c. 1571–92) of Michel de Montaigne.[1] More than any other literary or philosophical work of its period, the *Essais* have come to be regarded as a landmark in the development of modern subjectivity – as an embodiment of conceptions and concerns astonishingly akin to our own. I argue that this sense of familiarity is, in certain fundamental respects, illusory – a projection of our own preoccupations and expectations on to Montaigne's text. By drawing attention to questions about the freedom of the self in the *Essais*, I hope not only to illuminate a lost dimension of Montaigne's work, but to recover something of the strangeness and fertility of a way of thinking about the self largely occluded in our own culture.[2]

One of the most striking and original features of the text is its rejection of abstract and didactic learning in favour of a dynamic portrait of the

[1] Born in 1533, Montaigne is thought to have begun work on the *Essais* in about 1571 (see Villey 1933). Books I and II were first published in 1580, in a two-volume octavo edition printed in Bordeaux by Simon Millanges (Montaigne 1580). A considerably expanded quarto edition (the fifth edition) appeared in Paris (Abel L'Angelier) in 1588, with the addition of a third volume and the insertion of much new material into the first two books of the existing text (Montaigne 1588). The margins of the 'Bordeaux Copy' – Montaigne's own working copy of the 1588 edition, now preserved at the Bibliothèque municipale in Bordeaux (Rés. 1238) – are filled with further, extensive manuscript additions made in his own hand in the years before his death in 1592. This resource has recently been made available in a colour facsimile edition (Montaigne 2002a) and is also available online as part of the Montaigne Project hosted by the University of Chicago (Montaigne 2002b). The Bordeaux Copy diverges at a number of points from the first posthumous (folio) edition of 1595 (Paris: Abel L'Angelier), which was prepared by Montaigne's 'fille d'alliance' (II.17: P 701, V 661, F 502), Marie de Gournay (Montaigne 1595). For fuller bibliographical information, see Sayce and Maskell 1983. For information about the editions used in this book, see under 'Conventions'.

[2] Recent years have witnessed a surge of interest in the history of subjectivity and selfhood: see, for example, Taylor 1989, Porter 1997, Reiss 2005, Seigel 2005, Martin and Barresi 2006 and Sorabji 2006. These accounts, however, have little to say about the role of freedom in the construction of personhood and individual agency. For a stimulating exploration of the difficulties involved in studying representations of the person and the self in other periods and cultures, see Carrithers, Collins and Lukes 1985.

author's own dispositions and cogitations. Montaigne claims to [A]'examine', 'monitor' and 'sample' himself, to [B]'see' himself and 'seek for' himself 'down to the very entrails'.[3] At the heart of this groundbreaking project of self-study is a call for a symbolic retreat from the world into the seclusion of one's own home, library or *arriereboutique* – spaces in which it is possible to live for or belong to oneself ([A]'*estre à soy*').[4]

This foregrounding of the self resonates strongly with modern readers, who tend to think of themselves as individuals possessed of hidden feelings and inward depths, caught in a web of language and social performance always falling short of their essential being. From this perspective, Montaigne's efforts to distinguish all that is properly 'moy' or 'à moy' (myself, my own) from all that is not reflect a striving for sincere self-presence and self-expression in a world of alienating appearances and constructed roles.[5] Subjectivity here emerges at a point of perceived friction between artificial and authentic layers of conduct and self-understanding – between our concern to establish ourselves as the authors of our own identities and the suspicion that our 'selves' are mere performances, scripted by social and ideological forces beyond our control.[6]

My objection to this approach is that it involves the suppression of a crucial dimension of Montaigne's project: the fact that the [B]'ruling form' that he claims to discover in himself is specifically that of a *free* self.[7] [C]'Idleness and freedom', he writes in *On vanity*, are his 'most favoured qualities' – a point reiterated just a few pages later with the claim that [C]'liberty and idleness' are his 'ruling qualities'.[8] His soul, we are told in *On presumption*, is [A]'free and all its own'; he succeeds only when moved by his 'own pure and free will', having had 'neither forced governor nor master to this day'.[9] As these quotations suggest, Montaigne's self-portrait is at

[3] [A]'Je me considere sans cesse, je me contrerolle, je me gouste'. II.17: P 697, V 657, F 499. [B]'Moy, qui me voy, et qui me recherche jusques aux entrailles'. III.5: P 889, V 847, F 643–4.

[4] I.38: P 246, V 242, F 178.

[5] See, for example, Cameron 1968, Lüthy 1987, Kushner 1993, Martin 1997, Delègue 1998, Martin 2004 and, above all, Starobinski 1993; cf. (in the context of English Renaissance drama) Maus 1995. For further examples and more extensive discussion, see Chapter 2, Section IV. For a critique of this approach in relation to seventeenth-century English 'life-writings', see Shuger 2000.

[6] This dichotomy between subjectivity (understood as autonomous self-creation) and subjection to power (in the Foucauldian or Althusserian sense) is central to Greenblatt 1980; see also (again in an English context) Barker 1984 and Belsey 1985. For recent appeals to Montaigne as the exponent of an inner self ultimately irreducible to social and ideological determination, see Lee 2000 and Grady 2002.

[7] [B]'Forme maistresse'. III.2: P 851, V 811, F 615.

[8] [C]'Mes qualitez plus favories, l'oysiveté, la franchise'. III.9: P 1014, V 969, F 741. [C]'La liberté et l'oysiveté, qui sont mes maistresses qualitez'. III.9: P 1038, V 992, F 759.

[9] [A]'Ma pure et libre volonté [. . .] J'ay une ame libre et toute sienne [. . .]. N'ayant eu jusques à cett' heure ny commandant ny maistre forcé'. II.17: P 680–1, V 642–3, F 487.

its heart that of a man who belongs to himself, in the sense that his will is his own, instead of being enslaved to someone or something other than himself. It is with the analysis of this self-image that the following study is principally concerned.

Montaigne's reflections on freedom, as this book seeks to make clear, resist incorporation into any one framework of analysis. Certain dimensions of his thinking – in particular his preoccupation with dependency, with the enslavement of the will, and with the vicissitudes of personal obligation (as opposed to legitimate subjection) – resonate unmistakably with what has come to be described, in the wake of Quentin Skinner, as a 'neo-Roman' or 'republican' understanding of freedom as nondomination.[10] Montaigne's version of that language, however, is ethical, rather than constitutional, in its orientation: freedom is to be secured not through political participation in a free state, but through a personal practice of self-regulation allowing us to preserve our will from subjection and expropriation. That project of voluntary disengagement is, in turn, indebted to ancient thought, and in particular to Stoic conceptions of independence as a state of inner tranquillity and detachment. Here again, however, that language of moral freedom and self-control appears in a heavily revised and nuanced incarnation, couched in a discourse of human frailty, vulnerability and self-protection, emphasising the limits of our voluntary power over ourselves and centred on the withdrawal or suspension of the will, rather than its assertion.

These considerations all serve to direct the question of subjectivity and interiority in the *Essais* away from conceptions of *identity* (the text as a celebration of Montaigne's unrepeatable and singular individuality) and towards the more explicitly ethical notions of agency, personhood and control. A primary aim of this book is thus to reorient critical attention to a crucial but hitherto overlooked strand in Montaigne's conception of self. The historical importance and interest of the *Essais*, I contend, lies not only in their anticipation of later forms of autobiographical and introspective writing, but in their distinctive and highly nuanced approach to the problem of personal liberty.

It is also possible, however, to give my argument a more polemical twist. I do not wish to suggest that the existence of a hidden, affective self would have been unintelligible to Montaigne; nor do I wish to imply, just as implausibly, that countless readers of the *Essais* have been mistaken in their assessment of the text as a remarkably original work, unprecedented in its attention to the inner dispositions and reflections of its author.

[10] Skinner 2008b contains the most recent and complete statement of this analysis.

When we realise, however, that Montaigne's efforts to return to and live for himself are, at least in part, an expression of his concern to preserve himself from slavery, conventional appeals to sincerity or authenticity as defining attributes of his notion of self lose much of their force. The *nature* of Montaigne's interest in the self, I suggest, has been fundamentally misrepresented and misunderstood. His book represents him as he truly is – but as a witness of his moral character as a free man, not as an expression (sincere or otherwise) of his innermost psychological being.

As the title of the work suggests, Montaigne's eclectic reflections are offered not as doctrines to be studied or learned, but as material for further evaluation and elaboration. He examines problems from a multiplicity of angles, 'trying out' and 'sampling' a variety of opinions without binding himself to any one school of thought or point of view. As one recent commentator has emphasised, this discontinuous and open-ended way of writing serves to promote a particular kind of 'free-thinking', in which both writer and reader may participate.[11] Montaigne judges matters for himself, instead of deferring to the authority of other thinkers; his text is purely his own, free of philosophical and literary debts. The freedom made possible by the *essai*, however, extends beyond his autonomy as a writer and as a thinker. For Montaigne, I argue in Chapter 1, liberty and dependency constitute ethical, as well as intellectual, concerns. His claim to own his book, and to be represented within it, embodies an appeal to moral, and not merely literary, independence.

Chapter 2 focuses on the terms in which Montaigne himself describes his project of 'self-study' and on the language that he uses to articulate what we would now call 'the self'. My analysis centres on two patterns of discourse: a rhetoric of inwardness urging us to look or withdraw *into* ourselves, and a rhetoric of self-possession calling for us to *own* or *belong to* ourselves. I am able to show, first, that these expressions reflect habits of language inherited from ancient texts, in particular the writings of Plutarch and Seneca; and, second, that the habits of thought which underpin them are far removed from our own. When Montaigne contrasts that which is inside us with what is merely external, he is not referring to the distance that separates self and mime, referent and sign, in our own culture. He is instead distinguishing that which is intrinsic to us – in the sense that it can truly be accounted as our own, that it is in our power – from all those possessions and attributes that are merely accidental or fortuitous. When he claims to belong to himself, or to be his own, he is not affirming himself

[11] Scholar 2010.

as the origin and author of his own identity, unfettered by what we would think of today as the forces of ideological subjection; nor does he mean, as some scholars have supposed, that he is his own property.[12] To belong to oneself is instead to be one's own man and master, as opposed to another man's creature.

As I seek to show in Chapter 3, liberty, and not authenticity, provides the key to Montaigne's way of thinking and writing about the self. His appeals for us to return to and reclaim ownership over ourselves emerge as an urgent and practical response to the problem of public engagement and service in a turbulent and corrupt world. Public life, Montaigne claims, should be shunned because it removes us from ourselves – not in the sense that it exposes us to the distorting gaze of others, but because it turns us into slaves by rendering us dependent on the favour of others and by encouraging us to live for the sake of that which lies beyond our powers. Solitude and privacy, in this context, are defined not in opposition to social life per se, but rather to the active pursuit of public office, advancement and reputation. Montaigne's retreat to his estate is an exile of the will, an inward refuge from slavery. Freedom here consists both in the absence of personal subjection to the will of others and in an internal disposition of the mind, achieved by turning one's efforts and will back towards oneself. To be free is to govern oneself in accordance with one's own will, and thus to belong to oneself.

This conception of liberty as a form of self-possession radically reorients our understanding of Montaigne's turn to 'self'. However, it does not quite get us, on its own, to the heart of what the *Essais* have to say about liberty: it is only one half of a complex picture. Chapter 4 considers a strand in Montaigne's reflections that appears at first sight to be entirely separate from, and at variance with, the robust language of independence and self-ownership discussed in Chapter 3. Freedom is here associated with idleness (*oysiveté*) and negligence (*nonchalance*) – with the fragility of an indolent and ill-disciplined will that recoils from occupation and strain, not because it yearns for independence, but because it seeks to be without care. Pressing further, we come to see that these two threads of discourse – self-possession and carelessness – are in fact part of a single story about liberty.

Having analysed Montaigne's composite account of freedom under its two leading aspects, it remains for us to ask how that liberty is to be achieved and defended in practice. Chapter 5 examines the nature and limits of self-discipline in the *Essais*, focusing in particular on Montaigne's use of the

[12] Schaefer 1990, esp. pp. 315–21, Van Delft 1990, Levine 2001, Jordan 2003, Jordan 2004.

is itself tacitly subjected to significant limitations. In the first place, his representation of freedom as an unlearned, natural condition identifies self-possession and carelessness as aristocratic qualities, accessible only to a [B]'few souls so orderly, so strong and well-born, that they can be trusted with their own guidance'.[21] Although the focus of this book is on the intellectual and discursive contexts (rather than the social conditions) that govern Montaigne's thinking about liberty, it is important to emphasise that independence, frankness, leisure and nonchalance are all traits characteristically associated with the nobility of *ancien régime* France.[22] To this extent, Montaigne's self-presentation as a free man reflects the ideology of a particular class, defined in opposition to a servile majority of vulgar scholars and mendacious flatterers, rather than an ethics of more universal application. Contrary to those scholars who have linked the *Essais* to the morality of an emergent bourgeoisie,[23] it is hard to see how liberty, as Montaigne understands it, could be either imagined or realised in the absence of the economic self-sufficiency and freedom from occupation of the land-owning aristocracy. Freedom is intimately tied to freehold: the free man can do without the material rewards of princely service; he is not in the employ of any other man; he lives in a state of leisure; he has dominion and authority over his own household.

Liberty, in this perspective, is itself the hostage of our birth – a paradox highlighted by Montaigne in *On vanity*, where the ability to live within the limits of one's own power, instead of relying on the favour of other men, is unmasked as a product of divine grace.

> [B]Oh, how much am I obliged to God that it was his pleasure that I should receive all I have directly from his grace: and that he has kept all my indebtedness for himself privately! [C]How earnestly I beseech his holy mercy, that I may never owe thanks for essential things to anyone! Fortunate freedom: which has guided me so far. May it continue to the end![24]

Montaigne may be free from debts to any man, but for this he is indebted to God. The freedom of the self, in this light, operates within a purely human sphere, circumscribed by the soul's dependency on God. The question as to

[21] [B]'Il est peu d'ames si reglees, si fortes et bien nées, à qui on se puisse fier de leur propre conduicte'. II.12: P 592, V 559, F 419.

[22] Posner 1999.

[23] In addition to the works cited in Footnote 12 above, see Desan 1992 and the more qualified claims made by Keohane 1977.

[24] [B]'Ô combien je suis tenu à Dieu, de ce qu'il luy a pleu, que j'aye receu immediatement de sa grace, tout ce que j'ay: qu'il a retenu particulierement à soy toute sa debte! [C]Combien je supplie instamment sa saincte misericorde, que jamais je ne doive un essentiel grammercy à personne! Bien heureuse franchise: qui m'a conduict si loing. Qu'elle acheve'. III.9: P 1013, V 968, F 739.

what limits, if any, our duty of subjection to God imposes on the exercise of our liberty is unfortunately not one that I can hope to adequately answer here. The problem of free will, moreover, lies beyond the scope of this book, which is more particularly concerned with the self's relationship with other agents and with the inner disposition of the soul towards that which lies beyond its power.[25]

It may be helpful, however, to recall here Pascal's castigation of Montaigne's 'sot projet' of self-portrayal – a condemnation rooted in the claim that the self (*le moi*) is 'unjust because it makes itself the centre of everything', as part of that fallen 'instinct which incites one to make oneself God'.[26] The self, for Pascal, is worthy of hate as a source not merely of narcissistic *divertissement*, but of self-idolatry and rebellion against God. Montaigne's withdrawal into the self offers as a solution to human misery what is in fact the cause of our unhappiness and enslavement: our failure to acknowledge our dependency upon God and our existence, not as self-sufficient entities, but as 'members' of humanity and of Christ, in the literal sense of bodily parts that have no life on their own but only insofar as they partake of the whole.[27] Pascal's objection to Montaigne thus centres not (as is often supposed) on the immodesty of his fascination with himself, but on the sin of pride that leads him to seek contentment in, and independence for, himself.

One way, however, of understanding the argumentative arc of the final three chapters of this book – from self-possession to carelessness to 'impure' self-management – would be to insist on the precariousness and imperfection of Montaigne's freedom. One of his main concerns in writing the *Essais*, certainly, is to demonstrate that his essential and natural condition is one of liberty. He does not, however, claim always and everywhere to be in possession of his freedom; still less does he pretend to master himself. Montaigne's conception of 'self', as I hope to have made clear, hinges on a fundamental moral distinction between that which is subject to his will and that which lies beyond the limits of his power. In practice, however, that boundary is rarely clear-cut.

Finally, a few words about my approach to the text. My guiding concern has been to analyse the *Essais* as a landscape of intuitions, inclinations and preoccupations rather than as the expression of fixed assumptions or deeply

[25] But on this question, see Langer 1990 and Carraud and Marion 2004.

[26] Pascal 2004. 'Ce sot projet de se peindre' (fragment 653). 'Le moi est haïssable. [. . . ] Je le hais parce qu'il est injuste, qu'il se fait centre de tout' (fragment 509). 'Qui ne hait en soi son amour-propre, et cet instinct qui le porte à se faire Dieu, est bien aveuglé' (fragment 524).

[27] Mesnard 1989.

held beliefs. One effect of my argument, as I have already intimated, is to draw attention to the persistence and depth of Montaigne's commitment to personal freedom. I have ultimately found it more helpful, however, to think of interpretation as a way of explaining what makes Montaigne's book into the particular text that it is, rather than as a way of reconstructing his patterns of belief. In other words, I have sought to understand the text not as an archival imprint of his fundamental 'views' about liberty, but as an exceptionally flexible exercise of judgment, allowing him to draw upon and confront contrasting argumentative and rhetorical strategies. My aim has been to evoke a dense tapestry of thinking habits inscribed in the text, made up of persistent preoccupations and anxieties, recurrent motifs and configurations, echoes between chapters, and traces left by other texts – to examine Montaigne's reflections on freedom as a palimpsest of discourse rather than a solid edifice of ideas.

In an effort to view that palimpsest in its full complexity, I have chosen to treat the *Essais* as a single body of discourse instead of structuring my analysis around the close, sequential reading of discrete chapters. This approach has led me to focus attention on particular passages and reflections, sometimes juxtaposing discussions situated some distance apart in the text. It is vital to stress, however, that these quotations are offered not as insights into Montaigne's 'position' or 'beliefs' on the theme of freedom, but as instances of his intricate handling of the language of liberty. Mindful of Jean-Yves Pouilloux's warnings against the temptation to anthologise Montaigne's text, I have sought to interpret these passages not as disembodied fragments of prose, but as reflections embedded within particular textual contexts, invested with a peculiarly self-reflexive and self-critical force.[28]

I have also sought, however, to carry the discussion initiated by Pouilloux one step further. Crucially, it seems to me, the *Essais* represent more than a purely formal exercise in critical thinking. They address particular problems and questions in particular ways, acting within and upon prevailing systems of discourse. To explain the *Essais*, to explain Montaigne's *manière*, is thus not only to elucidate the sceptical and self-critical dynamic of his writing (and rewriting). It is also to understand the preoccupations, presuppositions and interpretative categories that nourish and shape his fluid reflections – to reconstruct the complex horizons of understanding and expectation which it inhabits and brings into being. To explain the text, in this sense, is to read Montaigne as a *bricoleur*, appropriating and refashioning preexisting tropes,

[28] Pouilloux 1969, Pouilloux 1995.

vocabularies, arguments and other textual materials.[29] This approach helps us to move beyond a stark contrast between form and content, *manière* and *matière*, by reading Montaigne's 'dispositions' in discursive rather than purely cognitive terms, as habits of language as well as thought.

It also allows us to dispense entirely with the assumption that the *Essais* can and should be explicated in terms of a single world view, and that it is in moments of consonance that Montaigne's presence is most truthfully disclosed. Instead of scrutinizing the work for evidence of latent conceptual patterns, persisting despite its self-critical impulse, our task becomes one of analysing the *Essais* as a text in conversation both with other texts and with itself. From this perspective, questions of coherence and continuity lose much of their importance: the focus of attention shifts instead towards recomposing the supple and plural discourses deployed by the text. This approach, I contend, equips us not only for understanding Montaigne's complex exploration of freedom and self, but for seeing his own text, his *bricolage*, as an expression of his liberty.

[29] For the concept of *bricolage*, see Lévi-Strauss 1962 and Derrida 1967, esp. p. 418.

CHAPTER I

# *Freedom and the* essai

## I

Montaigne's decision to present his thoughts as disparate and eclectic reflections marked by tension and doubt, rather than work them into a systematic and controlled argument, has rightly come to be considered fundamental to any credible account of the *Essais*. His [C]'style, and [his] mind, alike go a-roaming', essaying topics from contrasting angles; indeed, he claims to have [C]'some personal obligation, to speak only by halves, to speak confusedly, to speak discordantly'.[1] The text moves restlessly from one subject to another, delighting in counter-examples, qualifications and sudden reversals of perspective, offering monstrous 'ravings', vain 'stupidities' and idle 'fancies' rather than purposive arguments or authoritative statements of position.[2]

These labyrinthine digressions and cultivated discontinuities provide the foundation for Montaigne's distinctive representation of the self as a mobile, ephemeral and fragmentary entity, defined not by [B]'being' but 'passage', in keeping with his conception of life as [B]'a material and corporeal movement: an action by its very essence imperfect, and irregular'.[3] At a still more fundamental level, his efforts to [B]'represent a continual agitation and mutation of [his] thoughts, whatever subject they light on' serve to identify the *Essais* (in Jean-Yves Pouilloux's seminal formulation) as a book concerned with *penser* rather than *pensée* – with the activity of thinking

[1] [C]'Mon stile, et mon esprit, vont vagabondant de mesmes: [ . . . ] Joint, qu'à l'advanture ay-je quelque obligation particuliere, à ne dire qu'à demy, à dire confusement, à dire discordamment'. III.9: P 1041–2, V 994–6, F 761–2.

[2] [A]'Chimeres et monstres fantasques' (I.8: P 55, V 33, F 21); [A]'crotesques et corps monstrueux' (I.27: P 189, V 183, F 135); 'resveries' (I.25: P 150, V 146, F 106[A]; II.18: P 704, V 665, F 504[C]); [A]'inepties' (I.25: P 153, V 148, F 108; II.37: P 823, V 783, F 595); [B]'fadaises' (III.1: P 829, V 790, F 599); 'fantasies' (II.10: P 428, V 407, F 296[A]; III.9: P 989, V 964, F 721[B]).

[3] [B]'L'estre', 'le passage' (III.2: P 845, V 805, F 611); [B]'un mouvement materiel et corporel: action imparfaicte de sa propre essence, et desreglée' (III.9: P 1034, V 988, F 756). See Rigolot 1988, Starobinski 1993, Jeanneret 2001 and Nakam 2006.

complemented by a further dimension of philosophical freedom – the liberty, made possible by the *essai* form, to tackle subjects under a multiplicity of guises, without surrendering to any one conclusion, and to try out ideas without binding oneself, either through assent or dissent, to the propositional content of one's discourse. Underlying this approach to thinking and writing is a form of ethical as much as epistemological scepticism, founded on a rejection of systematic and dogmatic philosophy as a source not merely of error and illusion, but of perturbation and servitude.

The fifth and final section of this chapter draws out the implications of this analysis of freedom as a defining property of the *essai* for Montaigne's insistence that his text represents or expresses him – that it yields knowledge of himself, and not merely of things, as a book 'consubstantial' with its author. This set of claims, I suggest, relies not on a mimetic conception of the text as a faithful depiction of its subject, but on the validation of its author's autonomous and self-sufficient agency. Montaigne's text represents him because it is 'exactly [his] own' ('exactement mien') – because it bears the unmistakable impression of his own intellectual and moral qualities. The language of dependency and ownership deployed by Montaigne here emerges not only as a central component of his 'accidental' philosophy,[14] but as a crucial dimension of his conception of the self.

## II

For all his scepticism about our ability to draw lessons from the ancients, Montaigne remains deeply committed to the possibility of 'speaking with the dead' – to a conception of writing as a form of conversation and exchange (*conference*, *commerce*) with classical texts.[15] This appeal to the classics is at its most visible in the case of the frequent (predominantly Latin) quotations that structure the text, contrasting both typographically and linguistically with the continuous flow of Montaigne's vernacular prose.[16] His conversation with the dead is not limited, however, to these instances of conscious and visible citation. His instinct is to turn to the classics in search both of thinking matter and of an idiom or language within which to work through and articulate his ideas. As he explains in *On books*, C 'I make others

[14] On 'accidental philosophy,' see Hartle 2003, which takes as its prompt Montaigne's description of himself as a C 'nouvelle figure: Un philosophe impremedité et fortuit'. II.12: P 578, V 546, F 409.

[15] The phrase is borrowed from Pieters 2006; see further Grafton 1997. For the *Essais* as witness to a 'crisis of exemplarity' in late Renaissance literature, see Hampton 1990.

[16] The paragraph breaks found in Pierre Villey's edition (and Donald Frame's translation) are an editorial artifice. The new Pléiade edition restores the unity of Montaigne's dense, continuous prose, interrupted only by chapter breaks and occasional, indented quotations.

say, <not before me, but after me>, what I cannot say so well', whether due to the 'weakness' of his 'language' or of his 'understanding'.[17] The text here emerges as a discursive space inhabited by the ruined fragments of other texts – as a cultural artefact constituted through the continual 'essaying' of examples, arguments and rhetorical strategies excavated from predominantly ancient sources.[18]

Montaigne's familiarity with the classics is presented as a product of nature and effortless dabbling, rather than as the fruit of erudite study. His Latin, he claims, was acquired [A]'without art, without books, with grammar or precept, without the whip, and without tears', having been received from the cradle, as his mother tongue, from a German tutor wholly ignorant of French.[19] As for his knowledge of Greek, Montaigne's unabashed profession of absolute ignorance – although almost certainly an exaggeration – further underlines the gap separating him from the figure of the scholar, devoted to the patient and painstaking study of books.[20] By his own admission, certainly, Montaigne received an expensive and first-rate humanist education at the recently established Collège de Guyenne in Bordeaux, described in the *Essais* as [A]'flourishing greatly at that time, and the best in France'.[21] He insists, however, that this training left him [A]'without any benefit that [he] can place in evidence now', other than the

[17] [C]'Je fay dire aux autres, <non à ma teste, mais à ma suite,> ce que je ne puis si bien dire, ~~tantost~~ par foiblesse de mon langage, ~~tantost~~ <ou> par foiblesse de mon sens'. II.10: P 428, V 408, F 296.

[18] 'Each essay presents a ruin and the *Essais* as a whole represent the ruins of antiquity'. Sedley 2005, p. 44. See also Boccassini 1993 and McGowan 2000.

[19] [A]'Sans art, sans livre, sans grammaire ou precepte, sans fouet, et sans larmes'. I.25: P 180, V 173–4, F 128.

[20] [A]'Je n'entens rien au Grec'. II.4: P 382, V 363, F 262. On other occasions, Montaigne is somewhat less emphatic. [A]'As for Greek, of which I have practically no knowledge at all' ('quant au Grec, duquel je n'ay quasi du tout point d'intelligence'). I.25: P 181, V 174, F 129. [A]'I do not take much [. . . ] to [books] in Greek, because my judgment cannot do its work with a childish and ~~average~~ [C]apprentice [A]understanding' ('je ne me prens gueres [. . . ] aux [livres] Grecs, par ce que mon jugement ne sçait pas faire ses besoignes d'une puerile et ~~moyenne~~ [C]apprantisse [A]intelligence'). II.10: P 430, V 409–10, F 297. These assertions should not, however, be taken too literally: of the 75 sentences painted on the ceiling and beams of Montaigne's library, more than half are in Greek (Legros 2000). Moreover, his Greek hand (as found in the Bordeaux Copy) suggests, at the very least, a facility in writing the language and some familiarity with its meaning (see Montaigne 2002a and 2002b, fols. 177r and 490r). Richard Sayce notes, however, that the scattered Greek quotations of the *Essais* 'seem to come almost entirely from intermediate sources', and that it is 'certain' that he read Plutarch and Herodotus in French translation, a fact proved 'by numerous verbatim transcriptions' (Sayce 1972, p. 29). On Montaigne's Greek see further Christodoulou 1992 and Legros 1999.

[21] I.25: P 180, V 175, F 129. For the 'programme d'études' at the Collège de Guyenne, see Vinet 1886; see also Gaullier 1874, Gorris Camos 2001, and, on schools in Renaissance France more generally, Huppert 1984. Trinquet 1972 remains the only extended study of Montaigne's youth and education, even though its methodology and some of its central claims have now been discredited (see Balsamo 2008).

corruption of his native Latin.[22] The same logic is applied to his plundering of classical texts, a practice that purports to be haphazard and ill-disciplined, innocent of sustained effort and learning: [C]'I have not studied one bit to make a book: but I have studied a bit, because I had made it: if it is studying a bit, to skim over and pinch, by his head, or by his feet, now one author, now another'.[23]

This emphasis on punctual, disconnected reading links the *Essais* to a practice central to humanist pedagogy and which Montaigne himself (for all his protestations of ignorance) would assuredly have encountered at school: the compilation of commonplace-books.[24] These were personal notebooks into which pupils were expected to copy quotations, arguments and examples culled from authoritative and exemplary texts. These extracts were typically arranged under thematic headings to facilitate their redeployment in the student's own compositions. Schoolboys were thus encouraged to read texts extensively rather than intensively, approaching them as resources to be exploited and appropriated – as repositories of commonplaces, offering variations on familiar topics and themes, to be put to use in new settings. Montaigne's emphasis on the spontaneity and disorder of his reading and writing certainly contrasts with the methodical, orderly habits his humanist tutors would have sought to inculcate. Nevertheless, the commonplace book provides a vital context for his conception of the *Essais* as an [C]'ill-fitted patchwork'[25] formed through the assembly and reworking of borrowed materials into new patterns of thought.

The shift from commonplace to *essai*, conversely, reflects the pressures inherent in this intellectual inheritance.[26] For even while advertising his ready recourse to intertextual material, Montaigne is anxious to distinguish his text from what he refers to disparagingly in *On physiognomy* as [C]'those concoctions of commonplaces' ('ces pastissages de lieux communs'), which 'serve to show us off, not to guide us'.[27] His [B]'borrowed ~~ornaments~~ <adornments>' are merely a concession to [B]'public opinion', [C]'the fancy

[22] [A]'Sans aucun fruit, que je peusse à present mettre en compte'. I.25: P 182, V 175, F 130.

[23] [C]'Je n'ay aucunement estudié pour faire un livre: mais j'ay aucunement estudié, pour ce que je l'avoy faict: si c'est aucunement estudier, qu'effleurer et pincer, par la teste, ou par les pieds, tantost un autheur, tantost un autre'. II.18: P 704, V 666, F 505.

[24] See Moss 2000, esp. p. 213. For an important assessment of Montaigne's debt – and departure – from this model, see Goyet 1986–7.

[25] [C]'Une marqueterie mal jointe'. III.9: P 1008, V 964, F 736.

[26] On imitation as a source of anxiety in the *Essais* and Renaissance literature more generally, see Cave 1979, Rigolot 1982 and Greene 1986. On the problem of originality and imitation in the *Essais*, see Compagnon 1979, Beaujour 1980 and Cave 1982.

[27] [C]'À nous montrer, non à nous conduire'. III.12: P 1103, V 1056, F 808–9.

of the age ~~and the exhortations of others~~ <and idleness>': they [C]'may be useful to someone else', but he himself does not set stock by them.[28] Others may accuse him of having [C]'only made a bunch of other people's flowers', a *florilegium* of borrowed quotations. Yet had he followed his own advice, instead of yielding to convention, he [C]'would at all hazards have spoken absolutely alone'.[29] The *Essais* here emerge as the antitype of the *florilegium* or *cento* for which they might otherwise be mistaken. When Montaigne hides one of his quotations by incorporating it seamlessly into his own reflections, [C]'transplanting it into [his] own soil and confounding it with [his] own', he is careful to [C]'give it some particular application with [his] own hand, so that it may be less purely someone else's'.[30] His stated [B]'design' is 'to make a show only of what is [his] own, and of what is [his] own by nature';[31] the [B]'principal end and perfection' of his work being that it is 'exactly [his] own'.[32]

This language of ownership has conventionally tended to be interpreted as an appeal to originality and individuality as markers of true authorship. Montaigne's ambivalence towards his predecessors, in this light, reflects anxieties about influence and repetition, as obstacles to authentic, spontaneous self-expression. But this is to overlook the central thrust of the *Essais*'s problematic relationship with past texts: Montaigne's account of his 'borrowings' as challenges to his authorial independence and agency, rather than to his identity.

The metaphor of ownership must in the first place be understood in the context of sixteenth-century conceptions of intellectual authorship and production. As Kathy Eden has shown, Montaigne's claim to own his text draws on Erasmian notions of both shared and private property in intellectual goods.[33] His borrowings are not, from this perspective, examples of theft because wisdom (and specifically the wisdom conveyed by the

[28] [B]'Certes j'ay donné à l'opinion publique, que ces ~~ornemens~~ <parements> empruntez m'accompaignent: [...] [C]Je m'en charge de plus fort, tous les jours, outre ma proposition et ma forme premiere, sur la fantasie du siecle: et ~~enhortemens d'autruy~~ <par oisiveté>. S'il me messied à moy, comme je le croy, n'importe: il peut estre utile à quelque autre'. III.12: P 1102–3, V 1055, F 808.

[29] [C]'Un amas de fleurs estrangeres'. [C]'À tout hazard, j'eusse parlé tout fin seul'. III.12: P 1102, V 1055, F 808.

[30] [C]'Si j'en transplante quelcun en mon solage, et confons aux miens'. II.10: P 428, V 387, F 296. [C]'Je luy donne quelque particuliere adresse de ma main, à ce qu'il soit d'autant moins purement estranger'. III.12: P 1103, V 1056, F 809. See also I.25: P 178, V 171, F 127[C].

[31] [B]'Mon dessein. Qui ne veux faire montre que du mien et de ce qui est mien par nature'. III.12: P 1102, V 1055, F 808.

[32] [B]'Sa fin principale et perfection, c'est d'estre exactement mien'. III.5: P 918, V 875, F 667.

[33] Eden 2008. For an exploration of these themes in Erasmus' *Adages*, see Eden 2001.

classical tradition) belongs to all. The materials upon which he draws are in fact *commune*, not *alienum*:

> [A]Truth and reason are common to everyone, and no more belong to the man who first spoke them, than to the man who says them later. [C]It is no more according to Plato, than according to me: since he and I understand and see it in the same way.[34]

Not only does Montaigne share in the intellectual wealth of his predecessors, but he has *appropriated* their materials, digesting and transforming them in such a way as to make them wholly proper to him, an integral and inalienable part of himself:

> [A]The bees plunder the flowers here and there, but afterward they make of them honey, which is all theirs; it is no longer thyme, or marjoram: Even so with the pieces borrowed from others, he will transform and blend them, to make a work that is all his own: to wit his judgment.[35]

By claiming the fragments that he borrows as his 'own', Montaigne is at once anchoring his text in a common intellectual inheritance and affirming his ability to reshape these materials to his own particular ends.

The relevant distinction, then, is not between pre-existing discourse that is borrowed or stolen and new material that originates with Montaigne. The claim that truth and reason belong to all itself derives from Seneca's claim in the *Epistulae* that 'any truth [. . . ] is my property [*meum est*]' and that 'the best ideas are common property [*communia*]' – a *topos* reworked in the Renaissance by both Petrarch and Erasmus.[36] The metaphor of the bees, similarly, represents a familiar classical *topos*, and thus an instance of the very practice that it sets out to justify.[37] The contrast is rather between those borrowings that remain stubbornly 'estranger', and those that are successfully digested, incorporated, transplanted – between those parts of a text that merely reflect the agency of others, and those that truly testify to the author's 'ouvrage'.

The problem raised by imitation, in this perspective, has more to do with independence than with what we would now call originality. As Pierre Force

[34] [A]'La verité et la raison sont communes à un chacun, et ne sont non plus à qui les a dites premierement, qu'à qui les dit après. [C]Ce n'est non plus selon Platon, que selon moy: puis que luy et moy l'entendons et voyons de mesme'. I.25: P 157, V 152, F 111.

[35] [A]'Les abeilles pillotent deçà delà les fleurs, mais elles en font après le miel, qui est tout leur; ce n'est plus thin, ny marjolaine: Ainsi les pieces empruntées d'autruy, il les transformera et confondra, pour en faire un ouvrage tout sien: à sçavoir son jugement'. I.25: P 157, V 152, F 111.

[36] Eden 2008, pp. 23–31. Cf. Seneca 1989, 12.11, p. 72.

[37] Pigman 1980. Cf. Seneca 1989, II.84.3, p. 276.

legacy, Boutcher argues, was 'precisely the freedom to judge others' philosophical legacies on their own merits', 'by freely assessing the philosophical merit of the bequest and moving the discussion on unhampered by any obligations to the legator', in such a way that 'the authority of a legacy with its heirs' is no longer taken to be 'conditioned by the origins of the philosophical gift, by the moral character of its donor or author, by the social tradition identifying it as a source of guidance'.[44] Richard Scholar has similarly characterised Montaigne's 'turn of mind' as 'free-thinking', a phrase intended to recall the 'anti-authoritarian topos' of the *libertas philosophandi* and, more particularly, the commonplace saying 'amicus Plato, magis amica veritas' ('Plato is my friend but a greater friend is truth'). Free-thinking, in Scholar's analysis, means thinking for oneself 'in the company' of past writers, subjecting one's reading to the test of one's own experience, and striving 'to reflect upon a particular question by asking not "What does Plato [or any other figure of authority] think about it?" [...] but "What do I think about it? Do I accept what Plato says?"'[45]

Montaigne is concerned not merely to underline his own intellectual liberty but to encourage, in turn, a similar independence of judgment and interpretation in his readers. The *Essais* are destined not for [C]'beginners'[46] (*principians*) but for those possessed of [B]'a penetrating mind', capable of following the 'little tracks' that Montaigne has left behind and to grasp what he has merely 'pointed to with [his] finger'.[47] This statement implies not that he writes in a purposefully evasive or enigmatic manner, but rather that he allows and expects his readers to bring their own understanding and judgment to bear upon his text. As Terence Cave has put it:

> It is not that Montaigne writes indeterminately; few authors of discursive prose have been as meticulously precise as he was in momentarily arresting and recording the fugitive creatures that passed through his mind. He leaves carefully calculated spaces, gaps, suspensions of assent, shifts of direction, that allow his readers plenty of room to participate in the exercise.[48]

The self-reflexive and self-critical force of the *Essais* belies traditional interpretations of the text as a leisurely and companionable *livre de chevet*, a 'livre de sagesse' or moral handbook offering humane and aphoristic 'teachings' to an essentially docile reader.

[44] Boutcher 2005, p. 27. On the use of Montaigne in twentieth-century debates over the status of the humanities in America 'to naturalise a particular kind of philosophical-critical agency, [...] as an index of the receptive and self-reflexive agency, the lived mental experience, of the unsystematic critical mind', see Boutcher 2004 (quotation at p. 35).

[45] Scholar 2006, pp. 44–8; see also Scholar 2007 and 2010.

[46] III.8: P 983, V 938, F 716. [47] III.9: P 1029, V 983, F 751. [48] Cave 2007, p. 115.

[C]It is the inattentive reader who loses my subject, not I. Some word about it will always be found off in a corner, which will not fail to be sufficient, though it takes little room. [. . .] [B]I want the matter to make its own divisions. It shows well enough where it changes, where it concludes, where it begins, where it resumes: without my interlacing it with words, with links and seams introduced for the benefit of weak or heedless ears: and without writing glosses on myself. Who is there who would rather not be read, than be read sleepily or in passing?'[49]

Montaigne has not produced a textbook: he is not offering lessons to his readers. He has not digested his thoughts into an easily consumable form; nor has he organised and summarised them using headings and conclusions that tell us what it is we are expected to learn. Instead of expounding a doctrine or set of teachings, Montaigne invites us to draw our own conclusions from his reflections and to appropriate and incorporate his text into our own enquiries and meditations: [C]'how many stories have I spread around which say nothing of themselves, but from which anyone who troubles to pluck them with a little more ~~ingenuity~~ <care> will produce numberless essays?'[50]

Montaigne's philosophical enterprise, as both Boutcher and Scholar make clear, is shaped not merely by a sceptical retreat from dogmatism, but by a determination to free his reason and judgment from tutelage and dependency – not merely, that is, by an epistemological concern with the conditions of human knowledge, but by an ethical interest in independent agency. My aim in what follows is to carry this analysis one step further. Montaigne's refusal to submit to the authority of his philosophical predecessors, I argue, reflects his commitment to moral, as well as intellectual, autonomy: thinking independently matters not only for its own sake, or for the sake of the truth, but for the sake of living well. For both Montaigne and his intended readers, the point of 'essaying' one's judgment is to learn how to live (not only how to think) for oneself.

The purpose of philosophy for Montaigne, as Pierre Force has recently emphasised, lies not in the pursuit of 'doctrinal coherence', but (to quote the *Essais*) in [A]'a continual exercise of the soul'. 'Exercise' here connotes

[49] [C]'C'est l'indiligent lecteur, qui perd mon subject; non pas moy. Il s'en trouvera tousjours en un coing quelque mot, qui ne laisse pas d'estre bastant, quoy qu'il soit serré. [. . .] [B]J'entends que la matiere se distingue soy-mesmes. Elle montre assez où elle se change, où elle conclud, où elle commence, où elle se reprend: sans l'entrelasser de parolles, de liaison, et de cousture, introduictes pour le service des oreilles foibles, ou nonchallantes: et sans me gloser moy-mesme. Qui est celuy, qui n'ayme mieux n'estre pas leu, que de l'estre en dormant ou en fuyant?' III.9: P 1041–2, V 994, F 761. See also I.25: P 178–9, V 172, F 127[A].

[50] [C]'Et combien y ay-je espandu d'histoires, qui ne disent mot, lesquelles qui voudra esplucher un peu plus ~~ingenieusement~~ <curieusement>, en produira infinis Essais?' I.39: P 255, V 251, F 185.

not merely use or application but *training*: as Force explains, 'philosophers exercise their souls as athletes exercise their bodies in order to achieve spiritual health, knowing of course that perfect wisdom is out of reach and philosophers, as lovers of wisdom, can only strive for what they love'.[51] In a similar vein, Scholar presents the *Essais* as an exacting cognitive exercise, Montaigne's 'quest being to try out his mind on the questions that his experience of life and his reading raised for him and, where he could, to rescue and befriend the truth'.[52] This emphasis on the *essai* as an instrument of *intellectual* training is echoed in turn by Force: 'philosophizing is a way of exercising one's judgment'; Montaigne's concern is with 'intellectual activity as a way of exercising both mind and judgment'.[53]

Montaigne, however, conceives of philosophy in a humanist vein, as a discipline in service of life. His 'continual exercise of the soul', accordingly, is not limited to the training of the mind. The passage in *On pedantry* from which this quotation is excerpted, as Force himself notes, opposes [A]'words' (*les parolles*) and 'things' (*les choses*), and in particular the rhetorical training of the Athenians, which equipped them 'to disentangle themselves from a sophistical argument and to overthrow the imposture of words captiously interlaced', to the ascetic exercises of the Spartans, who learnt instead to confront 'the lures of sensual pleasure' and 'the threats of fortune and death'.[54] The contrast in question, then, is not merely between philosophy as the production of doctrine (*sçavoir*, *science*) and philosophy as self-reflexive, mental exercise, but between verbal and practical training, or (as Montaigne makes clear in the immediately preceding paragraph) learning and wisdom, [A]'precepts and words' and 'examples and works', 'a knowledge *in* the soul', and one that has become 'its character and habit'.[55]

This distinction between erudition and moral training is central not only to *On pedantry*, but to the chapter which immediately succeeds it, *On the education of children*. [A]'A child of noble family', Montaigne writes, is to study letters neither for (pecuniary) 'gain' nor for 'external commodities', but 'to enrich and adorn himself inwardly'. The pursuit of such outward, material advantages is not only 'unworthy of the graces and favour of the Muses', but incompatible with the self-sufficiency of the well born, because

[51] [A]'Une continuelle excercitation de l'ame'. I.24: P 148, V 143, F 105. Force 2009, pp. 530–1.

[52] Scholar 2010, p. 1. [53] Force 2005, p. 24; see Force 2009, pp. 531, 533.

[54] [A]'À Athenes on aprenoit à bien dire, et icy [en Lacedemone] à bien faire: là à se desmesler d'un argument sophistique, et à rabattre l'imposture des mots captieusement entrelassez; icy à se desmesler des appats de la volupté, et à rabatre d'un [C]grand [A]courage ~~invincible~~ les menasses de la fortune et de la mort'. I.24: P 148, V 143, F 105.

[55] [A]'Non seulement de preceptes et parolles, mais principalement d'exemples et d'oeuvres: afin que ce ne fust pas une science en leur ame, mais sa complexion et habitude'. I.24: P 148, V 142–3, F 105.

it 'looks to others and depends on them'. The purpose of education is to fashion 'able' rather than 'learned' men: the (true) [C]'gain' afforded by study, as Montaigne expresses it later on in the chapter, is 'to have become better and wiser by it'. In selecting a tutor, accordingly, one should seek out a [A]'well-made rather than well-filled head', attending to 'character and understanding' rather than 'learning'.[56]

The responsibility of the instructor, on this account, is to exercise the moral as well as the intellectual faculties of his charge. The training of the 'understanding' (*entendement*) is inseparably connected to the formation of 'character' (*mœurs*), a conjunction already established in *On pedantry* through the pairing of 'judgment' with 'virtue', and of 'understanding' with 'conscience'.[57] The emancipation of thought from captivity to memory and established authority is harnessed (and subordinate) to the cultivation of *moral* freedom:

> [A]The first lessons, in which we should steep his mind, must be those that regulate his behaviour and his sense, that will teach him to know himself, and to know how to die well and live well. [C]Among the liberal arts, let us start with the art which makes us free.[58]

Only later, when [A]'his judgment is already formed', should a pupil be taught 'the meaning of logic, physics, geometry, rhetoric'.[59] Moral philosophy is here singled out, among all the liberal arts, as the most [C]'directly and professedly useful' for the 'edification and service of our life'.[60] Freedom, on this account, consists not merely in the exercise of intellectual autonomy, but in an art of existence centred around self-knowledge.

[56] [A]'À un enfant de maison, qui recherche les lettres, non pour le gaing (car une ~~si vile~~ fin ~~et~~ si abjecte, est indigne de la grace et faveur des Muses, et puis elle regarde et depend d'autruy) ny tant pour les commoditez externes, que pour les siennes propres, et pour s'en enrichir et parer au dedans, ayant plustost envie d'en ~~tirer un~~ <reussir> habil' homme, qu'~~un~~ homme sçavant, je voudrois aussi qu'on fust soigneux de luy choisir un conducteur, qui eust plustost la teste bien faicte, que bien pleine: et qu'on y requist tous les deux, mais plus les mœurs et l'entendement que la science'. I.25: P 155, V 150, F 110. [C]'Le guain de nostre estude, c'est d'en estre devenu meilleur et plus sage'. I.25: P 157, V 152, F 112.

[57] [A]'De vray le soing et la despence de nos peres, ne vise qu'à nous ~~garnir~~ [C]meubler [A]la teste de science: du jugement et de la vertu, peu de nouvelles. [. . . ] Nous ne travaillons qu'à remplir la memoire, et laissons l'entendement [C]et la conscience [A]vuide'. I.24: P 141, V 136, F 100.

[58] [A]'Les premiers discours, dequoy on luy doit abreuver l'entendement, ce doivent estre ceux, qui reglent ses mœurs et son sens, qui luy apprendront à se cognoistre, et à sçavoir bien mourir et bien vivre. [C]Entre les arts liberaux, commençons par l'art qui nous faict libres'. I.25: P 165, V 159, F 117.

[59] [A]'Ayant desjà le jugement formé'. I.25: P 166, V 160, F 118.

[60] [C]'Elles [les arts liberaux] servent toutes ~~aucunement~~ <voirement en quelque manière> à l'instruction de nostre vie, et à son usage: [. . . ] Mais choisissons celle qui y sert directement et professoirement'. I.25: P 165, V 159, F 117.

This emphasis on living independently, as well as thinking independently, is fundamental to the rhetoric of appropriation and assimilation that pervades both *On pedantry* and *On the education of children*. Montaigne's distinction between *habile* and *docte*, between *sage* and *sçavant*, is articulated through a contrast between that which is inwardly digested and that which is merely held in keeping, or superficially lodged:

> [A]Just as birds sometimes go in quest of grain, and carry it in their beak without tasting it, to give a beakful to their little ones, so our pedants go pillaging knowledge in books, and lodge it only on the end of their lips, in order merely to disgorge it, and scatter it to the winds.[61]

A key implication of this metaphor, as we saw in the previous section, is that material may be borrowed and yet transformed in such a way that it becomes part of our own substance: [A]'it is a sign of rawness and indigestion to disgorge food just as we swallowed it: the stomach has not done its work, if it has not changed the condition and form, of what it has been given to cook.'[62] That process of incorporation, however, is figured not merely as one of appropriation, but as one of vital nourishment. It is not enough for us to simply transform what we have swallowed, to rework it in such a way that we can legitimately call it our own. It is also necessary that it should *feed* us: for [A]'what good does it do us to have our belly full of meat, if it is not digested, if it is not transformed inside us? If it does not augment and strengthen us?'[63] To transform what we read, to make it our own, is to apply it to the conduct of our own self – to subordinate it to the 'edification and service of our life' – and to thereby transform ourselves. It is in this light, I suggest, that one should understand Montaigne's own claim to [C]'promptly apply' all that he studies 'to himself, or rather within himself'.[64]

This close identification of philosophical liberty with ethical freedom helps to explain an apparent paradox within Montaigne's account of independent judgment and thought. As Scholar makes clear, 'free-thinking, for

[61] [A]'Tout ainsi que les oyseaux vont quelquefois à la queste du grain, et le portent au bec sans le taster, pour en faire bechée à leurs petits: ainsi nos pedantes vont pillotans la science dans les livres, et ne la logent qu'au bout de leurs lèvres, pour la dégorger seulement, et mettre au vent'. I.24: P 141, V 136, F 100.

[62] [A]'C'est tesmoignage de crudité et indigestion que de regorger la viande comme on l'a avallée: l'estomach n'a pas faict son operation, s'il n'a faict changer la façon et la forme, à ce qu'on luy avoit donné à cuire.' I.25: P 156, V 151, F 111.

[63] [A]'Que nous sert-il d'avoir la panse pleine de viande, si elle ne se digere, si elle ne se transforme en nous? si elle ne nous augmente et fortifie?' I.24: P 142, V 137, F 101.

[64] [C]'Et si j'estudie autre chose, c'est pour soudain le coucher sur moy, ou en moy, pour mieux dire'. II.6: P 397, V 378, F 273.

affirming nor denying the truth of any given proposition) is characterised in the *Apology* as a vindication of human liberty.

[B]Where others are carried away, either by the custom of their country, or by their parental upbringing, or by chance, as by a tempest, without judgment and without choice, indeed most often before the age of discretion, to such or such an opinion, to the Stoic or Epicurean sect, to which they find themselves pledged, enslaved, and fastened, as to a prey they have bitten into and cannot shake loose: [C]*to whatever doctrine they have been driven, as by a storm, to it they cling as to a rock.* [B]Why shall it not be granted similarly to these [C]men [B]~~here~~ [the Pyrrhonians] to maintain their liberty, and to consider things without obligation and servitude? [C]*The more free and independent because their power to judge is intact.*

Not only are they able to escape the errors and quarrels that afflict dogmatic philosophers, but the Pyrrhonians are [C]'released from the necessity that bridles others'.[77]

This freedom 'to consider things without obligation and servitude', it is important to stress, does not simply involve the power to think for oneself, independent of the influence of custom, education or allegiance to a particular school of thought. These forces are here represented as the *instruments* of subjection, not as the *masters* to whom our minds are held captive. The freedom of the Pyrrhonians is located instead in the mind's relationship to its objects – in the ability to conceive and consider (to 'essay') ideas [A]'without inclination or approbation on either side', without surrendering to and becoming enslaved to them. This attitude of indifferent detachment extends even to their own profession of doubt. By [A]'taking all things in without adherence or consent', the Pyrrhonians find themselves 'exempt from the agitations we receive through the impression of the opinion and knowledge we think we have of things', and thereby 'free themselves [ . . . ] from jealousy on behalf of their doctrine'. Just as Montaigne refuses to pledge his judgment to the authority of another man, so the Pyrrhonians do not allow themselves to be ruled by any given proposition: they are able to 'maintain their liberty', by applying their judgment to opinions

[77] [B]'Et où les autres sont portez, ou par la coustume de leur païs, ou par l'institution des parens, ou par rencontre, comme par une tempeste, sans jugement et sans choix, voire le plus souvent avant l'aage de discretion, à telle ou telle opinion, à la secte ou Stoïque ou Épicurienne, à laquelle ils se treuvent hypothequez, asserviz et collez, comme à une prise qu'ils ne peuvent desmordre: [C]*ad quamcumque disciplinam, uelut tempestate, delati, ad eam, tanquam ad saxum, adhaerescunt* [Cicero, *Academica priora*, II.3.8]. [B]Pourquoy à ~~ceux icy~~ [C]ceux-cy, [B]ne sera-il pareillement concedé, de maintenir leur liberté, et considerer les choses sans obligation et servitude? [C]*Hoc liberiores et solutiores, quod integra illis est iudicandi potestas* [Cicero, *Academica priora*, II.3.8]. N'est-ce pas quelque advantage, de se trouver desengagé de la necessité, qui bride les autres?' II.12: P 531, V 503–4, F 373.

and arguments without committing and thereby submitting themselves to them as their masters.[78]

These two versions of liberty – freedom as the capacity to exercise one's judgment autonomously and as the ability to preserve that judgment from captivity to any one perspective or position – are found in close conjunction in *On presumption*. Montaigne concludes the catalogue of his deficiencies and imperfections with the following statement: [A]'this capacity for sifting truth, [B]whatever it may amount to in me, [A]and this free humour not to enslave my belief easily, I owe principally to myself'.[79] This assertion serves to legitimate his claim to be free of the vice of presumption, by confirming the sincerity and accuracy of his low opinion of himself. But it also focuses the reader's attention on the one quality which he is eager to attribute to himself: the ability to safeguard his *creance* from subjection. The upshot of this passage is, in the first place, to uphold Montaigne's independent jurisdiction over the formation of his judgment. He insists that [A]'the firmest and most general ideas' that he has are 'natural and all mine', that he has himself 'produced them crude and simple', and that he has merely 'established and fortified them by the authority of others and the arguments of the ancients', thereby perfecting his own original 'possession' of them. But he is also careful to emphasise his indifference towards the external objects of his mind's attention: he 'concentrates nearly all [his] affection upon [him]self and does not squander much of it elsewhere', 'turning [his] gaze inward' instead of 'looking straight ahead'.[80]

Intellectual freedom is thus best thought of not as an end in itself but as evidence of the moral status of the speaker – of the quality of his judgment and, more generally, the condition of his soul. The excellence of '*conference*' as an energetic encounter between [B]'vigorous and orderly minds' contrasts with the sycophantic performance of those who 'serve as a spectacle to the great and make a competitive parade of their wit

[78] [A]'Sans inclination, ny approbation d'une part ou d'autre'. [A]'Recevant tous objects sans application et consentement'. [A]'Exempte des agitations que nous recevons par l'impression de l'opinion et science, que nous pensons avoir des choses. [. . .] Voire ils s'exemptent par là, de la jalousie de leur discipline'. II.12: P 530, V 503, F 372.

[79] [A]'Ceste capacité de trier le vray, [B]quelle qu'elle soit en moy, [A]et cett' humeur libre de n'assubjectir aysément ma creance, je la dois principallement à moy'. II.17: P 697, V 658, F 499.

[80] [A]'Les plus fermes imaginations que j'aye, et generalles, ~~ce sont celles mesmes~~ [B]sont celles [A]qui par maniere de dire, nasquirent avec moy: [B]elles sont naturelles, et toutes miennes. [A]Je les produisis crues et simples, [. . .] depuis je les ay establies et fortifiées par l'authorité d'autruy, et par les sains exemples des anciens, ausquels je me suis rencontré conforme en jugement: Ceux-là ~~me les ont mises en main~~ [C]m'en ont asseuré de la prinse, [A]et m'en ont donné la jouyssance et possession [C]plus [A]~~entiere~~ <claire>'. II.17: P 697, V 658, F 499. [A]'L'affection que je me porte, singuliere, comme celuy qui la ramene quasi toute à moy, et qui ne l'espands gueres hors de là. [. . .]. Le monde regarde tousjours vis à vis: moy, je replie ma veue au dedans'. II.17: P 696-7, V 657, F 499.

and chatter'.[81] Those eminent or learned persons, meanwhile, who rely on intimidating their audience into submission through their impressive demeanour and reputation are engaged in a [B]'tyrannie [ . . . ] parliere' that is no less hateful to Montaigne than that which is 'in acts' (*effectuelle*). [B]'The gravity, the gown, and the fortune of the speaker often give authority to vain and inept remarks', but Montaigne declares himself 'inclined to resist with all [his] mind these vain externals that delude our judgment through the senses'.[82]

Free conversation is sabotaged not only by servile flatterers driven by the pursuit of favour rather than truth or by self-appointed luminaries relying on awe rather than reason to persuade. Montaigne reserves his harshest criticism for those who are so enslaved to their own opinions that they cannot bear to hear them contested and contradicted. He admits to exasperation when dealing with interlocutors who, through [B]'ineptitude' rather than 'ignorance', lack the capacity to 'speak with order, prudently, and competently', and readily condemns his impatience in this regard: [B]'it is always a tyrannical ill humour to be unable to endure an approach different from your own'.[83] Crucially, however, what riles Montaigne is not the substance of these offending claims, but the way in which they are arrived at and defended.

Far from being irritated or unsettled when others disagree with him, he claims to [B]'enter into discussion and argument with great liberty and ease, inasmuch as opinion finds in [him] a bad soil to penetrate and take deep roots in'.[84] [B]'Contradictions of opinion [ . . . ] arouse and exercise' him, instead of 'offending' or 'altering' him.[85] So happy is he to see himself contradicted that he readily contradicts himself: [C]'my thinking so often contradicts and condemns itself that it is all one to me if another does the job'.[86] Indeed, even in light banter with friends, he brings [B]'more liberty

[81] [B]'Esprits vigoureux et reiglez'. 'Servir de spectacle aux grands, et faire à l'envy parade de son esprit, et de son caquet'. III.8: P 967, V 923, F 704.

[82] [B]'La gravité, la robbe, et la fortune de celuy qui parle, donne souvent credit à des propos vains et ineptes: [ . . . ] Je hay toute sorte de tyrannie, et la parliere, et l'effectuelle. Je me bande volontiers contre ces vaines circonstances, qui pipent nostre jugement par les sens'. III.8: P 975–6, V 931, F 710–11.

[83] [B]'Dire ordonnement, prudemment, et suffisamment, peu d'hommes le peuvent. Par ainsi la fauceté qui vient d'ignorance, ne m'offence point: c'est l'ineptie'. 'C'est tousjours un'aigreur tyrannique, de ne pouvoir souffrir une forme diverse à la sienne'. III.8: P 973, V 928, F 708–9.

[84] [B]'J'entre en conference et en dispute, avec grande liberté et facilité: d'autant que l'opinion trouve en moy le terrein mal propre à y penetrer, et y pousser de hautes racines'. III.8: P 967, V 923, F 704.

[85] [B]'Les contradictions donc des jugemens, ne m'offencent, ny m'alterent: elles m'esveillent seulement et m'exercent'. III.8: P 968, V 924, F 705.

[86] [C]'Mon imagination se contredit elle mesme si souvent, et condamne, que c'est tout un, qu'un autre le face'. III.8: P 969, V 924, F 705.