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## Montaigne and the Origins of Modern Philosophy

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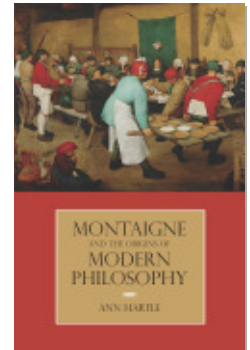
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## Chapter Seven



### The Character of the Free Individual

Because society is the association of individuals that is free from the control of government, it therefore serves to limit the power of government. In the *Essays*, Montaigne reveals the new character of the free individual that is necessary for the existence of a free society. This is not to say that every member of society must or can exhibit this character, but without the presence of a sufficient number of such individuals, society cannot remain free. This character has already been described in previous chapters as “the self-ordered soul” that is also sociable; as the combination in one man of the renunciation of mastery and the love of freedom; and as the man who is neither master nor slave.

#### Individuality and the Human Condition

Michael Oakeshott locates Montaigne within the tradition of what he calls the politics of skepticism. “Montaigne,” Oakeshott says, “has no illusions about human power.”<sup>1</sup> He describes the changes that were taking place at the very origins of modernity: “During the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, governments all over Europe were, in varying degrees, acquiring a power to control the activities and destinies of their subjects such as their predecessors had never enjoyed.” Now “the tireless, inquisitive, roving hand of government was beginning to be able to reach everywhere, accustoming the subject to the notion that nothing should be beyond its grasp.” According to Oakeshott, “the most significant of all these changes was . . . the gradual disappearance of the intermediate authorities which had formerly stood between a then weak central government and the subjects, leaving them naked before a power which in its magnitude was becoming comparable to a force of nature.”<sup>2</sup>

Not coincidentally, the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries saw “the emergence of the human individual in his modern idiom.”<sup>3</sup> According

to Oakeshott, the medieval condition of life was such that “relationships and allegiances normally sprang from status and rarely extricated themselves from the analogy of kinship. For the most part anonymity prevailed; individual human character was rarely observed because it was not there to be observed. What differentiated one man from another was insignificant when compared with what was enjoyed in common as members of a group of some sort.”<sup>4</sup> The individual “became unmistakable when the habit appeared of engaging in activities identified as ‘private’: indeed, the appearance of ‘privacy’ in human conduct is the obverse of the desuetude of the communal arrangements from which modern individuality sprang.”<sup>5</sup>

Oakeshott regards the emergence of this disposition to be an individual as “the pre-eminent event in modern European history.”<sup>6</sup> Unsurprisingly, Montaigne is one of the exemplars of this disposition. “The disposition to regard a high degree of individuality in conduct and in belief as the condition proper to mankind and as the main ingredient of human ‘happiness’ had become one of the significant dispositions of modern European character. What Petrarch did for one century, Montaigne did for another.”<sup>7</sup>

In *The Invention of Autonomy*, J. B. Schneewind argues that Montaigne was the first modern philosopher to attempt to articulate “a morality of self-governance.”<sup>8</sup> Schneewind claims that this morality of self-governance is grounded in what he regards as Montaigne’s moral skepticism: Montaigne’s “moral skepticism was the starting point of modern moral philosophy.”<sup>9</sup> The evidence that Schneewind finds for this moral skepticism includes Montaigne’s rejection of universal natural laws and his acknowledgment of the variety of customs and beliefs among different cultures. He concludes that, like the classical Pyrrhonists, Montaigne’s morality involves his adjustment of his beliefs to the demands of daily practice.

I would argue, however, that Montaigne’s understanding of the freedom of the individual is not to be identified with the radical autonomy of contemporary notions of liberalism or postmodernism. True, Montaigne’s character is that of the “self-ordered” individual, but he abhors vices and makes categorical moral judgments, for example, that cruelty is the extreme of all vice. Further, although Montaigne does often speak in terms of deferring to custom as the ancient skeptics did, he is also engaged in a project of reform, as we see in his reordering of the virtues and vices, and this reform implies a moral standard. In other words, there is a substantive good, the good of free association itself, that is at stake in Montaigne’s reformation of the moral life. Thus, there are distinct virtues that the individual must cultivate if the substantive good of society is to

be enjoyed. At the same time, there are also virtues that he must practice if society is to remain an association of free individuals.

What is at issue in the idea of the free individual can be expressed in terms of Constant's two kinds of freedom: political and personal. Montaigne clearly hates tyranny and wholeheartedly admires the ancients who willingly sacrificed their lives for the freedom of their country. On the other hand, he loves his own freedom and prefers private life to public occupations. These two freedoms are, at first glance, incompatible. The second seems to refer to a private life that turns people away from any common concerns and makes them indifferent to political freedom. If I can pursue my own economic goals in freedom, then what do I care whether I do so under a tyrannical or a democratic regime? The first seems to require a disregard for one's personal, private satisfaction for the good of the whole society. The compatibility of these two kinds of freedom is much more than a merely practical problem, for that compatibility implies a radical change both in the meaning of citizenship and in the set of virtues that are necessary for both personal goodness and life with other men. The reconciliation of personal with societal freedom requires a new character, one that is both necessary for the existence of a free society and suited for life in a free society. It is not enough to espouse the principles of liberalism, or even to place institutional limits on the power of the state and erect safeguards for the freedom of individuals. Only a certain kind of character, the formation of which depends on a reformation of human nature itself on the deepest level, makes freedom possible. Individuality is not simply given with "particularity" but must also be achieved: the individual is the self-ordered soul. Montaigne is unique among modern philosophers in presenting us with such a character.<sup>10</sup>

### Montaigne's Marvelous Weakness

The *Essays* bring to light a new notion of strength, very different from the moral strength of ancient philosophy. Recall that Caesar and Alexander actually "toughen" their souls by submitting their violent occupations to the practice of everyday life; in the tradition, their strength would be shown in their freedom from and transcendence of the needs of everyday life. When Montaigne says that his end is domestic and private, he implies that the domestic and private is a lower or weaker goal than public service or his own glory: "my powers [*forces*] are inadequate for such a purpose." Although Montaigne is a self-ordered soul, strong in himself, he often describes himself as weak. He must use the vocabulary of weak

and strong in order to capture what is new in his character. Weakness, therefore, is the way he expresses the fact that he acts “without striving,” without any internal moral struggle. Weakness is the absence of mastery within the soul.

Montaigne comes into the public in order to reveal himself, but he reveals himself not as a powerful conqueror or great mind, but rather as weak. In doing so, he emerges into the public without pride. He is the possible prince without pride and without mastery. The first thing that Montaigne says about himself in the first essay is: “I am marvelously weak.” His marvelous weakness is “in the direction of mercy and gentleness,” and this, according to the standard of weak and strong, makes him resemble the common people who are moved by compassion because they are weak.

How can his weakness be marvelous? Weakness looks like a failure to attain the end or perfection of the human form. According to the Aristotelian hierarchy of the moral order, weakness ranks just above vice. Hints of this hierarchy, and Montaigne’s assessment of it, come out especially in “Of Cruelty.” Montaigne begins with the opinion that “virtue is something other and more noble than the inclinations toward goodness that are born in us” (VS422, F306). Virtue is “more noble” because it involves struggle and the difficulty of mastering the passions and appetites. The difficult and rare is more noble or higher than the ease of inclination. But Montaigne is brought up short by the images of Socrates and Cato: he cannot imagine any difficulty or struggle in their practice of virtue and, therefore, struggle and mastery cannot be essential to virtue. The two-place hierarchy of virtue and goodness has been superseded by the three-place hierarchy of perfect habitual virtue, ordinary virtue (virtue as moral strength), and the goodness or innocence that belongs to those who simply happen to be born with a good temperament and a distaste for vice (VS425–26, F310).

Montaigne locates himself at the lowest place in this three-place hierarchy: he is very far from that first and most perfect degree of excellence in which virtue becomes a habit, and he has given little evidence of the second degree of virtue or moral strength. Had he been born with a more unruly temperament, things would have gone pitifully with him, for he has not experienced much firmness in his soul to withstand passions: “I do not know how to foster quarrels and conflict within me” (VS427, F311). Comparing himself to Socrates and to Stilpo (both of whom are said to have corrected their natural inclinations to vice through discipline and study), Montaigne says that he, on the contrary, has whatever good is in him simply by the chance of his birth (VS427, F311). Montaigne does not

or cannot imitate the loftiness of heroic virtue, and he does not strive for the perfection of virtue that would require the rule of reason in the soul. There seems to be no distance between what he is and what he should be.

By locating himself below the category of moral strength, Montaigne ranks himself in what looks like Aristotle's category of moral weakness. He calls attention to this by pointing out that the condition of goodness or innocence is "so close to imperfection and weakness" that it is difficult to distinguish them. Even the names "goodness" and "innocence" suggest a certain contempt (VS426, F310). Ordinary language lends itself to rank difficulty and mastery higher than goodness and innocence.

Montaigne's own goodness and innocence might be confused with moral weakness because in "Of Cruelty" he presents his goodness as "extreme softness." Since he attributes his goodness to his natural disposition, not to reason, it would be plausible to assume that extreme softness must be accompanied by cowardice.<sup>11</sup> So, an individual may have a natural inclination to one or another virtue, but not to all the virtues, because a natural disposition that inclines to one virtue also inclines to the contrary of another virtue. Therefore, a man who is naturally inclined to courage will also be naturally inclined to cruelty. Consistency of action requires the direction of the inclinations by reason to a single end. Looked at from the perspective of the tradition, Montaigne's goodness is just an impossible combination of natural inclinations.

But the picture of Montaigne's character that emerges in the *Essays* is not one of cowardice. On the contrary, he is not afraid of death. The gesture of laying down his arms is the risk of his life. In "Cowardice, Mother of Cruelty," he shows clearly that he hates cowardice and associates it with the character of the tyrant. His own openness, frankness, and honesty in dealing with the princes with whom he negotiates require courage, as he himself says. In "Of Physiognomy," the stories he relates about when he was captured and held for ransom and the threatened invasion of his house by enemy troops reveal a man whose openness is courageous. He hates especially the practice of dissimulation, because it originates in cowardice (VS647, F491).

Montaigne uses the traditional language of weakness and imperfection but displays a moral possibility that cannot be captured by the traditional moral categories. Goodness and innocence are "so close" to weakness and imperfection that even their names are "almost" terms of contempt. Montaigne has gone outside the ancient hierarchy to a position that, from the perspective of that hierarchy, looks like weakness. In fact, however, he is not holding himself accountable to that hierarchy but rather to an entirely new moral vision.

The distinction between classical virtue and Montaigne's notion of goodness can be seen in his description of Cato the Younger, one of his two exemplars of perfect virtue. Those who attribute Cato's death to ambition and the desire for glory are, he says, fools (VS231, F171). Rather, Cato acted for the nobility and beauty of the act itself and took great pleasure in it. Montaigne says: "I go so far in that belief that I begin to doubt whether he would have wanted to be deprived of the occasion for so fine an exploit. And if his goodness [*la bonté*], which made him embrace the public advantage [*les commoditez publiques*] more than his own, did not hold me in check, I should easily fall into this opinion, that he was grateful to fortune for having put his virtue to so beautiful a test and for having favored that brigand [Caesar] in treading underfoot the ancient liberty of his country" (VS424, F309). Montaigne here associates virtue with personal perfection, whereas he associates goodness with the public advantage, that is, the freedom of the country.

In "By Diverse Means We Arrive at the Same End" Montaigne presents himself as similar to the weak in that he is compassionate and easily moved. But he is also similar both to the strong princes on account of his capacity for esteem and to the Stoic philosophers on account of his consistency. His compassion is not due to fear for himself. He displays a character that includes both weak and strong but that is also not reducible to weak and strong. That is, his character transcends those traditional categories, for his character is not due to Aristotelian virtue but to his judgment. In terms of the traditional categories, his character is an impossible combination of compassion and courage for which the name is generosity. The emergence of goodness and innocence from their hiddenness into the public effects a new kind of virtue, a virtue without pride and mastery.

### The Ease of Virtue

In "Of the Education of Children" Montaigne says that he has little to offer in the way of advice concerning this most difficult topic apart from "this new lesson," the ease of virtue (VS162, F120). The young man's tutor "will teach him this new lesson, that the value and the height of true virtue lies in the ease, utility, and pleasure of its practice, which is so far from being difficult that children can master it as well as men, the simple as well as the subtle. Virtue's tool is moderation [*le reglement*], not strength. Socrates, her prime favorite, *deliberately gives up his strength*, to slip into the naturalness and ease of her gait" (VS162, F120, emphasis

added). Self-regulation, then, is not the same as self-mastery. Socrates deliberately gives up his strength so that his virtue is like the virtue of the simple; he does not, in other words, seek the virtue of the noble or the warrior. In this, Socrates demonstrates, for Montaigne, that the ease of virtue means there is no superior virtue of the nobility. Hence, “you can tie up all moral philosophy with a common and private life just as well as with a life of richer stuff” (VS805, F611).

The fact that Montaigne takes up his “new lesson” in this particular essay shows that the ease of virtue has to do with judgment, not with the rule of reason over the passions: the single goal of education, he says, is the formation of judgment. Socrates deliberately gives up his strength in order to slip into the ease of virtue: he *judges* the thing itself, *brings it down*, subjects it to himself, and makes it his own.

Why does Montaigne reject the classical idea of virtue as reason’s mastery of the passions? As we saw in the discussion of “By Diverse Means we Arrive at the Same End,” Aristotle’s moral teaching proved to be ineffective for his pupil, Alexander the Great, at least with respect to the control of his anger and desire for revenge. Quintus Curtius reports that Alexander went into a “frenzy,”<sup>12</sup> and Montaigne tells us that Alexander’s anger turned to rage in the confrontation with Betis so that Alexander treats his captive with extreme cruelty. This, I believe, is an instance of what Montaigne calls “the ravishment of reason.”

In “Of Cruelty” Montaigne wanders into a “digression” immediately after his assertion that cruelty is the extreme of all vices. “Those who have to combat sensual pleasure like to use this argument to show that it is wholly vicious and unreasonable: that when it is at its greatest pitch it masters us to such an extent that reason can have no access. And they cite the experience of it that we feel in intercourse with women, . . . where it seems to them that the pleasure transports us so far beyond ourselves that our reason could not possibly then perform its function, being all crippled and ravished away in pleasure” (VS429–30, F313).<sup>13</sup> Montaigne, of course, does not simply accept this common judgment, for his own experience shows otherwise: “I know that it is possible to master the onset of this pleasure.” It is possible to “cast our soul back to other thoughts at this very instant.” In fact, his own experience leads him to say: “I do not take it for a miracle . . . or for an extremely difficult thing, to spend entire nights with every opportunity and in all freedom, with a long-desired mistress, keeping the faith one has pledged to her, to be content with kisses and simple contacts” (VS430, F313).

With respect to the ravishment of reason, Montaigne says: “I think the example of the chase would be more appropriate. Even as there is less



pleasure in it, so there is more transport and surprise, whereby our reason, stunned, loses the leisure to prepare and brace itself against it, when after a long quest the beast starts up suddenly and appears in a place where perhaps we were least expecting it. This shock, and the ardor of the hue and cry, strike us so that it would be hard for those who love this sort of hunt to withdraw their thought elsewhere at that point” (VS430, F313–14). Montaigne himself does not love the hunt. “Natures that are bloodthirsty toward animals give proof of a natural propensity toward cruelty” (VS433, F316). Indeed, he cannot even bear to hear the scream of the hare in the teeth of his dogs. “The chase is a violent pleasure” (VS429, F313).

The civil wars of Montaigne’s day have seen incredible examples of cruelty, unsurpassed even by those recorded in the ancient histories: “We experience this,” he says, “every day. But that has not reconciled me to it at all. I could hardly be convinced, until I saw it, that there were souls so monstrous that they would commit murder for the mere pleasure of it . . . for the sole purpose of enjoying the pleasing spectacle of the pitiful gestures and movements, the lamentable groans and cries, of a man dying in anguish. For that is the uttermost point that cruelty can attain” (VS432, F315–16).

Reason is therefore unreliable and ineffective in ruling the passions because reason can be ravished away. Montaigne says that, while Plato fears pleasure and pain because they nail the soul to the body, he himself fears extreme pleasure and pain because they separate the soul from the body. Reason becomes “detached,” and thus cruel and violent. In the example of the chase, reason is ravished away in the contemplation of the spectacle. The extreme of cruelty is the contemplative pleasure of the spectacle of the pain and despair of another human being who is entirely in our power. The ravishment of reason as it contemplates the suffering of another human being shows that this ecstatic beholding separates the soul from the body, dissociates us from our common humanity, and brings about the loss of all sympathy.

Montaigne would not have believed such extreme cruelty possible if he had not seen it with his own eyes, if he had not experienced it. It is experience, not reason, that instructs him in this. Although he has seen many examples of cruelty, he has not become accustomed to it: it always horrifies him. “I cruelly hate cruelty, both by nature and by judgment, as the extreme of all vices” (VS429, F313). That he *cruelly* hates cruelty shows that he has made it his own, not through the experience of being cruel, but through his judgment, which subjects reason to the good. Montaigne substitutes “a settled inclination of judgment” for the rule of reason in the soul.

In the examples of both his encounter with his mistress and the chase, Montaigne refers to “turning our thoughts elsewhere” or “back” at the instant of pleasure. He does not specify where thought is or should be directed. Turning one’s thoughts elsewhere would seem to mean turning one’s thoughts to the good. Reason, then, is not ravished away to the good; it is ravished away in the pleasure of mastery. In the encounter with his mistress, he mentions that he keeps faith with her: he keeps the promise he has made to her. He will not use force and violence to impose his will on her. The chase, he says, is more difficult: one’s reason is ravished away by surprise, and the individual is caught up in the crowd. One “loses the leisure” to turn one’s thoughts elsewhere. The chase is the mastery of the animal, not of another human being. But that is precisely, according to the tradition, what reason is supposed to do: master the animal within us. The example of the chase shows that the attempt to master the animal within us—that is, to master our passions—by force of reason lends itself to the ravishment of reason and the acceptability of cruelty, force, and violence.<sup>14</sup>

Montaigne does not separate the moral from the contemplative. Notice, the language that he uses to talk about the chase is associated with philosophy: surprise, leisure, the pleasure of the spectacle. Cruelty is a contemplative vice. Montaigne’s reordering of the vices reflects his conviction that those which are more bodily are in fact less deadly than “the passions that are all in the soul” (VS729, F551). These more dangerous vices conflict more with society. Montaigne gives us two descriptions of the practice of his easy virtue: “unlearning evil” and “training the disposition.” In “Of Cruelty” he explains his own natural goodness (as distinguished from virtue as struggle) in terms of Antisthenes’s understanding of the best apprenticeship for virtue: “To unlearn evil” (VS428, F311). Throughout the *Essays*, he presents his own weak way of coming to terms with the accidents of life and with the occasions that force us to confront evil. In “Of Husbanding Your Will” he explains that his way involves avoiding such occasions whenever possible. Some philosophers have taken another way: they have not feared to seek out trials and test their powers of endurance in wrestling with misfortunes. But, Montaigne says, “Let us not tackle these examples; we would not come up to them. . . . For our common souls there is too much effort and harshness in that. . . . We little men must flee the storm from farther away; we must try to avoid feeling it, not try to endure it” (VS1015, F777). Later in the same essay, he writes: “Passions are as easy for me to avoid as they are hard for me to moderate. . . . He who cannot attain that noble impassibility of the Stoics, let him take refuge in the bosom of this plebeian stupidity of

mine. What those men did by virtue, I train myself to do by disposition” (VS1019–20, F780).

Although training the disposition sounds much like the habituation to virtue described by Aristotle, Montaigne is here in fact distinguishing between the two: his reform deliberately adopts a disposition of “plebian stupidity” rather than struggling to master his passions in the manner of the strong. However, there are instances when he does speak in terms of a kind of mastery, for example, in his encounter with his mistress and also in his description of his temptations to ambition (VS992, F759). Yet he does not fit into Aristotle’s categories of moral strength and moral weakness (*NE*. 7. 2–10, 1145b8–1152a35). For example, even though he presents himself as weak, he tells us in “Of Repentance” that he does not experience remorse as the morally weak man does. His description of mastery in the examples mentioned above seems to include no experience of struggle. Thus, training the disposition and attaining a settled inclination of judgment points to a standard of moral virtue that is different from Aristotle’s.

“Unlearning evil” and “training the disposition” both show that naturalness can be deliberately acquired. So, for example, he asks whether the gentleness of Epaminondas’s disposition is the result of nature or art. The disposition, for Montaigne, is the temperament one is born with; it is given by nature. Montaigne’s reform is so difficult and so deep because it is the reform of nature itself. He *makes* his disposition natural: he reoriginates his disposition. (This is precisely what was discussed in chapter 3 concerning the way he judges natural inclinations, choosing the natural inclinations to which his judgment conforms.)

If virtue is not the mastery of the passions, how then does Montaigne propose to deal with the passions? Passions, he says, are easy for him to avoid. “Those who say that they have got the better of their vindictive passion or of some other kind of painful passion often tell the truth as things are, but not as they were. They speak to us when the causes of their error have been fostered and developed by themselves. But go back further, call these causes back to their beginning; there you will take them unprovided. Do they expect their fault to be lesser for being older, and the sequel of an unjust beginning to be just?” (VS1016, F777). Since the beginnings of all things are weak, he confronts the passions in their weak beginnings rather than test himself against them when they have reached their height. “If each man watched closely the effects and circumstances of the passions that dominate him, as I have done with the ones I have fallen prey to, he would see them coming and would check their impetuosity and course a bit. They do not always leap at our throats at a single bound; there are threats and degrees” (VS 1074, F822–23). Stopping the

passion in its beginnings makes it possible to avoid the struggle between reason and passion.<sup>15</sup> Unlike the Stoics, Montaigne does feel the passions. His attitude toward them is not a matter of mastering them by the force of reason but of choosing the passions that he allows himself to feel and those that he wants to avoid.

Most of Montaigne's examples of passions to be avoided have to do with the violent passions associated with revenge. In fact, the first example of virtue as struggle and mastery in "Of Cruelty" concerns the overcoming of the desire for revenge. Comparing goodness to the more noble virtue, he writes: "He who through a natural mildness and easygoingness should despise injuries received would do a very fine and praiseworthy thing; but he who, outraged and stung to the quick by an injury, should arm himself with the arms of reason against this furious appetite for vengeance, and after a great conflict should finally master it, would without doubt do much more." The former should be called "good" and the latter "virtuous" (VS422, F307). This "natural" mildness and easygoingness—the good—can actually be deliberately acquired through training the disposition, that is, through deliberately giving up one's strength and becoming "marvelously weak."

Montaigne's new lesson, the ease of virtue, therefore amounts to a new understanding of what virtue is, a new ordering of the virtues and vices, and a transformation of classical virtue. The new foundation for the virtues is goodness rather than strength and truth rather than reason. Montaigne's new character—the self-ordered soul that is sociable, the combination of the renunciation of mastery and the love of freedom, the man who is neither master nor slave—is expressed in terms of the two virtues of generosity and integrity.

### Generosity

In the sixteenth century, "generosity" referred to the virtue of the nobility and bore the connotations of valor and magnanimity belonging to that class. Generosity, then, was associated with "good birth": the word itself comes from the Latin *genus*, meaning "family." Montaigne uses the term that way in "By Diverse Means We Arrive at the Same End" when he says that, in the "less generous souls" of the people, astonishment can have the same effect that esteem has in the souls of the nobility. However, in accordance with his reformation of the nobility, the meaning of generosity is transformed and becomes a possibility for all men, because natural origins are not determinative.

The man who emerges from obscurity wants to be seen, to reveal himself, in his individuality and his superiority. He emerges in his pride and wants to be master. But Montaigne astonishes us. He removes the desire for mastery from his self-revelation. Instead, the desire that seizes him to reveal himself in public is generosity; and the *Essays* are that uncalculated gesture of generosity. Generosity is produced out of himself.

Montaigne says: "If my heart is not great enough, it is compensatingly open, and it orders me boldly to publish its weakness" (VS917, F700). Aristotelian magnanimity is greatness of soul (*NE*. 4.3, 1123a35–1125a35). Openness compensates for greatness: classical magnanimity has become generosity. "A generous heart should not belie its thoughts; it wants to reveal itself even to its inmost depths. There everything is good, or at least everything is human" (VS647, F491).<sup>16</sup> Generosity is the more human possibility. Montaigne's natural goodness becomes the virtue of generosity through judgment.

Descartes's treatment of generosity in the *Passions of the Soul* can help us to understand the distinction between magnanimity and generosity. "There is, it seems, no virtue so dependent on good birth as the virtue [generosity] which causes us to esteem ourselves in accordance with our true value, and it is easy to believe that the souls which God puts into our bodies are not all equally noble and strong (which is why, following the vernacular, I have called this virtue 'generosity' rather than 'magnanimity', a term used in the Schools, where this virtue is not well known). It is certain, however, that a good upbringing is a great help in correcting defects of birth." Descartes calls this virtue generosity rather than magnanimity *because* our souls are not all equally noble and strong by birth or by nature. He thereby suggests that anyone, whether naturally weak or strong, can acquire this virtue. Anyone can change his natural disposition by correcting the defects of his birth. But how can this change be brought about? "Moreover, if we occupy ourselves frequently in considering the nature of free will and the many advantages which proceed from a firm resolution to make good use of it—while also considering, on the other hand, the many vain and useless cares which trouble ambitious people—we may arouse the passion of generosity in ourselves and then acquire the virtue. Since this virtue is, as it were, the key to all the other virtues and a general remedy for every disorder of the passions, it seems to me that this consideration deserves serious attention."<sup>17</sup> In his discussion of "how generosity may be acquired," Descartes writes: "It should be noted that what we commonly call 'virtues' are habits in the soul which dispose it to have certain thoughts: though different from the thoughts, these habits can produce them and in turn can be produced by them." Habits can produce

thoughts, and thoughts can produce habits. The virtues are thus “produced” in the soul by its thoughts. This is a very different account of how the virtues are acquired from Aristotle’s account, which involves mastery and moderation of the passions and which depends upon the practice of performing virtuous actions by striving for perfection as the end.

Here, it seems, we have a picture of Montaigne’s “weak way.” We can acquire the virtue by arousing the passion in ourselves. We can “unlearn” the defects of birth and train the disposition by thinking about the nature of free will. Generosity has to do with judgment: classical, Aristotelian magnanimity becomes generosity on account of the generous man’s judgment of and relation to the weak and the strong. Descartes’s description of generosity fits well with Montaigne’s practice of judgment. True generosity consists in the knowledge that nothing belongs to us but the freedom of the will and in the resolution to undertake and carry out whatever we judge to be best.<sup>18</sup>

Generosity, then, causes us to esteem ourselves in accordance with our true value but it also has to do with our judgment of others. The opposite of esteem is contempt, and Montaigne has contempt for no one precisely because generosity prevents us from having such contempt: “Those who possess this knowledge and this feeling about themselves readily come to believe that any other person can have the same knowledge and feeling about himself, *because this involves nothing which depends on someone else*. That is why such people never have contempt for anyone. Although they often see others do wrong in ways that show up their weakness, they are nevertheless more inclined to excuse than to blame them and to regard such wrong-doing as due rather to lack of knowledge than to lack of a virtuous will. . . . They suppose [a virtuous will] also to be present, or at least capable of being present, in every other person.”<sup>19</sup> Montaigne has esteem for the strong and compassion, not contempt, for the weak. He has contempt and hatred for no man, but only for vice. Again, in Descartes’s words: “we have contempt solely for vices.”<sup>20</sup>

Magnanimity implies hierarchy, whereas generosity’s openness suggests a disposition toward equality. The most explicit act of generosity is self-revelation, specifically the revelation of one’s thoughts, not one’s deeds. Unlike Aristotle’s magnanimous man, Montaigne talks about himself but has no great deeds to tell.<sup>21</sup> Whereas Aristotle’s magnanimous man is justifiably proud, Montaigne’s self-revelation is the cure for pride. Generosity is thus the moralization of the desire for glory.

Generosity assumes and accepts the imperfection of our condition. As Oakeshott says of the generous man, he is “not at all without imperfections and is not deceived about himself” but is also proud enough to be

spared the sorrow of his imperfections and the illusion of his achievements. This is a new kind of pride and a new kind of humility. Generosity assumes the need for forgiveness, for judging the actions of others in the most favorable light. It is not the worthiness or perfection of others that rationally justifies the good man's generosity, but rather the realization that no other human being is either higher or lower than himself.

This relationship of the generous man to imperfection begins to make sense of the fact that the same man is also "careless" or nonchalant. Oakeshott's generous man is "negligent . . . but perhaps with a touch of careless heroism about him." This description captures the freedom of generosity. To be wholly good is to be so "without law, without reason, without example." Nothing is calculated. The generous man seeks nothing for himself in his actions. Goodness, then, is a spontaneity of the will. In the case of Oakeshott's carelessly heroic man, generosity manifests itself in action that is free, for he does not act out of any need or lack of the good. This changes the meaning of human agency: it is not acting for an end, but producing out of itself.

### Integrity

In his discussion of "the best city" Aristotle writes: "one ought not even consider that a citizen belongs to himself, but rather that all belong to the city; for each individual is a part of the city" (*Pol.* 8.1, 1337a27). Montaigne, on the other hand, says that "the greatest thing in the world is to know how to belong to oneself" (VS242, F178).

Knowing how to belong to oneself is what might be called "integrity," the character that is necessary for freedom of judgment. Integrity is about the free choice of possibilities rather than the direction of all of one's actions to a single end. Yet it is nevertheless a kind of consistency. Montaigne's consistency cannot be captured in the rules of any school of philosophy: it is a "natural movement . . . a picture of liberty and license so constant and inflexible" (VS795, F603). There is no notion of perfection, no common good, that can guide his choices.

Since the common good can serve as the pretext for the actions of wicked men, integrity is the virtue that is most necessary for a kind of association not defined by the common good: integrity, unlike the common good, is often about what one refuses to do.<sup>22</sup> It is the character that is proper to life in a free society. In *Enjoyment: The Moral Significance of Styles of Life*, John Kekes spells out the connection between integrity and independent judgment.<sup>23</sup> Integrity is a way of life "that reflects one's



individuality.”<sup>24</sup> It is the virtue of the “self-ordered soul” whose character is such that he can be left free in his judgments.

When Oakeshott portrays the character of the man whose pride has been “moralized” and who is willing to risk everything in the gesture of laying down his arms, he describes him as a man of careless heroism “who (in Montaigne’s phrase) ‘knows how to belong to himself,’ and who, if fortune turned out so, would feel no shame in the epitaph: ‘*Par délicatessel J’ai perdu ma vie.*’”<sup>25</sup> If generosity is the transformation of Montaigne’s natural goodness into virtue, integrity is the transformation of his natural innocence into virtue. In *The Morality of Pluralism*, Kekes distinguishes between pre-reflective and reflective innocence. Both are characterized by simplicity, spontaneity, and the absence of calculation.<sup>26</sup> Reflective innocence involves the realization that we may fail.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the careless heroism of the man who knows how to belong to himself is a carelessness about the success of his actions. He is without striving.

Belonging to oneself, or integrity, has the sense of wholeness and completeness. But this is a very different kind of completeness from the perfection of classical moral virtue. The good, for Montaigne, is not an end but a possession or property of the individual. He has made the good itself his own through judgment. He is what he ought to be. That is why he presents himself as nonchalant and “without striving.” He does not need to look outside himself for the good. Therefore, the wholeness and completeness of the man of integrity is his independence from the city: he is not completed and perfected in relation to the common good but by his own judgment.

### **Limited and Conditional Allegiance: Separating the Man from the Citizen**

The wholeness and completeness of the man of integrity, his independence from a common good, means that his allegiance to his country is not absolute but conditional and limited. For Aristotle, the domestic and private is incomplete and imperfect for it finds its perfection only in the political. Montaigne’s end, however, is domestic and private. All of moral philosophy can be expressed in terms of a humble, private, and common life. Montaigne says: “Political philosophy may condemn, for all I care, the meanness and sterility of my occupation. . . . I am of the opinion that the most honorable occupation is to serve the public and to be useful to many. . . . For my part, I stay out of it; partly out of conscience, . . . partly out of laziness” (VS952, F727). That he stays out of politics on account



of his conscience shows that he does not regard the political realm as the place for the exercise of moral excellence but rather as a threat to his innocence.

It is true, of course, that Montaigne did participate in political life: he served two terms as mayor of Bordeaux and acted as negotiator between the Catholic and Protestant princes during the civil wars. His accounts of this public service are given in terms of the principle that the judgment of the man must always be above his power as a ruler. That is, he always keeps the private man separate from the public role. Hence, the private retains its primacy.<sup>28</sup>

Montaigne contrasts his weakness with the strength of those like Cato whose country “possessed and commanded their entire will” (F777, VS1015). He counsels this weak way with respect to the performance of those vicious actions that are necessary for the survival of one’s country. If such actions become “excusable” because of necessity, “we still must let this part be played by the more vigorous and less fearful citizens, who sacrifice their honor and their conscience, as those ancients sacrificed their life, for the good [*salut*] of their country” (VS791, F600; see also VS1015, F777). Montaigne’s will, honor, and conscience, then, are not entirely bound to his country.

In “Of Husbanding Your Will” he gives an account of his service as mayor of Bordeaux, an office that he assumed only with reluctance, but which he must have fulfilled with great diligence since he was elected to a second term. Montaigne believes that he was elected because of the high regard in which his father was held for his service as mayor. Montaigne’s father seems to have identified the theological virtue of charity with public service. But the son regards public service as a temptation to the vice of ambition and as a threat to his freedom: “By the little I have essayed myself in that profession, I am just that much disgusted with it. I sometimes feel rising in my soul the fumes of certain temptations toward ambition, but I stiffen and hold firm against them. . . . Freedom and laziness, which are my ruling qualities, are qualities diametrically opposite to that trade” (VS992, F759). Montaigne’s weak way, then, is presented as a break with the classical tradition in which one’s entire will belonged to one’s country because the common good is the good of each.

Montaigne does not seek his own good in politics, for it is the realm of mastery and slavery and not of the common good. His freedom is the condition of being “neither master nor slave.” In order to be a master, one must be willing to be a slave, because both involve seeking one’s own good in rule. As Socrates points out in his portrait of the tyrant in the *Republic*, the tyrant cannot tolerate any man who is not servile.

Montaigne describes his non-servile attitude with respect to “the great, toward whom lack of submission is the ultimate offense, and who are rough on any righteousness that is aware of itself and does not feel itself to be abject, humble, and suppliant. I have often bumped myself on that pillar” (VS1045, F799). The man who seeks his good in politics “must live not so much according to himself as according to others, not according to what he proposes to himself but according to what others propose to him” (VS991, F758). According to Kekes, Montaigne “acknowledged the need to participate in public life, but set a limit beyond which he would not go. This formed his remarkably independent manner.”<sup>29</sup> Montaigne’s attitude toward politics is one of “detachment” and the absence of “enthusiasm.”<sup>30</sup>

He is loyal to the ancient laws and to the side of the king and the Church in the civil wars, willing to risk his life and all his possessions, but Montaigne’s allegiance to France is not absolute. “He who desires the good of his country as I do, without getting ulcers and growing thin over it, will be displeased, but not stunned, to see it threatened either with ruin or with conditions of survival no less ruinous” (VS1016, F777–78). He places his own freedom above his attachment to his country: “I am so sick for freedom, that if anyone should forbid me access to some corner of the Indies, I should live distinctly less comfortably. . . . If [the laws] that I serve threatened even the tip of my finger, I should instantly go and find others, wherever it might be” (VS1072, F820–21).

Montaigne’s service as advisor to princes is not due to any private duty, or to anything that he owes to the prince or seeks to obtain from the prince. Therefore, he can describe his service as free: “I love a private life because it is by my own choice that I love it, not because of unfitness for public life, which is perhaps just as well suited to my nature. I serve my prince more gaily because I do so by the free choice of my judgment and my reason, without personal obligation, and because I am not thrown back on his service and constrained to it by being unacceptable and unwelcome to every other party” (VS988, F756). His will is free because he does not seek his own interest. “Moreover, I am not pressed by any passion either of hate or of love toward the great, nor is my will bound by personal injury or obligation. I look upon our kings simply with a legitimate and civic affection, which is neither moved nor removed by private interest” (VS792, F601).

In his account of his role as negotiator between princes, Montaigne says that he frankly tells the prince the limits of what he will do in his service. He will not lie, dissimulate, or betray any man. “This whole procedure of mine is just a bit dissonant from our ways. . . . Innocence itself

could neither negotiate among us without dissimulation nor bargain without lying. And so public occupations are by no means my quarry; what my profession requires, I perform in the most private manner that I can" (VS795, F603).

Montaigne's service to the prince is also limited by the demands of his conscience. There are princes, he says, "who do not accept men halfway and scorn limited and conditional services. There is no remedy. I frankly tell them my limits. For a slave I must be only to reason, and even that I can scarcely manage. And they too are wrong to demand of a free man the same subjection and obligation to their service as they demand of a man whom they have made and bought, or whose fortune is particularly and expressly attached to theirs" (VS794, F603). He would not, he says, betray a private person for the prince (VS792, F600). He does "not want to be considered either so affectionate or so loyal a servant as to be found fit to betray anyone" (VS794, F603). Nor will he knowingly lie for the prince, so that if he is to serve as an instrument of deceit, "at least let it be with a clear conscience" (VS794, F603). The actions of those who betray and lie for the king are not only low, but "also prostitute [their] conscience" (VS799, F606).

Epaminondas held that a man cannot be a good man, however good a citizen he may be, if he does not spare his friend when confronted in battle. Integrity separates the man from the citizen. As the separation of the man from the prince is the separation of the man from mastery, so the separation of the man from the citizen is the separation of the man from servitude. In his account of the limits of what he will do for the prince, Montaigne places his private duty, his duty to private individuals, above his obligations to the prince. Generosity and integrity have something of the appearance of the irrational, the whimsical, or the capricious: they are uncalculating and careless of consequences. Oakeshott refers to the "negligence" and the "careless heroism" of the generous man. Generosity and integrity have this quality because they are the virtues of an imperfect human being in an imperfect world.

Thus, Montaigne lives in the world as it is given to him. Nietzsche takes note of this and says of Montaigne: "If my task were to make myself at home on this earth, it is to him that I would cleave."<sup>31</sup> In "Of Husbanding Your Will" Montaigne writes: "We must live in the world and make the most of it such as we find it" (VS1012, F774). He has no philosophical or religious contempt for this world. Of his negligence about his own affairs he writes: "This is not a philosophical scorn for transitory and mundane things; my taste is not so refined, and I value them at least at their worth" (VS953, F728). He is both attached to this world, valuing it for what it is

worth, and detached from it because it is not all that there is: “Never did a man prepare to leave the world more utterly and completely, nor detach himself from it more universally, than I propose to do” (VS88–89, F61). What does it mean to judge the world as it is and to value transitory and mundane things for what they are worth? For Montaigne it means living in the attitude of nonchalance.<sup>32</sup> The attitude of nonchalance is the joyful acceptance of imperfection. The judgment that this world is not ultimate makes possible his carelessness about his own life: “I want a man to act, and to prolong the functions of life as long as he can; and I want death to find me planting my cabbages, but careless [*nonchalant*] of death, and still more of my unfinished [*imparfait*] garden” (VS89, F62). Nonchalance is therefore indistinguishable from hope.

## Society as the Limit on the Power of the Prince

### *Friendship*

Montaigne is one of the very few modern philosophers for whom friendship is a fundamental philosophical concern. Generosity and integrity coincide for him in the perfection of friendship. Although his essay on friendship refers to many classical tropes, Montaigne says that his unique friendship with La Boétie surpasses all of the ancient categories of friendship (VS184, F136). The discourses that antiquity has left on this subject seem weak to him when compared with his sentiments, and the facts “surpass even the precepts of philosophy” (VS192, F143). Their friendship is a “mystery” (VS189, F140) and a “miracle” (VS191, F142).

Montaigne’s friendship with La Boétie surpasses the classical categories of friendship and the precepts of philosophy because it is due to the will: “Our free will has no product more properly its own than affection and friendship” (VS185, F137). Their friendship is the “complete fusion of [their] wills” (VS190, F141). Thus, “the springs of action” are “perfectly clean and true” (VS192, F142). The will *produces* friendship. In his *Divine and Poetic Freedom*, Ullrich Langer notices a strange impression that is conveyed in “Of Friendship.” Montaigne, he says, sets out a conventional, classical view of friendship in describing his relationship with La Boétie. But then something else enters the picture: rather than depict their relationship as voluntary, Montaigne “removes any motivation.”<sup>33</sup> Langer’s observation here gives us an especially vivid example of the ease of Montaigne’s action. It is “without striving” even when it is the most perfect act of the will. There is no calculation, no deliberation, no reason that can be given for their union: “If you press me to tell why I loved him,

I feel that this cannot be expressed, except by answering: Because it was he, because it was I” (VS188, F139).<sup>34</sup> Choice is not deliberation but judgment. Deliberation is directed to an end, in particular, to a naturally given end. Judgment is the free production of the will, and friendship shows that a man has the complete disposition of his will.

The spontaneous self-communication of friendship is the most perfect act of freedom. Friendship is “the perfection of society” (VS184, F136), and there is in it no element of mastery. But since this complete fusion of wills cannot be duplicated (VS191, F141), society can only ever be an imperfect form of friendship. Montaigne refers to “the acquaintanceships and familiarities formed by some chance or convenience, by means of which our souls are bound to each other” (VS188, F139). He also recognizes the demands of private obligation such as those between father and son. These too are kinds of friendship although they are less free: “the more they are friendships which law and natural obligation impose on us, the less of our choice and free will there is in them” (VS185, F137). If natural obligation is less free than perfect friendship, then perfect friendship is an expression of a kind of freedom that actually transcends the natural.

In “Of Friendship” many of the friendships of antiquity are presented as examples of opposition to tyranny. Tyrants have no friends and cannot tolerate the friendships of their subjects because they are always suspicious of conspiracies. Describing the friendship of Caius Blossius and Tiberius Gracchus, who were condemned for conspiracy by the Roman consuls, Montaigne says that “they were friends more than citizens, friends [to each other] more than friends or enemies of their country” (VS189, F140).

In *On Voluntary Servitude*, Etienne de La Boétie defends friendship against the tyrant’s suspicions: “Indeed, it is certain that the tyrant is never loved, nor does he love. Friendship is a sacred word; it is a holy thing. It never occurs except between honorable people, and it arises only from mutual esteem. It maintains itself not so much by means of good turns as by a good life. What renders a friend assured of the other is the knowledge of his integrity. The guarantees he has from him are his good nature, faith, and constancy. There cannot be friendship where there is cruelty, where there is disloyalty, where there is injustice. Among the wicked when they assemble, there is a plot, not companionship. They do not provide for one another, but fear one another. They are not friends but accomplices. Yet even if it were not impossible to befriend a tyrant, it would still be hard to find in a tyrant a reliable love, because being above all [other people], and not having any peer, he is already beyond the bounds of friendship, which has its true foundation in equality.”<sup>35</sup>

It is important to note that perfect friendship is not a relationship of dependence: it is not based on need but is entirely free. “In this noble relationship, services and benefits, on which other friendships feed, do not even deserve to be taken into account; the reason for this is the complete fusion of our wills . . . the union of such friends, being truly perfect, makes them lose the sense of such duties, and hate and banish from between them these words of separation and distinction: benefit, obligation, gratitude, request, thanks, and the like. Everything actually being in common between them—wills, thoughts, judgments, goods, wives, children, honor, and life. . . . they can neither lend nor give anything to each other” (VS190, F140–41).

Montaigne surpasses “all modern examples” in his independence from others. “Those who know me, both above and below me, know whether they have ever seen a man less demanding of others. If I surpass all modern examples in this respect, it is no great wonder, for so many parts of my character contribute to it,” especially “my very favorite qualities, idleness and freedom” (VS969, F740–41). With respect to indebtedness to others, he says: “I see no one freer and less indebted than I am up to this point. . . . There is no one who is more absolutely clear of any others: *the gifts of princes are to me unknown* [adapted from Virgil].” He tries to have “no express need of anyone” (VS968, F739–40). He has conceived “a mortal hatred of being obliged either to another or by another than myself” (VS969, F741).

The idea of the common good in the tradition means that the members of the political association are dependent on each other for the good, because the good is such that it can only be attained in common. The good of all is the good of each. Thus, Montaigne’s generosity and integrity are very different from Aristotelian virtue, because virtue is bound to the idea of the common good. If integrity means the possession of the good as a property, if it means completeness, then the man of integrity is not dependent on his city or country for his completeness. Montaigne does not seek his good in the dependent relationships of politics. His will belongs to him, not to his country. The common good is replaced by the inestimable good of freedom.

### *Education and Freedom*

In “On the Education of Children” Montaigne says that “the greatest and most important difficulty in human knowledge” is the question of the upbringing and education of children (VS149, F109). The entire purpose of education is the formation of the judgment of the pupil, especially

through the study of history and philosophy. Like his own upbringing, the education he proposes would teach the pupil to be “wholly incapable of submitting to force and violence” (VS176, F131).

C. S. Lewis takes Montaigne as his example of “the freeborn mind”: “In adult life it is the man who needs, and asks, nothing of government who can criticize its acts and snap his fingers at its ideology. Read Montaigne; that’s the voice of a man with his legs under his own table, eating the mutton and turnips raised on his own land. Who will talk like that when the State is everyone’s schoolmaster and employer?”<sup>36</sup> Lewis is most concerned with the role of economic independence in providing an education not controlled by the state. Such an education is essential for freedom as well as for the knowledge that men must have of each other if they are to become and remain free. This is brought out forcefully in La Boétie’s *Voluntary Servitude* where he discusses the importance of books and learning for men who, in spite of subjection, have the desire for freedom: “Always there live among them some who are better born than the others, who feel the weight of the yoke and who cannot refrain from shaking it off, people who never tame themselves into subjection. . . . It is truly these individuals who, having a clear understanding and a sharp mind, do not content themselves like the vulgar populace with looking at what is at their feet, but look both backward and forward, and moreover recall past events so as to judge about those of times to come, and in order to measure the present ones. They are those who, having their own heads well made, have also polished them through study and knowledge. Those, if ever liberty were entirely lost and wholly gone from the world, imagining it and feeling it in their minds, and still savoring it, would never find servitude to their taste, no matter how well it might be dressed up. The Great Turk having become well aware of this, that books and learning more than anything else give men the sense and understanding to know one another and to hate tyranny, I understand that he does not have in his lands any learned people, nor does he ask for them.”<sup>37</sup> The education that Montaigne recommends for the nobleman includes the study of history so that the young man might form his independent judgment. The histories teach us to know men and recognize each in his individuality. Men who love freedom must be able to recognize each other. La Boétie describes the difficulties of this mutual recognition under conditions of tyranny: “But commonly, the good zeal and love of those who have preserved the devotion to freedom in spite of the times, no matter how large a number there may be of them, remain without effect because they do not recognize one another. The liberty of action and of speech, and almost of thought, is completely taken



away from them under the tyrant. They live completely alone in their imaginings.”<sup>38</sup>

Montaigne’s account of his first meeting with La Boétie seems to be a description of just such mutual recognition: “We sought each other before we met because of the reports we heard of each other, which had more effect on our affection than such reports would reasonably have; I think it was by some ordinance of heaven. We embraced each other by our names. And at our first meeting, which by chance came at a great feast and gathering in the city, we found ourselves so taken with each other, so well acquainted, so bound together, that from that time on nothing was so close to us as each other. He wrote an excellent Latin satire, which is published, in which he excuses and explains the precipitancy of our mutual understanding, so promptly grown to its perfection” (VS188, F139).

### *Freedom of Speech*

La Boétie says that the mutual recognition of freedom-loving men is made almost impossible under the tyrant because the tyrant prohibits freedom of speech. One of the most important aspects of Montaigne’s character is the freedom of his speech. His manner of conducting himself in his role as negotiator between princes is one of openness and frankness, a practice that is very different from the dissimulation that is typical of such dealings. He speaks the truth without regard to the consequences, either to himself or to the matter in question. He will not bend the truth in order to accomplish any goal. His liberty and license are constant and inflexible because “the way of truth is one and simple” (VS795, F603). Truth is the social bond that is possible for free particulars. Free speech is the way in which diverse minds can be bound to each other in truth. There is no common essence to bind men together, and so society is brought about only through self-communication. The only way we can know each other is not through knowledge of a universal nature but through our words in which we communicate our thoughts and wills, that is, our judgments.

A character of a certain kind is required for the practice of freedom of speech, and Montaigne’s character comes through especially clearly in his description of himself with respect to this practice. “I do not at all hate opinions contrary to mine. I am so far from being vexed to see discord between my judgments and others’, and from making myself incompatible with the society of men because they are of a different sentiment and party from mine, that on the contrary, since variety is the most general fashion that nature has followed, and more in minds than bodies,



inasmuch as minds are of a substance suppler and susceptible of more forms, I find it much rarer to see our humors and designs agree. And there were never in the world two opinions alike, any more than two hairs or grains. Their most universal quality is diversity” (VS785–86, F597–98).

In “Of the Art of Discussion” he elaborates on the attitudes that free speech requires. “I enter into discussion and argument with great freedom and ease, inasmuch as opinion finds in me a bad soil to penetrate and take deep roots in. No propositions astonish me, no belief offends me, whatever contrast it offers with my own” (VS923, F704). He is not offended nor does he respond with anger: “So contradictions of opinions neither offend nor affect me; they merely arouse and exercise me. . . . When someone opposes me, he arouses my attention, not my anger” (VS924, F705). Montaigne associates the inability to converse in this manner with a tyrannical disposition: “It is always a tyrannical ill humor to be unable to endure a way of thinking different from your own” (VS928, F709). In fact, in what may be the only instance in the *Essays* where he refers to himself as perfect, he says with respect to bantering and joking: “I am perfect in forbearance, for I endure retaliation, not only sharp but even indiscreet, without being disturbed” (VS938, F717).<sup>39</sup>

Montaigne removes self-esteem from discussion, thus removing the honor associated with winning an argument. His extreme tolerance for opinions different from his own is a necessary condition for a free society. Freedom of speech makes it possible for freedom-loving men to recognize each other and also provides one of the principal means of opposition to tyranny.

### *The Universal Church*

In chapter 2 I argued that the Church is the basis for Montaigne’s notion of society. The Church is the universal society that stands as an independent association which claims authority over the minds and hearts of men. While it is true that this authority can and did come into conflict with the authority of the state, causing civil unrest, it is also true that without such an independent authority, one of the principal limits on the coercive power of the state is lacking.

Like Socrates, Montaigne considers the whole world his city. “Not because Socrates said it, but because it is really my feeling, and perhaps excessively so, I consider all men my compatriots, and embrace a Pole as I do a Frenchman, setting this national bond after the universal and common one” (VS973, F743). But unlike Socrates, he is not entirely bound to his country: “What Socrates did near the end of his life, in considering a

sentence of exile against him worse than a sentence of death, I shall never, I think, be so broken nor so strictly attached to my own country as to do. . . . That was a very fastidious attitude for a man who considered the world his city” (VS973, F743–44). Generosity is such that society cannot stop at the borders of one’s country.

The conscience of Montaigne is different from the conscience of Socrates with respect to the degree of attachment that one owes to one’s country. Socrates never left Athens, as he says in his *Apology*. He was content to remain always among his fellow citizens for he cared about them, if not exclusively, then at least much more than he concerned himself for the citizens of any other city. Montaigne, however, sets the national bond after the universal and common bond. This universal bond is grounded in the universal Church in which national origins do not matter. In Rousseau’s description, Montaigne is the great cosmopolitan soul: “natural pity . . . no longer dwells in any but a few great cosmopolitan souls, who surmount the imaginary barriers that separate peoples and who, following the example of the sovereign Being who created them, include the whole human race in their benevolence.”<sup>40</sup> Montaigne’s invention of society, the philosophical act, effects the good of all mankind.

