

## To the Reader

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[A] You have here, Reader, a book whose faith can be trusted, a book which warns you from the start that I have set myself no other end but a private family one. I have not been concerned to serve you nor my reputation: my powers are inadequate for such a design. I have dedicated this book to the private benefit of my friends and kinsmen so that, having lost me (as they must do soon) they can find here again some traits of my character and of my humours. They will thus keep their knowledge of me more full, more alive. If my design had been to seek the favour of the world I would have decked myself out [C] better and presented myself in a studied gait.<sup>1</sup> [A] Here I want to be seen in my simple, natural, everyday fashion, without [C] striving<sup>2</sup> [A] or artifice: for it is my own self that I am painting. Here, drawn from life, you will read of my defects and my native form so far as respect for social convention allows: for had I found myself among those peoples who are said still to live under the sweet liberty of Nature's primal laws, I can assure you that I would most willingly have portrayed myself whole, and wholly naked.

And therefore, Reader, I myself am the subject of my book: it is not reasonable that you should employ your leisure on a topic so frivolous and so vain.

Therefore, Farewell:

From Montaigne;  
this first of March, One thousand, five hundred and eighty.<sup>3</sup>

1. '80: myself out, *with borrowed beauties, or would have tensed and braced myself in my best posture*. Here I want . . .

2. '80: Without *study* or artifice . . .

3. Date as in [A] and [C]. In [B]: 12 June 1588.

instruction I drew from it for my own purposes: for in truth, to inure yourself to death all you have to do is to draw nigh to it. Now, as Pliny says, each man is an excellent instruction unto himself provided he has the capacity to spy on himself from close quarters.<sup>12</sup>

Here you have not my teaching but my study: the lesson is not for others; it is for me. [C] Yet, for all that, you should not be ungrateful to me for publishing it. What helps me can perhaps help somebody else. Meanwhile I am not spoiling anything: I am only using what is mine. And if I play the fool it is at my own expense and does no harm to anybody. Such foolishness as I am engaged in dies with me: there are no consequences. We have reports of only two or three Ancients who trod this road and we cannot even say if their manner of doing so bore any resemblance to mine since we know only their names.<sup>13</sup> Since then nobody has leapt to follow in their traces. It is a thorny undertaking – more than it looks – to follow so roaming a course as that of our mind's, to penetrate its dark depths and its inner recesses, to pick out and pin down the innumerable characteristics of its emotions. It is a new pastime, outside the common order; it withdraws us from the usual occupations of people – yes, even from the most commendable ones. For many years now the target of my thoughts has been myself alone; I examine nothing, I study nothing, but me; and if I do study anything else, it is so as to apply it at once to myself, or more correctly, within myself. And it does not seem to me to be wrong if (as is done in other branches of learning, incomparably less useful) I share what I have learned in this one, even though I am hardly satisfied with the progress I have made. No description is more difficult than the describing of oneself; and none, certainly, is more useful. To be ready to appear in public you have to brush your hair; you have to arrange things and put them in order. I am therefore ceaselessly making myself ready since I am ceaselessly describing myself.

Custom has made it a vice to talk about oneself and obstinately prohibits it, hating the boasting which always seems to be attached to any testimony about oneself. Instead of wiping the child's nose you cut it off!

*In vitium ducit culpæ fuga.*

[Flying from a fault, we fall into a vice.]<sup>14</sup>

12. Cf. Pliny, cited Erasmus, *Adages*, I, VII, XCIV, *In tuum ipsius sinum inspue.*

13. It is not certain who these 'two or three Ancients' were. They may have included Lucilius, the 'father of satire'.

14. Horace, *Ars poetica*, 31.

I find more evil than good in that remedy. But even if it should be true that engaging people in talk about oneself is inevitably presumption, still, if I am to carry out my plan I must not put an interdict on an activity which makes that sickly quality public, since it is in me and I must not hide that defect; I do not merely practise it: I make a profession of it. Anyway, my belief is that it is wrong to condemn wine because many get drunk on it. You can abuse things only if they are good. I believe that that prohibition applies only to the popular abuse. It is a bridle made to curb calves: it is not used as a bridle by the Saints, who can be heard talking loudly about themselves, nor by philosophers nor by theologians;<sup>15</sup> nor by me though I am neither one nor the other. If they do not literally write about themselves, when the occasion requires it they do not hesitate to trot right in front to show off their paces. What does Socrates treat more amply than himself? And what does he most often lead his pupils to do, if not to talk about themselves – not about what they have read in their books but about the being and the movement of their souls? We scrupulously talk of ourselves to God and to our confessors, just as our neighbours do before the whole congregation.<sup>16</sup> 'But,' somebody will reply, 'we talk then only of our offences.' In that case we say it all: for our very virtue is faulty and needs repentance.

My business, my art, is to live my life. If anyone forbids me to talk about it according to my own sense, experience and practice, let him also command an architect to talk about buildings not according to his own standard but his next-door neighbour's, according to somebody else's knowledge not his own. If publishing one's own worth is pride, why does not Cicero puff the eloquence of Hortensius, and Hortensius that of Cicero?<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps they mean that I should witness to myself by works and deeds not by the naked word alone. But I am chiefly portraying my ways of thinking, a shapeless subject which simply does not become manifest in deeds. I have to struggle to couch it in the flimsy medium of words. Some

15. Montaigne may be thinking, among other works, of St Augustine's *Confessions*, but there are signs that he never read that particular work, though one would have expected him to have done so.

16. The Reformed Church rejected private confession to priests but encouraged a sinner to confess his sins to the assembled Church.

17. Montaigne's gibe is unfair. Quintus Hortensius was a famous orator of Cicero's time; Cicero named his treatise on oratory after him. Quintilian (XI, iii, 8) held his oratory to be inferior to Cicero's.

of the wisest of men and the most devout have lived their lives avoiding any sign of activity. My activities would tell you more about Fortune than about me. They bear witness to their own role not to mine, unless it be by uncertain conjecture: they are samples and reveal only particulars. I am *all* on display, like a mummy on which at a glance you can see the veins, the muscles and the tendons, each piece in its place. Part of me is revealed – but only ambiguously – by the act of coughing; another by my turning pale or by my palpitations. It is not what I do that I write of, but of me, of what I *am*. I hold that we must show wisdom in judging ourselves, and, equally, good faith in witnessing to ourselves, high and low indifferently. If I seemed to myself to be good or wise – or nearly so – I would sing it out at the top of my voice. To say you are worse than you are is not modest but foolish. According to Aristotle, to prize yourself at less than you are worth is weak and faint-hearted. No virtue is helped by falsehood; and the truth can never go wrong. To say we are better than we are is not always presumption: it is even more often stupidity. In my judgement, the substance of that vice is to be immoderately pleased with yourself and so to fall into an injudicious self-love.

The sovereign remedy to cure self-love is to do the opposite to what those people say who, by forbidding you to talk about yourself, as a consequence even more strongly forbid you to think about yourself. Pride lies in our thoughts: the tongue can only have a very unimportant share in it. They think that to linger over yourself is to be pleased with yourself, to haunt and frequent yourself is to hold yourself too dear. That can happen. But that excess arises only in those who merely finger the surface of themselves; who see themselves only when business is over; who call it madness and idleness to be concerned with yourself; for whom enriching and constructing your character is to build castles in the air; who treat themselves as a third person, a stranger to themselves.

If anyone looks down on others and is drunk on self-knowledge let him turn his gaze upwards to ages past: he will pull his horns in then, discovering many thousands of minds which will trample him underfoot. If he embarks upon some flattering presumption of his own valour let him recall the lives of the two Scipios and all those armies and peoples who leave him so far behind. No one individual quality will make any man swell with pride who will, at the same time, take account of all those other weak and imperfect qualities which are in him and, finally, of the nullity of the human condition.

Because Socrates alone had taken a serious bite at his god's precept to

'know himself' and by such a study had reached the point of despising himself, he alone was judged worthy of being called The Sage.<sup>18</sup>

If any man knows himself to be thus, let him boldly reveal himself by his own mouth.

18. Socrates maintained that men should be concerned not with cosmology but with self-knowledge and morals. He followed Apollo's revealed commandment, 'Know Thyself'. (Cf. Erasmus, *Apophthegmata*, III, *Socratica*, XII and XXXVI; *Adages*, I, VI, XCV, *Nosce teipsum*.)

provide wrapping-paper to stop some slab of butter from melting in the market:

[A] *Ne toga cordyllis, ne penula desit olivis;*

[Lest they are short of wrappings for their tunny-fish or their olives;]

[B] *Et laxas scombris saepe dabo tunicas.*

[And I shall often provide a loose garment to wrap up their mackerel.]

[C] Even if nobody reads me, have I wasted my time when I have entertained myself during so many idle hours with thoughts so useful and agreeable? ↘

Since I was modelling this portrait on myself, it was so often necessary to prepare myself and to pose so as to draw out the detail that the original has acquired more definition and has to some extent shaped itself. By portraying myself for others I have portrayed my own self within me in clearer colours than I possessed at first. I have not made my book any more than it has made me – a book of one substance with its author, proper to me and a limb of my life. Have I wasted my time by so continuously and carefully telling myself of myself? Those who merely think and talk about themselves occasionally do not examine the basics and do not go as deep as one who makes it his study, his work and his business, who with all good faith and with all his might binds himself to keeping a long-term account. The most delightful of pleasures are inwardly digested: they refuse to leave their spoor behind and refuse to be seen not only by the many but even by one other. How frequently has this task diverted me from painful thoughts! And all trivial thoughts should be counted as painful. Nature has vouchsafed us a great talent for keeping ourselves occupied when alone and often summons us to do so in order to teach us that we do owe a part of ourselves to society but that the best part we owe to ourselves. With the aims of teaching my mental faculty even to rave with some order and direction and so as to stop it losing its way and wandering in the wind, I need simply to give it body and to keep detailed accounts of my petty thoughts as they occur to me. How often when I have been irritated by some action which politeness and prudence forbid me from openly censuring have I unburdened myself here – not without the design of giving a public reproof.<sup>5</sup> And, indeed, those scourgings by the poet –

5. Cf. Joachim Du Bellay's reasons for writing personal poetry (*Regrets*, 4, 14, etc.). Then, Clément Marot, *Epistre de Fripelipes* against Sagon, punning on his name Sagon (*sagouin*, lout).

## II:18. On giving the lie

*Zon dessus l'euil, zon sur le groin  
Zon sur le dos du Sagoin.*

[Bong in the eye, bong on the snout,  
Bong on the back of Sagon the Lout.]

are even better when imprinted on paper than on the living flesh.

And what if I now lend a more attentive ear to the books I read, being on the lookout to see whether I can steal something with which to decorate and support my own? I have never studied so as to write a book, but I have done some study because I have written one, if studying a little means lightly touching this author or that and tweaking his head or his foot – not so as to shape my opinions but, long after they have taken shape, to help them, to back them up and to serve them.

[A] But during a time so debased, what man are we to trust when he speaks of himself, seeing there are few, perhaps none, whom we can trust when they speak of others, where they have less to gain from lying? The first sign of corrupt morals is the banishing of truth: for as Pindar says, being truthful is the beginning of any great virtue, [C] and it is the first item that Plato required in the governor of his Republic.<sup>6</sup> [A] Truth for us nowadays is not what is, but what others can be brought to accept: just as we call money not only legal tender but any counterfeit coins in circulation. Our nation has long been accused of this vice: Salvianus of Massilia, who lived in the time of the Emperor Valentinian, says that lying and perjury are not a vice for the French but a figure of speech!<sup>7</sup> If you wanted to outbid that testimony you could say that at the present time it is for them a virtue. People train themselves for it and practise for it as for some honoured pursuit: dissimulation is one of the most striking characteristics of our age. So I have often reflected on what could have given birth to our scrupulously observed custom of taking bitter offence when we are accused of that vice which is more commonplace among us than any of the others, and why for us it should be the ultimate verbal insult to accuse us of lying. Whereupon I find it natural for us to protect ourselves from those failings with which we are most sullied. It seems that by resenting the accusation and growing angry about it we unload some of the guilt; we are guilty, in fact, but at least we condemn it for show.

6. Pindar, in Plutarch, *Life of Marius*; Plato, *Republic*, VI, 489e ff.

7. Presbyter Salvianus of Massilia, *De gubernatione Dei*, I, i, xiv (a work printed in Paris in 1580).

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8. Plutarch, *L*

9. Lopez de C

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10. Androclid

11. Cf. II, 33

Emperor Julia

natural pleasures but delight in it as if it were its husband, contributing, if it is wise enough, moderation, lest those pleasures become confounded with pain through want of discernment. [C] Lack of temperance is pleasure's bane: temperance is not its chastisement but its relish. It was by means of temperance, which in them was outstanding and exemplary, that Eudoxus (who made pleasure his sovereign good) and his companions (who rated it at so high a price) savoured it in its most gracious gentleness.<sup>167</sup>

[B] I so order my soul that it can contemplate both pain and pleasure with eyes equally [C] restrained – '*eodem enim vitio est effusio animi in laetitia quo in dolore contractio*' [for it is as wrong for the soul to dilate with joy as to contract with pain]<sup>168</sup> – doing so with eyes equally [B] steady, yet looking merrily at one and soberly at the other and, in so far as it can contribute anything itself, being as keen to snuff out the one as to stretch out the other. [C] Look sanely upon the good and it follows that you look sanely upon evils: pain, in its tender beginnings, has some qualities which we cannot avoid: so too pleasure in its final excesses has qualities which we can avoid. Plato couples pain and pleasure together and wants it to be the duty of fortitude to fight the same fight against pain and against the seductive fascinations of immoderate pleasure. They form two springs of water: blessed are they, city, man or beast, that draw what they should, when they should and from the one they should. From the first we should drink more sparingly, as a medicine, as a necessity: from the second to slake our thirst, though not to the point of drunkenness. Pain and pleasure, love and hatred, are the first things a child is aware of: if, after Reason develops, they are guided by her, then that is virtue.<sup>169</sup>

[B] I have a lexicon all to myself: I 'pass' the time when tide and time are sticky and unpleasant: when good, I do not want to 'pass' time, I [C] savour it and hold on to it.<sup>170</sup> [B] We must run the gauntlet through the bad and recline on the good. 'Pastimes' and 'to pass the time' are everyday expressions which correspond to the practice of those clever folk who think that they can use their life most profitably by letting it leak and slip away, by-passing it or avoiding it and (as far as they can manage to

167. Eudoxus maintained that pleasure is the Supreme Good, arguing that all creatures, rational and irrational, seek it and avoid pain. (Aristotle, *Nicomachaeon Ethics*, X, ii, 1172 b.) Aristotle adds that Eudoxus had a reputation for exceptional temperance. (Cf. also *ibid.*, I, xii.) His 'companions' are doubtless the Platonists, of whom he was an unorthodox associate.

168. Cicero, *Tusc. disput.*, IV, xxxi, 66.

169. Plato, *Laws*, I, 632C–634B; 6360; 653A–C.

170. '88: I taste it and linger over it. We must . . .

do so) ignoring it and fleeing from it as painful and contemptible. But I know life to be something different: I find it to be both of great account and delightful – even as I grasp it now [C] in its final waning; [B] Nature has given it into our hands garnished with such attributes, such agreeable ones, that if it weighs on us, if it slips uselessly from us, we have but ourselves to blame. [C] '*Stulti vita ingrata est, trepida est, tota in futurum fertur.*' [It is the life of the fool which is graceless, fearful and entirely sacrificed to the future.]<sup>171</sup>

[B] That is why I so order my ways that I can lose my life without regret, not however because it is troublesome or importunate but because one of its attributes is that it must be lost. [C] Besides, finding it not unpleasant, to die can only rightly become those who find life pleasant. [B] To enjoy life requires some husbandry. I enjoy it twice as much as others, since the measure of our joy depends on the greater or lesser degree of our attachment to it. Above all now, when I see my span so short, I want to give it more ballast; I want to arrest the swiftness of its passing by the swiftness of my capture, compensating for the speed with which it drains away by the intensity of my enjoyment. The shorter my lease of it, the deeper and fuller I must make it.

Others know the delight of happiness and well-being: I know it as they do, but not *en passant*, as it slips by. We must also study it, savour it, muse upon it, so as to render condign thanksgivings to Him who vouchsafes it to us. Other folk enjoy all pleasures as they enjoy the pleasure of sleep: with no awareness of them. Why, with the purpose of not allowing even sleep to slip insensibly away, there was a time when I found it worthwhile to have my sleep broken into so that I could catch a glimpse of it. I deliberate with my self upon any pleasure. I do not skim it off: I plumb it, and now that my reason has grown chagrin and squeamish I force it to accept it. Do I find myself in a state of calm? Is there some pleasure which thrills me? I do not allow it to be purloined by my senses: I associate my Soul with it, not so that she will [C] bind herself to it<sup>172</sup> [B] but take joy in it: not losing herself but finding herself in it; her role is to observe herself as mirrored in that happy state, to weigh that happiness, gauge it and increase it. She measures how much she owes to God for having her conscience and

171. '88: I grasp it now, in its *decadence*; Nature . . .

Seneca, *Epist. moral.*, XV, 9. (Seneca presents this saying as an 'excellent Greek proverb' uttered by Epicurus, warning that it applies not to the lives of obviously foolish men but to our own, with its unsatisfiable desires.)

172. '88: she will get drunk on it but take . . .

her warring passions at peace, with her body in its natural [C] state, [B] enjoying ordinally and [C] appropriately [B] those sweet and pleasant functions by which it pleases Him, through His grace, to counterbalance the pains with which His justice in its turn chastises us;<sup>173</sup> she gauges how precious it is to her to have reached such a point that, no matter where she casts her gaze, all around her the heavens are serene – no desire, no fear or doubt bring disturbing gales; nor is there any hardship, [C] past, present or future [B] on which her thoughts may not light without anxiety. This meditation gains a great splendour by a comparison of my condition with that of others. And so I [C] pass in review,<sup>174</sup> [B] from hundreds of aspects, those whom fortune or their own mistakes sweep off into tempestuous seas, as well as those, closer to my own case, who accept their good fortune with such languid unconcern. Those folk really do 'pass' their time: they pass beyond the present and the things they have in order to put themselves in bondage to hope and to those shadows and vain ghosts which their imagination holds out to them –

*Morte obita quales fama est volitare figuras,  
Aut quæ sopitos deludunt somnia sensus*

[Like those phantoms which, so it is said, flit about after death or those dreams which delude our slumbering senses]

– the more you chase them, the faster and farther they run away. Just as Alexander said that he worked for work's sake –

*Nil actum credens cum quid superesset agendum:*

[Believing he had not done anything, while anything remained to be done:]

– so too your only purpose in chasing after them, your only gain, lies in the chase.<sup>175</sup>

As for me, then, I love life and cultivate it as it has pleased God to vouchsafe it to us. I do not go yearning that it should be without the need to eat and drink: [C] indeed to wish that need redoubled would not seem to me a less pardonable error: '*Sapiens divitiarum naturalium quaesitor acerrimus*' [The wise man is the keenest of seekers after the riches of Nature];<sup>176</sup> nor [B] that we could keep up our strength by merely popping into our mouths a little of that drug by means of which Epimenides

173. '88: natural health, enjoying ordinally and fully those sweet . . .

174. '88: I picture to myself, from hundreds of aspects . . .

175. Virgil, *Aeneid*, X, 641–2; Lucan, *Pharsalia*, II, 657.

176. Seneca, *Epist. moral.*, CXIX, 5.

assuaged his appetite and kept alive;<sup>177</sup> nor that we could, without sensation, produce children by our fingers and our heels [C] but rather, speaking with reverence, that we could also do it voluptuously with our fingers and our heels as well; [B] nor that our body should be without desire or thrills. Such complaints are [C] ungrateful and iniquitous. [B] I accept wholeheartedly [C] and thankfully [B] what Nature has done for me: I delight in that fact and am proud of it. You do wrong to that great and almighty Giver to [C] refuse [B] His gift, to [C] nullify [B] it or disfigure it. [C] Himself entirely Good, he has made all things good: '*Omnia quae secundum naturam est, aestimatione digna sunt.*' [All things which are in accordance with Nature are worthy of esteem.]<sup>178</sup>

[B] I embrace most willingly those of Philosophy's opinions which are most solid, that is to say, most human, most ours: my arguments, like my manners, are lowly and modest. [C] To my taste she is acting like a child when she starts crowing out *ergo*, preaching to us that it is a barbarous match to wed the divine to the earthy, the rational to the irrational, the strict to the permissive, the decent to the indecent; that pleasure is a bestial quality, unworthy that a wise man should savour it; that the only enjoyment he gets from lying with his beautiful young wife is the pleasure of being aware that he is performing an ordinate action – like pulling on his boots for a useful ride! May Philosophy's followers, faced with breaking their wife's hymen, be no more erect, muscular nor succulent than her arguments are!<sup>179</sup>

That is not what Socrates says – Philosophy's preceptor as well as ours. He values as he should the body's pleasure but he prefers that of the mind as having more force, constancy, suppleness, variety and dignity. And, according to him, even that pleasure by no means goes alone (he is not given to such fantasies): it merely has primacy. For him temperance is not the enemy of our pleasures: it moderates them.<sup>180</sup>

[B] Nature is a gentle guide but no more gentle than wise and just: [C] '*Intrandum est in rerum naturam et penitus quid ea postulet*

177. Plutarch, (tr. Amyot), *Banquet des Sept Sages*, 156 G.

178. '88: complaints are *those of ingratitude*. I accept wholeheartedly and thank her for it, what Nature . . . Giver to despise His gift, to debase it or disfigure it – Echoes of James 1:17, and of Genesis 1:25; then a conflation of phrases from Cicero, *De finibus*, III, vi, 20.

179. Montaigne is, textually, condemning Seneca here (*Epist. moral.*, XCII, 7–8). Cf. also Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, III, x, 8–9; Cicero, *Paradoxes*, 1.

180. Erasmus, *Apophthegmata*, III, *Socrates*, LXXVI (among others); Plato, *Laws*, 728E; 892 AB; 896 C ff.

*pervidendum.*' [We must go deeply into the nature of things and find out precisely what Nature wants.] [B] I seek her traces everywhere: we have jumbled them together with the tracks of artifice; [C] and thereby that sovereign good of the Academics and Peripatetics, which is to live according to Nature, becomes for that very reason hard to delimit and portray; so too that of the Stoics which is a neighbour to it, namely, to conform to Nature.<sup>181</sup> [B] Is it not an error to reckon some functions to be less worthy because they are necessities? They will never beat it out of my head anyway that the marriage of Pleasure to Necessity [C] (with whom, according to an ancient, the gods ever conspire) [B] is a most suitable match.<sup>182</sup> What are we trying to achieve by taking limbs wrought together into so interlocked and kindly a compact and tearing them asunder in divorce? On the contrary let us tie them together by mutual duties. Let the mind awaken and quicken the heaviness of the body: let the body arrest the lightness of the mind and fix it fast: [C] '*Qui velut summum bonum laudat animae naturam, et tanquam malum naturam carnis accusat, profecto et animam carnaliter appetit et carnem carnaliter fugit, quoniam id vanitate sentit humana, non veritate divina.*' [He who eulogizes the nature of the soul as the sovereign good and who indicts the nature of the flesh as an evil desires the soul with a fleshly desire and flees from the flesh in a fleshly way, since his thought is based on human vanity not on divine truth.]<sup>183</sup>

[B] There is no part unworthy of our concern in this gift which God has given to us; we must account for it down to each hair. It is not a merely [C] formal [B] commission to Man to guide himself according to Man's [C] fashioning: it is expressly stated, [B] inborn, [C] most fundamental, [B] and the Creator gave it to us seriously [C] and strictly. Commonplace intellects can be persuaded by authority alone, and it has greater weight in a foreign tongue; so, at this point, let us make another charge at it: '*Stultitiae proprium quis non dixerit, ignave et*

181. Cicero, *De senectute*, iii, 5 *De finibus*, V, xxiv, 69; III, vi, 44.

'88: with *bastard* tracks of artifice. Is it not . . .

182. Cf. Erasmus, *Adages*, II, III, XLI, *Adversum necessitatem ne dii quidem resistunt*, citing Simonides' saying and, above all, Plato. Montaigne is strongly influenced by Cicero (*De finibus*, II, xi, 34; IV, x, 25 – IV, xi, 27–9). In I, ii, 7 Cicero notes that the three schools mentioned by Montaigne, the Academics (the Platonists), the Peripatetics (the Aristotelians) and the Stoics have the virtual monopoly of ethics. Current distortions of their principles therefore pervert virtually the whole of moral philosophy. (Cf. also, *De finibus*, III, vi, 20–3; ix, 25–6; *Laelius*, V, 19; etc.) The debt to Cicero is fundamental.

183. St Augustine, *City of God*, XIV, v; stressing that even Plato devalued the body in the life of Man, who is body plus soul.

*contumaciter facere quae facienda sunt, et alio corpus impellere, alio animum, distrahique inter diversissimos motus?*' [Who would not say that it was really foolish to do in a slothful, contumacious spirit something which has to be done anyway, thrusting the body in one direction and the soul in another where it is torn between totally conflicting emotions?]<sup>184</sup>

[B] Go on then, just to see: get that fellow over there to tell you one of these days what notions and musings he stuffs into his head, for the sake of which he diverts his thoughts from a good meal and regrets the time spent eating it. You will find that no dish on your table tastes as insipid as that beautiful pabulum of his soul (as often as not it would be better if we fell fast asleep rather than stayed awake for what we do it for) and you will find that his arguments and concepts are not worth your rehashed leftovers. Even if they were the raptures of Archimedes, what does it matter?<sup>185</sup>

Here, I am not alluding to – nor am I confounding with the [C] scrapings of the pot [B] that we are, and with the vain longings and ratiocinations which keep us musing – those revered souls which, through ardour of devotion and piety, are raised on high to a constant and scrupulous anticipation of things divine; [C] souls which (enjoying by the power of a quick and rapturous hope a foretaste of that everlasting food which is the ultimate goal, the final destination, that Christians long for) scorn to linger over our insubstantial and ambiguous pleasurable 'necessities' and easily assign to the body the bother and use of the temporal food of the senses. [B] That endeavour is a privilege.<sup>186</sup> [C] Among the likes of us there are two things which have ever appeared to me to chime particularly well together – supercelestial opinions: subterranean morals.

That great man [B] Aesop saw his master pissing as he walked along. 'How now,' he said. 'When we run shall we have to shit?'<sup>187</sup> Let us husband our time; but there still remains a great deal fallow and underused. Our mind does not willingly concede that it has plenty of other hours to

184. '88: merely a *farical* commission . . . man's *natural* fashioning [. . .] it is *simple* and inborn [. . .] seriously and expressly . . .

Seneca, *Epist. moral.*, LXXIV, 32 (adapted).

185. Archimedes was ecstatic when he discovered his famous principle. In the next sentence, for 'rabble', *voirie*, Montaigne substituted *marmaille*, a pejorative term recalling to the ear both monkey (*marmot*) and stew-pot (*marmite*).

186. '88: privilege. *Our endeavours are all worldly and among the worldly ones the most natural are the most right.* Aesop . . .

187. From Planudes' *Life of Aesop*, often printed with the *Fables*.



perform its functions without breaking fellowship during the short time the body needs for its necessities. They want to be beside themselves, want to escape from their humanity. That is madness: instead of changing their Form into an angel's they change it into a beast's; they crash down instead of winding high. [C] Those humours soaring to transcendence terrify me as do great unapproachable heights; and for me nothing in the life of Socrates is so awkward to digest as his ecstasies and his daemonizings, and nothing about Plato so human as what is alleged for calling him divine. [B] And of [C] our [B] disciplines it is those which ascend the highest which, it seems to me, are the most [C] base and [B] earth-bound. I can find nothing so [C] abject [B] and so mortal in the life of Alexander as his fantasies about [C] his immortalization. [B] Philotas, in a retort he made in a letter, showed his mordant wit when congratulating Alexander on his being placed among the gods by the oracle of Jupiter Ammon: 'As far as you are concerned I'm delighted,' he said, 'but there is reason to pity those men who will have to live with a man, and obey a man, who [C] trespasses beyond, and cannot be content with, [B] the measure of a man'.<sup>188</sup>

[C] *Diis te minorem quod geris, imperas.*

[Because you hold yourself lower than the gods, you hold imperial sway.]<sup>189</sup>

[B] The noble inscription by which the Athenians honoured Pompey's visit to their city corresponds to what I think:

*D'autant es tu Dieu comme  
Tu te reconnais homme.*

[Thou art a god in so far as thou recognizest that thou art a man.]

It is an accomplishment, absolute and as it were God-like, to know how to enjoy our being as we ought. We seek other attributes because we do not understand the use of our own; and, having no knowledge of what is

188. '88: of *human* disciplines [...] I can find nothing *so base* and so mortal ... about his *deification*. Philotas ... who *exceeds* the measure of a man. The noble inscription ...

('Deification' was used by Christian mystics for the highest rapture. Montaigne replaced it, no doubt, as potentially misleading, Alexander's 'deification' not being an ecstasy but an act of flattery.) For Philotas, cf. Quintus Curtius, VI, 9.

189. Horace, *Odes*, III, vi, 5; then the inscription greeting Pompey as he left Athens, according to Plutarch. (Cited from Amyot's translation of his *Life of Pompey the Great*.)

within, we sally forth outside ourselves. [C] A fine thing to get up on stilts: for even on stilts we must ever walk with our legs! And upon the highest throne in the world, we are seated, still, upon our arses.

[B] The most beautiful of lives to my liking are those which conform to the common measure, [C] human and ordinate, without miracles though and [B] without rapture.

Old age, however, has some slight need of being treated more tenderly. Let us commend it to that tutelary god of health – and, yes, of wisdom merry and companionable:

*Frui paratis et valido mihi,  
Latoe, dones, et, precor, integra  
Cum mente, nec turpem senectam  
Degere, nec cythara carentem.*

[Vouchsafe, O Son of Latona, that I may enjoy those things I have prepared; and, with my mind intact I pray, may I not degenerate into a squalid senility, in which the lyre is wanting.]<sup>190</sup>

190. '88: common measure, without *marvel*, without rapture ... more tenderly *and more delicately*. Let us commend ...

Horace, *Odes*, I, xxxi, 17–20. Apollo, son of Jupiter and Latona, was the god of healing and presided over the Muses.