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NATURE'S ROLE IN THE ESSAIS OF MONTAIGNE

by

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in French in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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III

To my loving parents
Theodora and Sergios,
Who have instilled in me
The essence of perseverance
And an incessant devotion
To the quest for knowledge.

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"Je veux qu'on agisse, et qu'on allonge
les offices de la vie tant qu'on peut,
et que la mort me treuve plantant mes
chous, mais nonchalant d'elle, et
encore plus de mon jardin imparfait."

Montaigne, Les Essais, I, XX, p.91.

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Introduction

The Essais are comprised of a conglomeration of ideas that delve into all aspects of life. A recurrent theme is the intricate role played by Nature in the manifestation and perpetuation of universal order. Although Montaigne does not present an explicit conception of Nature, a diligent evaluation of his views regarding the Human Condition and man's placement in the universe offers a substantial insight into Nature's role in the Essais.

In the chapters that follow I shall attempt to define "Nature" and "Nature's role" as it is perceived by Montaigne. Utilizing the author's depictions of the inner and social self I shall probe his attitudes regarding man's existence, his interactions with the environment, and perception of Nature in its abstract form. Through this procedure I hope to construct a sequential development of Montaigne's concept of Nature in its diverse manifestations: including the physical, philosophical, and psychological

realms; for it is the study of change that ultimately leads
Montaigne to apperceive the Self both as a distinct entity
and as an essential link in the universal order.

* * *

Chapter I

Animal Nature

Montaigne's analysis of the Animal Kingdom is fundamental to his concept regarding Nature and the role it plays in the perpetuation of universal order. Nature, according to the author, endows all living things with innate tendencies which insure the continuation and preservation of each species. The manner in which particular beings relate to their environment is indicative of their basic nature. "Nature a embrassé universellement toutes ses creatures; et n'en est aucune qu'elle n'ait bien plainement fourny de tous les moyens necessaires à la conservation de son estre." (II, 12, 500) ¹

A proficient examination of animal mannerisms discloses a distinct similarity between members of the Animal Kingdom and mankind. Natural inclinations which are intrinsic in all species encompass various domains including sensoral, instinctual, emotional, defensive and sociological traits. Animals

¹ The Book, Chapter and page of Montaigne's Essais are from Garnier Frères edition, Paris 1962.

are instinctively concerned with survival. Their autonomous existence is furthered by an inborn defense system and consistent responses towards environmental changes. "Nature a empreint aux bestes le soing d'elles et de leur conservation." (III, 12, 506)

Both animals and humans interact with members of their own species in order to effectively resolve conflicts which threaten their immediate existence. "Quant aux particuliers offices que nous tirons l'un de l'autre pour le service de la vie, il s'en void plusieurs pareils exemples parmy elles." (II, 12, 528)

Montaigne noted a direct correlation between animal impulses and human preferences. His investigation of behavioral tendencies shows comparative emotional reactions to stress under analogous conditions. The imagination plays a crucial role in the individual's immediate assessment of a particular situation. "Les bestes mesmes se voyent comme nous subjectes à la force de l'imagination." (I, 21, 108) He cites instances where creatures would rather take their own life rather than fall prey to another, as well as examples of animals who perish as a result of grief over the loss of a loved one. The capacity to form psychological bonds with beings of other species is evidenced by their display of sorrow over the death of a close friend. "Nous pleurons

souvent la perte des bestes que nous ayons, aussi font elles la nostre." (II, 12, 528) Animals are subjected to effects of the complete emotional spectrum ranging from elation to distress just as their human counterparts.

Related species favoring cohabitation establish a coherent system of communication which induces as well as enhances positive interactions. The ability to convey emotions is inherent in all beings whether it involves intricate language constructions or basic vocalizations. "Au demeurant, nous decouvrons bien evidentement que entre elles il y a une pleine et entiere communication et qu'elles s'entr'entendent, non seulement celles de mesme espece, mais aussi d'especes diverses." (II, 12, 497) Many species effectuate a keen aptitude for relating thoughts and emotions not only to members of their own community but to other species as well. Some even enter into loyal attachments with people as a result of refined communicative faculties. "Qu'est ce autre chose que parler, cette faculté que nous leur voyons de se plaindre, de se resjouyr, de s'entr'appeller au secours, se convier à l'amour, comme ils font par l'usage de leur voix? Comment ne parleroient elles entr'elles? elles parlent bien à nous, et nous à elles." (II, 12, 503)

Members of species that become isolated from their peers by natural boundaries over a substantial period of time develop speech pattern variations just like individuals of a similar background or culture who inhabit distant regions. Speech deviates according to regional affinities which are instilled and reinforced through imitation and repetition. "Et la difference de langage qui se voit entre nous, selon la difference des contrées, elle se treuve aussi aux animaux de mesme espece." (II, 12, 504)

Species of animals that display similar mannerisms, affinities or preferences are placed within a particular family. Related species create communities which promote the welfare of members through an intricate division of labor based on predominant skills. Authority is delegated to resourceful creatures that demonstrate a readiness to accept full responsibility for the preservation of the community. Intruders are discouraged through the unification of society members who interact with a deep sense of loyalty towards their leaders. "Quant à la société et confederation qu'eiles dressent entre elles pour se liquer ensemble et s'entresecourir, il se voit des boeufs, des porceaux, et autres animaux, qu'au cry de celui

que vous offencez, toute la troupe accourt à son aide et se rallie pour sa defence." (II, 12, 528)

Animals have an acute sense of justice which predisposes them to defend that which is rightfully theirs with unyielding courage and determination. "Si c'est justice de rendre à chacun ce qui luy est deu, les bestes qui servent, ayment et defendent leurs bien-faicteurs, et qui poursuivent et outragent les estrangers et ceux qui les offencent, elles representent en cela quelque air de nostre justice." (II, 12, 519)

Unlike humans, animals are rarely betrayed by members of the same species. It is not uncommon to perceive one creature endanger its life in order to preserve the autonomous existence of a friend. "Quant à l'amitié, elles l'ont, sans comparaison, plus vive et plus constante que n'ont pas les hommes." (II, 12, 519)

Animals are not swayed by ambition or inconstancy because they faithfully adhere to natural inclinations. They obtain an incisive awareness of their immediate surroundings by scrutinizing sustained experiences and ascertaining precisely which actions yield advantageous consequences. Through trial and error they learn to cope with diverse situations and, in this manner, insure self-preservation. "Pourquoy disons nous

que c'est à l'homme science et connoissance bastie par art et par discours, de discerner les choses utiles à son vivre et au secours de ses maladies, de celles qui ne le sont pas." (II, 12, 508)

In contrast to the Renaissance regard for human excellence Montaigne praises the dignity and natural disposition exhibited by the Animal Kingdom. Animals maintain a stable comportment through the pursuit of necessities which are engendered by the present and are not at all perturbed by unrealistic goals or unsatiated desires. ² "Nous nous attribuons des biens imaginaires et fantastiques, des biens futurs et absens, desquels l'humaine capacité ne se peut d'elle mesme respondre, ou des biens que nous nous attribuons faucement par la licence de nostre opinion, comme la raison, la science et l'humeur; et à eux nous laissons en partage des biens essentiels, maniables et palpables: la paix, le repos, la sécurité, l'innocence et la santé." (II, 12, 536)

² "L'animal vit entièrement dans le présent et Montaigne pour qui la vie animale et intelligence animale sont supérieures à la vie et à l'intelligence humaine, estime que c'est la vie véritable." (Thibaudet, Montaigne, p.233)

Animals confront life's challenges with moderation. The foresight which enables them to amass provisions in order to alleviate future hardships is instinctive in all beings but obscured in man by inconsistent behavior and imaginary fears. Animals have a highly developed sensitivity which directs their attention towards imminent needs whereas man is more apt to be discouraged by sudden changes. "Il est croyable qu'il y a des loix naturelles, comme il se voit ès autres creatures; mais en nous elles sont perdues, cette belle raison humaine s'ingerant par tout de maistriser et commander, brouillant et confondant le visage des choses selon sa vanité et inconstance." (II, 12, 653) Animals are not only situated on an equal plane with humans in the natural order of things but often surpass man by their ability to perceive reality with lucid constancy. "Quant à la mesnagerie, elles nous surpassent non seulement en cette prevoyance d'amasser et espargner pour temps à venir, mais elles ont encore beaucoup de parties de la science qui y est necessaire." (II, 12, 521)

Montaigne's primary objective in evaluating animal nature is to present a direct link between mankind and the Animal Kingdom in order to show that virtually all species occupy a comparative level of placement within the universal structure.

"J'ay dit tout cecy pour maintenir cette ressemblance qu'il y a aux choses humaines, et pour nous y ramener et joindre au nombre. Nous ne sommes ny au dessus, ny au dessous du reste: tout ce qui est sous le Ciel, dit le sage, court une loy et fortune pareille." (II, 12, 504) It is inconceivable that Nature would provide certain species with distinctive properties which are intentionally lacking in others.³ Human presumption impels individuals to assert beliefs advocating Nature's abandonment of mankind and in this manner ascribe gains and accomplishments to acquired wisdom rather than to natural affinities. "La vanité de nostre presumption faict que nous aymons mieux devoir à nos forces qu'à sa liberalité nostre suffisance; et enrichissons les autres animaux des biens naturels et les leur renouçons, pour nous honorer et ennoblir des biens acquis." (II, 12, 505-6)

The degree of perfection that may be attained depends upon the individual's ability to appraise diverse situations

³ "Montaigne est si persuadé de la bonté de la nature qu'il lui est impensable qu'entre les créatures certaines sont nées pour le malheur." (Conche, Montaigne ou la conscience heureuse, p. 23)

in order to react methodically to sporadic changes. Man has neither been forsaken by Nature nor lavished with unique attributes. He acquires efficient skills through the process of trial and error as do members of the Animal Kingdom. Vanity predominates in his attempts to display intellectual prowess. "Il est entravé et engagé, il est assubjecty de pareille obligation que les autres creatures de son ordre, et d'une condition fort moyenne, sans aucune prerogative, praeexcellence vraye et essentielle. Celle qu'il se donne par opinion et par fantasie n'a ny corps ny goust." (II, 12, 505)

* * *

Chapter II

Human Nature: the internal world

Although the Essais encompass diverse philosophical ideas Montaigne's primary objective concerns the explicit presentation of self. "Chacun regarde devant soy; moy, je regarde dedans moy: je n'ay affaire qu'à moy, je me considere sans cesse, je me contrerolle, je me gouste." (II, 17, 61)

*He realizes that to write at all is to portray oneself and finds in himself the unity of his book.¹ The ability to delve into the core of self in order to envision Human Nature distinguishes this author from other philosophers of his time. "J'ay faict ce que j'ay voulu: tout le monde me reconnoit en mon livre, et mon livre en moy." (III, 5, 303) Since truth is relative Montaigne can only evaluate inner reality with any degree of certainty. Because the outcome of his life is dependent upon his willingness to abide by Nature's laws

¹ Donald Frame, Montaigne's Discovery of Man, p.82.

and his conformity to basic instincts nothing is more sacred to him than his natural form. "Je n'ay rien mien que moy." (III, 9, 408)

The literary genre he has chosen concurs with his perception of self in that both follow a natural unrestricted course of oscillation. "J'ay une ame toute sienne, accoustumée à se conduire à sa mode." (II, 17, 44) Because Montaigne regards man's condition as being in a fluid state the Essais reflect life's varied movements in their unstructured style.² "Mon stile et mon esprit vont vagabondant de mesmes." (III, 9, 438-9)

The self portrait appears fragmentary in that it is not confined to any particular section of the work. It is mobile because it manifests transformations that are sustained by one being as a result of diverse encounters with the external world. The author's temperament is often affected by changing

² Floyd Gray, Le Style de Montaigne, p.158.

conditions and his ideas may vary in accordance with immediate experiences, but the overall presentation of self discloses natural inclinations that cannot be altered by circumstance. Throughout the Essais we perceive countless facets of one personality - of the same person. ³

The fragmented portrayal of self reflects man's transient condition but is by no means incomplete because it offers a substantial evaluation of the author's image from several points of view: behavioral, philosophical, psychological, physiological and sociological. Montaigne enumerates capabilities as well as shortcomings in order to present a realistic portrayal of self. ⁴ "Je veux qu'on voye mon pas naturel et ordinaire, ainsin detraqué qu'il est." (II, 10, 449) He is an avid observer of Human Nature in his endeavor to

³ Philip Hallie, Montaigne and Philosophy as Self Portraiture, p.22.

⁴ "Le soin avec lequel il note les contradictions, chez lui et chez les autres, et dans les choses, prouve bien sa volonté de ne rien cacher, de ne rien se cacher." (Alexandre Micha, Le Singulier Montaigne, p.141.)

decipher Nature's role in the formation of his individuality. "Mes défauts s'y liront au vif, et ma forme naïve, autant que la reverence publique me l'a permis." (Au Lecteur, p.1)

What differentiates one being from another is the natural form which is comprised of inclinations that not only direct behavioral preferences but also endow it with a particular identity. "Mes actions sont réglées et conformes à ce que je suis et à ma condition." (III, 2, 232) Living naturally entails adhering to inborn tendencies in order to enhance communications with the inner self. "J'accepte de bon coeur, et reconnoissant, ce que Nature a fait pour moy, et m'en agrée et m'en loue." (III, 13, 574) By natural inclinations the author implies personality traits, mannerisms, reactions towards the environment, innate skills and abilities as well as attitudes towards sporadic changes. Montaigne faces life's diverse experiences without modifying his natural comportment. "Je cede et m'accommode en general, autant que tout autre, à la nécessité." (III, 10, 553) Natural for him is that which furthers inner tranquility: the basic emotions, necessary appetites, common sense, and judgment.

Unnatural is that which disturbs the self's physiological and psychological balance. Subject to unnatural use are imagination and unbridled reasoning in its diverse manifestations: ambition, presumption, insatiability and apprehension. ⁵

For Montaigne moderate reactions towards changes are essential for psychological equilibrium. Natural tendencies are unquestionably accepted regardless of how they may be perceived or judged by social standards. "Je me laisse aller, comme je suis venu, je ne combats rien." (III, 12, 511) He accepts sole responsibility for his actions and is therefore held accountable for errors in judgment that may occur. "The very notion of a self-portrait necessarily implies a doubling of personality or at any given rate of functions within the self." ⁶ The author's affinities are often disclosed through vivid accounts of responses towards life's changes. "Je me presente debout et couché, le devant et le

⁵ Frame, Montaigne's Discovery of Man.

⁶ R.A. Sayce, The Essays of Montaigne: a critical exploration, p.72.

derriere, à droite et à gauche, et en tous mes naturels plis."
 (III, 8, 381) Because reactions towards the environment are
 indicative of natural tendencies each experience contributes
 towards the observation and evaluation of self.

Man emerges as a distinct entity endowed with inborn
 traits which predispose the self to act in a set manner.⁷
 "Lors que je consulte des deportemens de ma jeunesse avec ma
 vieillesse, je trouve que je les ay communement conduits
 avec ordre, selon moy." (III, 2, 232)

Since inclinations are an integral part of the natural
 form education cannot alter the basic comportment: it can
 only refine or accentuate traits that are naturally present,
 that essentially remain intact. "Ce que je fais aysément
 et naturellement, si je m'ordonne de le faire par une expresse
 et prescrite ordonnance, je ne le sçay plus faire." (II, 17,
 52) Because reason is unable to deter innate tendencies a

⁷ "Nous ne pouvons pas changer notre nature, ni la douer
 de facultés et de pouvoirs qui lui ont été refusés." (Pierre
 Borel, Autour de Montaigne, p.33)

person cannot deviate from his natural disposition without engendering psychological turmoil. "Je n'ay guere de mouvement qui se cache et desrobe à ma raison, et qui ne se conduise à peu près par le consentement de toutes mes parties, sans division, sans sedition intestine." (III, 2, 231)

Since man cannot transform his basic nature Montaigne strives to analyze behavioral tendencies in order to comprehend natural motivations. "He realizes that the way the self grows is by attaining a fuller concept of what it is, by a more complete comprehension of its capabilities and of its faults." ⁸ The Essais are thus perceived as one man's struggle to define Human Nature and grasp the essence of self. ⁹ They depict the manner in which one being consciously

⁸ Carlos David Fandal, The Concept of Self in the Essais of Michel de Montaigne, p.52.

⁹ "Ses Essais sont avant tout une manière de se connaître, de s'éprouver, de se décrire, de parler de la chose qu'il connaît le mieux, mieux que n'importe qui, bien qu'il y fasse des découvertes constantes, puisque ces découvertes c'est sa vie: lui-même." (Thibaudet, p.465)

experiences a gradual awareness of personal needs and desires. Through self-awareness Montaigne comes to terms with inner aspirations and learns to cope with existence itself. "Qui auroit à faire son fait, verroit que sa premiere leçon, c'est cognoistre ce qu'il est et ce qui luy est propre." (I, 3, 11)

Montaigne's philosophical endeavors prompted him to detach his soul from social interactions. Because he is embarked on a quest for knowledge which may only be attained through meditation and the devotion to an inner reality rejection of the external world is inevitable. The Essais affirm his negative regard towards social commitments: "Mais aux affections qui me distrayent de moy et attachent ailleurs à celles là certes m'oppose-je de toute ma force." (III, 10, 447)

"What the man in quest of self-knowledge does is to seek to acquire a greater consciousness of his existence by differentiating himself from all that exists around him." ¹⁰ He restricts interactions of the self and the external world to basic family ties and obligations thereby remaining free to decipher inner aspirations. "Mes conditions corporelles sont

¹⁰ Fandal, p.26.

en somme trèsbien accordantes à celles de l'ame." (II, 17, 43) He is comprised of a dual personality: in part he is the observer of external reality; he is also the judge of self as it encounters change and reacts towards particular stimuli. "Someone is living and acting, someone is watching him live and act." ¹¹ "Avec bien peu d'effort j'arreste ce premier branle de mes esmotions, et abandonne le subject qui me commence à poiser, et avant qu'il m'emporte." (III, 10, 463) Isolation enables him to attain a valid basis for evaluating life's challenges. Without first acquiring the ability to dissociate personal needs from sociological obligations one cannot discern natural affinities. "Le sage doit au dedans retirer son ame de la presse, et la tenir en liberté et puissance de juger librement des choses." (I, 23, 125) Based on the above notion the possession and ultimate acceptance of self are imperative. ¹² An individual must cultivate the inner self. He must not only feel comfortable with the

¹¹ Sayce, p.72.

¹² "On se saisit soi-même dans l'expérience - fort rare - de l'unité; et l'on est proche de soi-même dans l'activité visant à 'reigler' la vie." (Michel Baraz, L'Etre et la connaissance selon Montaigne, p.149)

image he is projecting but also content with the immediate present. "Regardez dans vous, reconnoissez vous, tenez vous à vous; vostre esprit et vostre volonté, qui se consomme ailleurs, ramenez la en soy." (III, 9, 446)

Although there is evidently some egocentricity in the author's impending need for isolation the reader must bear in mind that self awareness is frequently impeded by social interactions. Since the knowledge of self depends on meditation and introspection the author advocates a solitary existence. "Je me presche il y a si long temps de me tenir à moy, et separer des choses estrangeres." (III, 12, 494)

Self-awareness leads to the affirmation of self as well as to the acceptance of personal limitations and character flaws. Man perceives the self as an entity which is endowed with natural strengths and abilities but also characterized by certain weaknesses. "Je n'ay guere à me prendre de mes fautes ou infortunes à autre qu'à moy." (III, 2, 233) Montaigne has little desire to project a perfect image to the reader. He attributes positive traits to Nature's generosity rather than to intellectual fortitude. "Mes meurs sont naturelles;

je n'ay point appellé à les bastir le secours d'aucune discipline." (II, 12, 611) Fortunately he has been blessed with a flexible disposition that allows him to adapt to sporadic changes without anxiety. "Je me contente de jouir le monde sans m'en empresser, de vivre une vie seulement excusable, et qui seulement ne poise ny à moy, ny à autruy." (III, 9, 389)

Montaigne regards life as a series of experiences that affect the self's composure to a minimal degree provided they comply with its natural comportment. He entrusts judgment to resolve conflicts moderately, thereby formulating sound criteria by which to appraise and gratify personal aspirations in a consistent manner.¹³ "Mon jugement m'empesche bien de regimber et gronder contre les inconveniens que nature m'ordonne à souffrir." (III, 5, 265) Acts that are naturally stimulated do not generate psychological tension. The self does not fluctuate from one emotional state to another but rather adheres placidly to natural tendencies. "J'ordonne à mon ame de regarder et la douleur et la volupté de veuë pareillement réglée." (III,

¹³ "Il ne vise qu'à s'apprendre lui-même pour vivre selon ce qu'il est." (Conche, p.70)

13, 571) It is wiser to avoid energy-depleting emotions than to try to curb their negative effects once they have been assimilated into the psychological sphere. "Les passions me sont autant aisées à éviter comme elles me sont difficiles à moderer." (III, 10, 466) Montaigne occasionally does fall prey to unbridled emotions but, nevertheless, strives to rechannel their effects and regulate his reactions towards stress in order to minimize psychological disturbances.

Self-awareness results in the unification of self as the individual collates instinctual impulses, judgment, and sensibility with consistent actions. There is no discrepancy between the motivation and commission of an act. Throughout the Essais the author presents a certain uniformity of character that is reflected through a tranquil disposition. "Si j'avois à revivre, je revivrais comme j'ay vescu; ny je ne plains le passé, ny je ne crains l'advenir." (III, 2, 236) He entrusts life to both God and Nature who have enhanced his character with a sound judgment, flexibility and moderate tendencies. "Pour moy donc, j'ayme la vie et la cultive telle qu'il a pleu à Dieu nous l'octroier." (III, 13, 574) Through self-awareness he has discerned the essence of happiness which is

found in simplicity, constancy, and naturalness. Even death is perceived as the natural culmination of the life cycle and contemplated with serenity. "Je me contente d'une mort recueillie en soy, quiete et solitaire, toute mienne, convenable à ma vie retirée et privée." (III, 9, 420)

The issue pertaining to Montaigne's candid and unbiased exposition of natural tendencies has preoccupied readers and critics since the advent of the Essais. Many have challenged the image of self that permeates through the author's analysis of Human Nature: "Ceux qui disent communément contre ma profession que ce que j'appelle franchise, simplesses et naïveté en mes moeurs, c'est art et finesse et plustost prudence que bonté, industrie que nature, bon sens que bon heur, me font plus d'honneur qu'ils ne m'en ostent." (III, 1, 211-12)

Since the external and internal worlds that are divulged in the Essais are, in essence, an extension of Montaigne's perception of reality it is feasible to contend that projected images are tempered by psychological impressions despite the author's insistence on personal objectivity. "Au demeurant, je ne corrige point mes premieres imaginations par les secondes;

ouy à l'aventure quelque mot, mais pour diversifier, non pour oter." (II, 37, 169) His sole purpose, he affirms, is to decipher natural propensities in order to reveal a realistic image of self. ¹⁴ Honesty is inherent in his basic nature. "J'ayme la modestie; et n'est par jugement que j'ay choisi cette sorte de parler scandaleux: c'est Nature qui l'a choisi pour moy." (III, 5, 319)

Knowledge of self ultimately evolves into the study of Human Nature. The self not only represents man's individual form but also reflects humanity in its quest for inner stability. ¹⁵ Montaigne's image of self has undoubtedly been

¹⁴ "Tout son effort consiste à découvrir la 'forme maîtresse,' c'est-à-dire la condition interne de l'homme, la condition humaine sans étude et artifice." (Gray, p.158)

¹⁵ "L'originalité de Montaigne est d'avoir peint en lui non un original et un excentrique mais l'humaine nature, sous les traits les plus individuels et les plus vivants." (Thibaudet, p.48)

transformed into the portrait of mankind by aspirations which exemplify needs shared by all beings that comply with Nature's Laws. 16

16 "On voit ainsi se dégager l'idéal moral de Montaigne: réaliser aussi pleinement que possible notre nature d'homme." (Pierre Villey, Les Essais de Michel de Montaigne, p.129)

Chapter III

The External World and the Mobility of Self

Montaigne envisions the universe as a mass in perpetual motion and the self as a mobile entity, a being that is constantly metamorphosed by the passage of time. "Je ne peints pas l'estre. Je peints le passage." (III, 2, 222) He differentiates between the natural form which remains stable and the image of self which varies according to existing circumstances.¹

The degree of transformation which is undergone by the self corresponds to environmental changes that alter both the individual's perception of reality and evaluation of the role played by the self in the perpetuation of universal order. The self's appraisal of a particular experience is affected by its momentary disposition. Judgment and reason are often modified by

¹ "Les Essais nous mettent en présence d'un être qui se laisse saisir, dont on aperçoit les préférences, les traits essentiels, - et d'un autre être, fuyant, multiple, qui nous glisse entre les doigts." (Micha, p.7)

the individual's psycho-physiological condition and therefore constitute an integral part of the mobile self. "Non seulement le vent des accidens me remue selon son inclination, mais en outre je me remue et trouble moy mesme par l'instabilité de ma posture." (II, 1, 369) Although the personality, basic com-
 portment, and moral convictions remain uniform due to a continuous reinforcement by natural inclinations the assessment of past experiences deviates according to the self's present condition. An impaired health alters judgment, desires impede the ability to discern excessive behavior, and a depressed mental state diminishes the self's willingness to cope with impeding difficulties. "Un mesme pas de cheval me semble tantost rude, tantost aysé, et mesme chemin à cette heure plus court, une autrefois plus long, et une mesme forme ores plus, ores moins agreable." (II, 12, 635)

Since the perception of reality is inconsistent, attitudes regarding personal needs and aptitudes undoubtedly change. For this reason Montaigne does not strive to present the essence of self in its entirety but rather portrays its mobility. He analyzes the self's reactions towards life's experiences in

order to depict its changeability.² Thus, the Essais reveal the degree of transformation which is sustained by the self over a substantial period of time. The self is perceived as an entity consisting of a multiplicity of potent selves that emerge from one moment to another.³

Custom plays a notable role in the formation and manifestation of changes that occur in the self's disposition. "Nous luy voyons forcer tous les coups les reigles de nature." (I, 23, 113) It is fundamental to the author's study of Human Nature in that it explicates behavioral deviations and philosophical antitheses.

The self gradually adapts to immutable conditions as it becomes apparent that they cannot be altered through inner determination. "Nous nous durcissons à tout ce que nous

² "Il fait une distinction entre le moi de maintenant et le moi de tantôt, qui sont deux." (Alfred Glauser, Montaigne Paradoxal, p.48)

³ Jerome Schwartz, Diderot and Montaigne, p.72.

accoustumons." (III, 9, 410) Acquired habits are regarded as being anti-Nature even though they are perpetuated through the lack of adequate resistance because they do not constitute a valid expression of the self's basic form. Although Nature has endowed all beings with certain inclinations that dictate specific responses towards external stimuli the persistent reinforcement of a non-natural act may cause modifications in the basic comportment.

Once a tendency is instilled through repetition over a long period of time it becomes increasingly difficult to ascertain whether it is inborn or acquired because it has become automatic. "On s'apprivoise à toute estrangeté par l'usage et le temps." (III, 11, 477) The newly-acquired habit proceeds to impair the judgment's ability to determine whether an action is beneficial or detrimental to inner stability, thereby causing the self to relinquish former norms of behavior in order to adhere to the deviant custom. "Nostre entremise n'est quasi qu'une routine, et plus communément consideration d'usage et d'exemple que de raison." (III, 8, 369)

Man, according to the Essais, has not only modified the senses through acquired customs ("l'accoutumance hebeté nos sens" I, 23, 113) but has actually decreased his ability to withstand stressful changes. A close examination of other species reveals that they are able to sustain natural hardships with greater stamina. Man's immediate goal involves the gratification of habits that often impede the self's ability to perceive reality with objectivity. "L'assuefaction endort la veuë de nostre jugement." (I, 23, 116) "The essay on custom has shown us how much Montaigne felt his own inclinations had been buried under habits, opinions and laws." ⁴

Social mores reflect subjective views that are manifested and substantiated through accepted traditions. "Les loix prennent leur autorité de la possession et de l'usage." (II, 12, 656) In order to liberate judgment from preconceived notions and prejudicial attitudes man must scrutinize traditions and determine whether they are perpetuated at the expense of personal integrity. Because customs alter behavioral tendencies

⁴ Frederick Rider, The Dialectic of Selfhood in Montaigne, p.74.

and affect the reasoning process their validity and effectiveness should be clearly defined before they are assimilated into the self's moral code of ethics.

The conscience is perceived as the faculty which formulates norms that serve as guidelines by which actions are evaluated and judged by the self. It supervises man's moral development, seeking to attain goodness and virtue by inducing the self to consider the consequences of a proposed action as soon as it is externally motivated. The conscience acts both as an independent entity and as a function of judgment. "It generally denotes man's natural and personal notion of good and evil."⁵

Social mores and acquired customs affect the moral code or laws of conscience. "Les loix de la conscience, que nous disons naistre de nature, naissent de la coustume." (I, 23, 121) Since the self's perception of reality varies according to immediate experiences there are no absolute behavioral norms.

⁵ Raymond C. La Charité, The Concept of Judgment in Montaigne, p.142.

"Nothing that is may be said to be against Nature, but only against what we are used to." ⁶ The judgment's evaluation of other cultures remains subjective in that it tends to condemn customs that do not concur with familiar habits. "Chacun appelle barbarie ce qui n'est pas de son usage." (I, 31, 234) In this manner predominant social mores are transformed into norms by which deviant actions are morally assessed. "Nous appellons contre nature ce qui advient contre la coutume; rien n'est que selon elle, quel qu'il soit." (II, 30, 118)

Once the concepts of good and evil are firmly established by the conscience the self interacts in the external world with a distinct moral perspective. It cannot be readily compelled to denounce beliefs that adhere to norms which have been instilled in accordance with the laws of conscience. The conscience fortifies positive actions by augmenting inner repose while it severely admonishes behavior that does not comply with the self's moral code. Every act which defies the laws of conscience engenders feelings of remorse and inner tension.

⁶ Schwartz, p.89.

"Tant est merveilleux l'effort de la conscience! Elle nous fait trahir, accuser et combattre nous mesme, et, à faute de tesmoing estrangier, elle nous produit, contre nous."

(II, 5, 401)

Virtue is either inborn or acquired as a result of a tenacious compliance with the self's moral code. Montaigne distinguishes between natural goodness, which entails having a calm and generous disposition, and the ultimate attainment of a virtuous comportment through the persistent resolution of conflict. A fundamental prerequisite of virtue is inner strife which is effectively directed towards positive acts through a firm adherence to the laws of conscience.

"Montaigne will not allow the name of virtue to those inclinations towards goodness which are born with us."⁷

Although a serene disposition is essential for psychological equilibrium natural goodness cannot parallel virtue which attains consistency through the effective moderation

⁷ Edward Dowden, Michel de Montaigne, p.268.

of desires and resourceful channeling of surplus energy towards constructive actions. Once virtue is attained difficult challenges augment the self's determination to subdue stress in order to perpetuate inner stability. "La vertu sonne je ne sçay quoy de plus grand et de plus actif que de se laisser, par une heureuse complexion, doucement et paisiblement conduire à la suite de la raison." (II, 11, 462) Virtue censors negative emotions in order to eradicate tension as it induces the self to accept all losses with dignity. Without its proficient supervision life would be transformed into an erratic journey, devoid of purpose, which alienates the individual and depletes the self of moral integrity. "Son office propre et particulier, c'est sçavoir user de ces biens là réglément, et les sçavoir perdre constamment." (I, 26, 175)

Virtue originates with the conscious modification of behavior and attains perfection only after moderation and consistency of action have become an integral part of the self's comportment. "C'est un mot de Demosthenes, dit-on, que le commencement de toute vertu, c'est consultation et deliberation; et la fin et perfection, constance." (II, 1, 366) Once a virtuous temperament has been incorporated into

the basic form the self is exhilarated by a newfound psychological freedom which enables it to react to the external world without inner stress. "Le prix et hauteur de la vraie vertu est en la facilité, utilité et plaisir de son exercice." (I, 26, 174) Virtuous beings cannot be induced to accept social mores that may compromise personal integrity because responsibility to the self has led to the definitive endorsement of the laws of conscience. Virtue instills perfection as it directs the self to cope with reality without succumbing to indiscriminate pressures or futile obligations. "Le droit de la vertu doit prevaloir le droit de nostre obligation." (III, 1, 219)

Grief is perceived as a natural occurrence which is often induced by the self's momentary inability to cope with affliction or stress. In order to minimize the depressive effects of grief the immediate conflict must be resolved either through reason or by focussing attention on past accomplishments. "Il est en nous, si non de l'aneantir, au moins de l'amoindrir par la patience." (I, 14, 54)

Nature regulates the duration of sorrow in order to offset its turbulent effects. A severe ailment lasts for a short duration whereas a minor discomfort usually lingers over a longer period of time. "Davantage, cela doit nous consoler: que naturellement, si la douleur est violente, elle est courte; si elle est longue, elle est legiere." (I, 14, 55)

The self counteracts stress by discerning which actions yield positive consequences in specific situations. The inability to regulate superfluous desires augments a person's susceptibility to stress. Ambitions and desires are often intensified by the imagination. Fear immobilizes judgment thereby magnifying inner tension and distorting the self's perception of reality. "Ce qui nous fait souffrir avec tant d'impatience la douleur, c'est de n'estre pas accoustumez de prendre nostre principal contentement en l'ame." (I, 14, 56) Although grief is a natural phenomenon its intensity may be depreciated by the degree of reason which is applied to resolve stress that jeopardizes the self's moral integrity.

Man is motivated by a natural quest for knowledge. His inquisitive temperament directs him towards the study of Human

Nature as he strives to discern what definitive role is played by the self in the manifestation of universal equilibrium.

"Il n'est desir plus naturel que le desir de connoissance.

Nous essayons tous les moyens qui nous y peuvent mener."

(III, 13, 516)

One basic fallacy concerning knowledge is caused by man's insistence on the possible acquisition of absolute truths. Man fails to realize that since the cosmos is in constant motion, nothing, not even acquired knowledge, may remain unchallenged. "We have no true knowledge of the created world because both we and it are perpetually changing."⁸ Relative truths are attained through the analysis of life's experiences, through the scrutinization of environmental changes, or as a result of scientific experimentation. Most forms of knowledge, however, that are obtained through observations of the external world are by nature inconclusive due to the interjection of personal views and customs. "Since our senses are unreliable and our interpretations of phenomena at variance with one another, he has already concluded (in the Apology for Raymond Sebond)

⁸ Frame, Montaigne's Discovery of Man, p.169.

that we have no communication with Being except by the extraordinary intervention of God's grace." ⁹ Man's greatest error is to presume that he has acquired absolute truths, overlooking the fact that our assessment of reality is obstructed by preconceived notions and beliefs. "Quoy que ce soit qui tombe en nostre connoissance et jouissance, nous sentons qu'il ne nous satisfaiet pas, et allons beant après les choses advenir et inconnuës, d'autant que les presentes ne nous soulent point." (I, 53, 343) Because the senses alter man's capacity to interpret natural phenomena he can only perceive occurrences that relate directly to his immediate situation.

Man's quest for knowledge remains unsatiated because he is never content with the degree of truth he has accumulated at any given moment. ¹⁰ His conscious endeavor to define the limits of his comportment leads him to question the validity

⁹ Rider, p.153.

¹⁰ "Pour Montaigne, il n'existe pas de connaissance dans laquelle l'objet et la pensée s'accordent." (Hugo Friedrich, Montaigne, p.151)

of acquired knowledge. "Quiconque cherche quelque chose, il en vient à ce point: ou qu'il dict qu'il l'a trouvée, ou qu'elle ne se peut trouver, ou qu'il en est encore en queste." (II, 12, 557) A scrutinization of the human sensory system discloses that sensoral impulses are affected by physiological or psychological disturbances. Knowledge which involves the internalization of a preconceptual view of the external world based on personal observation is highly subjective. Knowledge obtained through the senses in conjunction with judgment is, therefore, inconclusive. "Les yeux humains ne peuvent apercevoir les choses que par les formes de leur cognoissance." (II, 12, 597)

Montaigne's analysis of Human Nature has revealed that man is unable to expound logical theories concerning universal order. Man is a mass of contradictions that continuously plague his existence causing him to fluctuate from one view to another without sound foundations. A truly knowledgeable individual admits that his comprehensive view of Nature is limited, that he ignores the basic cause of most occurrences. "Le plus sage homme qui fut onques, quand on luy demanda ce qu'il sçavoit, respondit qu'il sçavoit cela, qu'il ne sçavoit

rien." (II, 12, 555) Because man is unable to discern the true nature of things he attributes known characteristic traits to phenomena which continuously elude reason. A detailed study of Nature discloses partial truths. For this reason the author turns to the analysis of self in order to perpetuate inner stability. He is an avid observer of the self in its interactions with the environment. "If perfect truth is unattainable, experience has taught him the value of practical moral truths by which we live."¹¹ Montaigne is aware that man's desire to obtain perfect knowledge ultimately causes him to reject the present in search of future attainments that are inconceivable. "Le soing de s'augmenter en sagesse et en science, ce fut la premiere ruine du genre humain." (II, 12, 552) The degree of perfection which may be attained by knowledge is infinitesimal as compared to the vast amount of unresolved phenomena that persist in Nature without adequate clarification. Knowledge will remain deficient as long as man continues to be perplexed by natural occurrences which defy logical and scientific explanations.

¹¹ Frame, Montaigne's Discovery of Man, p.250.

Chapter IV

The Life Cycle: man in accordance with Nature

Montaigne's philosophy of life perceives man's existence as a succession of distinct moments. In scrutinizing various stages of the life cycle the author relates personal transformations to Nature's seasonal changes and, in this manner, enriches his immediate experiences.¹ Nature affirms the existing correlation between environmental modifications and the Human Condition. "Si vous avez pris garde au branle de mes quatre saisons, elles embrassent l'enfance, l'adolescence, la virilité et la vieillesse du monde." (I, 20, 96) She prepares man to savor each fleeting moment in order to preserve a serene disposition in the midst of external chaos. "La plus expresse marque de la sagesse, c'est une esjouissance constante." (I, 26, 173) To live in the present is to concentrate one's energy towards the possible accumulation of positive experiences

¹ "La personnalité s'affirme et s'enrichit par la recherche de la consonance avec ce qui est accessible dans la nature." (Baraz, p.160)

which, in turn, reinforce internal balance and augment emotional stability. "This order not only applies to the self's consistent actions, but also to the direction in which an individual progresses." ² "Nostre bien estre, ce n'est que la privation d'estre mal." (II, 12, 546)

Montaigne is aware of the spontaneity of life's successive stages. He regards Nature's perpetual motion as life's predominant trait. For him the expedient resolution of inner conflict is vital for a healthy comportment. Thus, energy is never expended for the contemplation of future hardships that may or may not materialize, but rather directed towards the effective temperance of present difficulties. "Il faut avoir l'ame instruite des moyens de soustenir et combatre les maux, et instruite des reigles de bien vivre et de bien croire, et souvent l'esveiller et exercer en cette belle estude." (III, 5, 262)

The art of living expounded by the author entails the

² Fandal, p.93.

natural transformation of sporadic incidents into moments of inner harmony. This may be accomplished by establishing a cohesive unity between diverse responses towards external change.³ By remaining faithful to natural inclinations the self not only formulates but also reinforces a behavioral pattern based on consistency and psychological stability. Life's overall duration is, therefore, inconsequential because what really matters is the intensity of immediate experiences as they are sustained by the self during various encounters with the outside world.⁴ "Si vous avez vescu un jour, vous avez tout veu. Un jour est égal à tous jours." (I, 20, 96)

Nature acts as a prudent guide that directs man towards the fulfillment of basic needs. Nothing in Nature is super-

³ "Ainsi le rôle de l'esprit est d'unifier les multiples possibilités de l'individu dans une courbe cohérente, tout en les laissant s'épanouir." (F. Joukovsky, Montaigne et le problème du temps, p.182)

⁴ "Le vrai temps est le présent, parce que c'est celui de l'action, et de la détermination de soi." (ibid., p.83)

fluous. "Il n'y a rien d'inutile en nature; non pas l'inutilité mesmes; rien ne s'est ingeré en cet univers, qui n'y tienne place opportune." (III, 1, 206) All creatures pursue a course of action that manifests the overall universal structure.

Since Nature is characterized by diversity in motion the self needs to enhance natural affinities and compound advantageous responses with regard to environmental changes through an incessant application of judgment and self-regulating principles. "Nostre principale suffisance, c'est sçavoir s'appliquer à divers usages." (III, 3, 237) Man's most triumphant achievement involves his tranquil adaptation to change.⁵ "Or la fin, ce crois-je, en est tout'une, d'en vivre plus à loisir et à son aise." (I, 39, 268)

Montaigne repeatedly emphasizes the importance of retaining immediate tasks and longterm goals in proper perspective, throughout the Essais. The belief that Nature protects man,

⁵ "Ce qui existe pour lui, c'est la vie, c'est l'être vivant dans son développement et sa durée, par conséquent dans son changement." (Thibaudet, p.98)

who is generally perceived as a vulnerable creature that is swayed and led astray by psychological alterations, constitutes a major point in the author's philosophy of life. Convinced that man's intellectual fortitude cannot sufficiently decipher phenomena that affect his existence Montaigne advocates a simple comportment that adheres to Nature's Laws. "Il n'est rien si beau et legitime que de faire bien l'homme et deuëment, ny science si ardue que de bien et naturellement sçavoir vivre cette vie." (III, 13, 571)

The Essais praise the simplicity of those who preserve a well-tempered existence through the conscious rejection of transient social mores. The author's conservative nature renders him apprehensive of social or scientific trends that may interfere with Nature's balance, ultimately causing the self to abandon natural tendencies for actions that have not substantially proven to be beneficial. "La moins desdeignable condition de gens me semble estre celle qui par simplesse tient le dernier rang, et nous offrir un commerce plus réglé." (II, 17, 65) According to the author man's scientific advances cannot parallel the level of perfection which is exhibited by creatures that adapt to changes through basic instincts. "C'est imprudence d'estimer

que l'humaine prudence puisse remplir le rôle de la fortune."
 (III, 8, 370)

Life's validity is determined by the degree of inner contentment that is generated through positive actions. "Le n'avoir point de mal, c'est le plus avoir de bien que l'homme puisse esperer." (II, 12, 546) The secret of inner harmony lies in a well-tempered existence. "Montaigne's concept of 'moderation' entails a vigorous mixture of self-limitation and a prudent censure of the presumptions"⁶ that often hinder inner repose causing the self to oscillate between conflicting modes of behavior.

Nature's seasonal changes reflect modifications that are manifested in the human life cycle. They epitomize the birth, growth, development, as well as ultimate demise of all living things. Montaigne actively pursues a natural comportment confident that Nature will endow him with ample strength and wisdom to confront life's imminent challenges. He is not at all perturbed by the uncertainty of life after death because he has

⁶ Rider, The Dialectic of Selfhood in Montaigne.

already savored the essence of life's passing moments.⁷ "Je
 veux qu'on agisse, et qu'on allonge les offices de la vie tant
 qu'on peut, et que la mort me treuve plantant mes chous, mais
 nonchalant d'elle, et encore plus de mon jardin imparfait."

(I, 20, 91)

Montaigne respects the self's ability to curb the degree
 of behavioral deviations that hinder a balanced disposition.
 Joy and despair both comprise a substantial portion of the
 self's emotional spectrum but nevertheless must be tempered
 in order to preserve psychological equilibrium. "On se doit
 moderer entre la haine de la douleur et l'amour de la volupté."

(III, 10, 447)

The author avoids immoderate responses towards change
 that deplete the self of vital energy which is required for
 the maintenance of a natural comportment. "Il faut estendre
 la joye, mais retrencher autant qu'on peut la tristesse."

⁷ "Montaigne est particulièrement sensible à cette dis-
 continuité, qui transforme notre vie en une série de rendez-
 vous avec l'existence." (Joukovsky, p.240)

(III, 9, 420) This principle plays an important role in Montaigne's concept of a sound marital relationship.

Marriage, according to the Essais, is a sacred affirmation of man's natural obligations which entail the dignified preservation of the human species. "On ne se marie pas pour soy, quoy qu'on die; on se marie autant ou plus pour sa posterité, pour sa famille." (III, 5, 273) The marital bond is reinforced by a mutual need for companionship and a natural commitment which minimizes the negative effects of unbridled emotions. "La carriere de nos desirs doit estre circonscripte et restraincte à un court limite des commoditez les plus proches et contigues." (III, 10, 456)

In marriage it is essential to retain one's particular identity intact while the self actively pursues the mutual prosperity of its constituents. A continuous reappraisal of values and psychological reactions is, therefore, imperative because indulgence as well as self-abnegation may lead to the ultimate desolution of self-esteem and human integrity. "Le mariage a pour sa part l'utilité, la justice, l'honneur et la constance: un plaisir plat, mais plus universel."

(III, 5, 278)

Montaigne's aversion for frequent signs of affection stems from his belief that marriage is sacred, that its participants are bound by a supreme obligation to preserve mankind with dignity. There is, therefore, little room for the selfish gratification of personal needs. "C'est une religieuse liaison et devote que le mariage; voilà pourquoy le plaisir qu'on en tire, ce doit estre un plaisir retenu, serieux et meslé à quelque severité; ce doit estre une volupté aucunement prudente et consciencieuse." (I, 30, 227) Time is the ultimate criterion of a particular commitment because a relationship based on respect and trust often endures diverse challenges and thereby remains stable during changing circumstances. "La touche d'un bon mariage et sa vraye preuve regarde le temps que la société dure; si elle a esté constamment douce, loyalle et commode." (II, 35, 152)

Consistency in marriage may be regarded as an invaluable asset but once old age is attained it has become indispensable. Old age accentuates the need for moderation, emphasizing the inherent advantages of inner repose. Peace of mind is ensured

through the reticent acceptance of diverse limitations that prevail as a result of the aging process. "Le jeu de la constance se joue principalement à porter patiemment les inconveniens, où il n'y a point de remede." (I, 12, 43)

Montaigne considers the advent of old age as an unparalleled honor because it represents man's final stage of transformation - one which announces life's imminent culmination. It is revered because during the author's time most individuals were not privileged to experience this phase of life. "C'est bien la borne au delà de laquelle nous n'irons pas, et que la loy de nature a prescript pour n'estre point outrepasée; mais c'est un sien rare privilege de nous faire durer jusques là." (I, 57, 361)

It is undoubtedly wiser to savor life's challenges without reservation than to age prematurely as a result of incessant anticipation. "J'ayme mieux estre moins long temps vieil que d'estre vieil avant que de l'estre." (III, 5, 264)

During this period of life man's quest for knowledge is modified by the inherent need for inner stability. Because he is faced with the convergent termination of life man learns to possess the totality of each fleeting moment by relying on

natural affinities to perpetuate inner tranquility. "C'est en fin tout le soulagement que je trouve en ma vieillesse, qu'elle amortist en moy plusieurs desirs et soins de quoy la vie est inquietée, le soing du cours du monde, le soing des richesses, de la grandeur, de la science, de la santé, de moy." (II, 28, 108)

Old age is imbued with recollections of experiences that had directed the self through countless transformations. For this reason, it is perceived as a phase of placid reflection. "Que l'enfance regarde devant elle, la vieillesse derriere." (III, 5, 263)

As Montaigne sets the stage for life's final scene he prays for nothing more than a serene present. He has had an enriched existence permeated with the stability of a natural comportment. But most of all he has successfully reconciled the soul to contemplate the end with complete repose.

Death is regarded as an integral part of the life cycle. It is manifested in man's evolution as the natural cessation of human transformation. It is the counterpart of birth and

is, therefore, not seen as the absence of life but rather as a vital aspect of the natural cycle.⁸ Since living and dying are interwoven by the passage of time, life's intensity rather than duration determines the ultimate essence of a particular existence. "L'utilité du vivre n'est pas en l'espace, elle est en l'usage." (I, 20, 98) Death is the concrete affirmation of a process that had imperceptibly commenced at birth. "Le continuel ouvrage de vostre vie, c'est bastir la mort. Vous estes en la mort pendant que vous estes en vie. Car vous estes après la mort quand vous n'estes plus en vie." (I, 20, 95)

Once death is perceived as man's natural destination it is no longer something to be feared but an eventuality that is placidly accepted. "Tous les jours vont à la mort, le dernier y arrive." (I, 20, 99) Nature appeases man, teaching him to live in the present without anticipating life's dissolution. The environment is constantly being revitalized by newer, more energetic forms of life that replace ineffectual ones. In this

⁸ "Pour Montaigne, le contraire de la mort n'est pas la vie, mais la naissance." (Joukovsky, pp.202-3)

manner universal balance is attained as well as perpetuated. "Nul ne meurt avant son heure. Ce que vous laissez de temps n'estoit non plus vostre que celuy qui s'est passé avant vostre naissance; et ne vous touche non plus." (I, 20, 97) Once the life cycle nears completion man should placidly yield his position to newer forms of life without trebulation, thereby accepting his finite nature with dignity. "Faites place aux autres, comme d'autres vous l'ont faite." (I, 20, 96)

A notable outcome of self-unification is the strong reinforcement of inner stability. Experience teaches the self to rely on natural inclinations for guidance in order to remain self-sufficient both physically and spiritually. "Regardez un peu comment s'en porte nostre experience: il n'est personne, s'il s'escoute, qui ne descouvre en soy une forme sienne, une forme maistresse, qui luicte contre l'institution, et contre la tempeste des passions qui luy sont contraires." (III, 2, 229-30) The willingness to withdraw from the oscillations of a transient culture in order to preserve a consistent course of action augments spiritual freedom because the self depletes acts which do not comply with its basic nature. "Choice (which

entails the freedom of action) and serenity (the reflection of inner constancy) remain Montaigne's ideals throughout the Essais." ⁹

Man, according to Montaigne, should not only follow Nature but adhere to his inner nature. Consistent actions reinforce the self's distinct identity, leading towards spiritual deliverance from stress. Self-unification entails the reconciliation of the self with its immediate existence. Once a distinct association has been realized between natural affinities and emotional desires the self has attained spiritual harmony. No discrepancy exists between psychological needs and actual accomplishments. ¹⁰ As physiological and spiritual needs concur the individual actively possesses life. "Au reste, quand je veux juger de quelqu'un, je luy demande combien il se contente de soy, jusques où son parler et sa besongne luy plaist." (III, 8, 376) This philosophy is reflected in the

⁹ Marcel Tetel, Montaigne, p.36.

¹⁰ "Montaigne ne se refuse à aucun plaisir: tous ont leur prix, leur temps et leur place dans une vie bien ordonnée." (Gustave Lanson, Les Essais de Montaigne et de la pensée moderne, p.199)

author's contemplation of death.

Man's attitude pertaining to death is largely dependent on the degree of fulfillment that has been experienced during a lifetime of change. Death is contemplated without regret by those who have led a naturally satisfying existence. "Aussi ne sied il proprement bien de ne se desplaire à mourir qu'à ceux qui se plaisent à vivre." (III, 13, 572) The serene acceptance of death transforms every experience into the glorification of life. Death is thus seen as the ultimate moment of truth which asserts the manner in which life's previous challenges had been confronted. "C'est le maistre jour, c'est le jour juge de tous les autres." (I, 19, 80) The author's love of life engenders his serene acceptance of death. Because he has savored Nature's unique beauty and faced innumerable changes he is now ready to confront life's climax without anxiety. "Si nous avons sçeu vivre constamment et tranquillement, nous sçaurons mourir de mesme." (III, 12, 501)

Nature teaches man how to live through repetitive cycles;
she teaches him how to face death in the same manner. ¹¹

¹¹ "Le flux temporel qui traverse ses créatures (les âges de la vie) est déjà une mort, phase après phase." (Fandal, p.282)

She has conditioned man for life's final moment by gradually habituating him to the tranquil loss of consciousness that occurs during the recurrent sleeping process. As the author becomes increasingly aware of the serene transition that is experienced from a conscious to an unconscious state he begins to react towards death with less anticipation. "A l'aventure pourroit sembler inutile et contre nature la faculté du sommeil qui nous prive de toute action et de tout sentiment, n'estoit que, par iceluy, nature nous instruit qu'elle nous a pareillement faicts pour mourir que pour vivre, et, dès la vie, nous presente l'eternel estat qu'elle nous garde après icelle, pour nous y accoustumer et nous en oster la crainte." (II, 6, 407)

Montaigne's analysis of the sleeping process is essential to his comprehension of death's role in the natural cycle because the sensations that are experienced during the consecutive stages are analogous to those which are inherent during life's climax. In this way the author enables the soul to apperceive death before the final moment actually arrives. Death's apprehension is diminished as the individual realizes how serenely the self

is transported from one phase to another.¹² "Il n'y a rien de mal en la vie pour celui qui a bien compris que la privation de la vie n'est pas mal." (I, 20, 88)

Montaigne distinguishes between the unconscious acceptance of life's ultimate end and a courageous confrontation with death. The scrutinization of various phases of the life cycle enables the self to actively place life's sporadic experiences in a linear plane and, in this manner, appraise its total essence. "Je me garderay, si je puis, que ma mort die chose que ma vie n'ayt premierement dit." (I, 7, 28) Every living thing is an apprentice as far as death is concerned because it is life's unique experience.

Socrates epitomizes man's ability to face death with undaunted courage. His love of Nature had led him to contemplate life's end in a dignified manner. Montaigne concludes that

¹² "La comparaison avec le sommeil, familière aussi à Montaigne, signifie, par l'analogie de l'inconscience, l'extinction du moi." (Friedrich, pp.306-7)

the self has undoubtedly attained the pinnacle of wisdom once it has effectively resolved death's anticipation. "Je voyois nonchalamment la mort, quand je la voyois universellement, comme fin de la vie." (III, 4, 259) Thus, one brief moment validates an entire existence as it endows the soul with eternal repose.

* * *

Chapter V

The Human Condition: a divergence from Nature

The most prevalent trait of the cosmic structure undoubtedly entails the perpetual flux of its constituents. This constancy of inconstancy is inherent in Nature's recurrent seasonal cycles.¹ "Le monde n'est que variété et dissemblance." (II, 2, 373) Natural transformations are readily accepted by Montaigne who regards change as being positive only when it serves to enhance universal order. "Il n'y a aucune constante existence, ny de nostre estre, ny de celui des objects." (II, 12, 678) The author's attitude pertaining to sporadic changes, however, varies depending on whether he is referring to Nature or the Human Condition. Natural modifications are beneficial in that they alleviate hardships and dissipate negative emotions by altering the immediate circumstances that had instigated the problem. "Nature precede ainsi par le benefice de l'inconstance;

¹ "L'univers auquel nous invitent les Essais est à la fois un et multiple, stable et mouvent." (Olivier Naudeau, La Pensée de Montaigne et la composition des Essais, p.11)

car le temps, qu'elle nous a donné pour souverain medecin de nos passions, gagne son effaict principalement par là, que, fournissant autres et autres affaires à nostre imagination, il demesle et corrompt cette premiere apprehension, pour forte qu'elle soit." (III, 4, 257)

What the Essais unequivocally condemn, with regard to the Human Condition, are the self's behavioral deviations which prove detrimental to inner stability. "Nos hommes sont si formez à l'agitation et ostentation que la bonté, la moderation, l'equabilité, la constance et telles qualitez quietes et obscures ne se sentent plus." (III, 10, 469) Man's disposition fluctuates as a result of psychological turmoil that impedes the self's ability to perceive reality in a consistent manner.² The self is, therefore, intermittently plagued by contrasting emotions and divergent goals that deplete judgment of its ability to formulate a natural course of action.

² "Judgment's susceptibility to the senses is one of its greatest weaknesses and one which impedes its orderly functioning more than any other facet of life." (La Charité, p.48)

The author's criticism of human inconstancy stems from his conservative beliefs. He firmly advocates that sporadic actions impair judgment as the self is torn between a series of unbridled reactions towards environmental stimuli. Since the universe is in a state of perpetual flux, and since man is constantly altering his perception of reality the self cannot be defined in terms of a pronounced set of tendencies. As man's perception of the environment is modified by psychological desires, his evaluation of basic needs also changes.³ He is always in the process of being, never really existing at any given moment. His comportment is fragmented by psychological alterations. "Il n'y a rien de changé, mais nostre ame regarde la chose d'un autre oeil, et se la represente par un autre visage." (I, 38, 266)

The Essais depict man's passage through time as they attempt to reconstruct the successive phases of the life cycle in order

³ "En termes plus précis, Montaigne nous rend conscients que le jugement fondé sur l'observation n'est pas exempt de pièges: l'individu ne se révèle pas tel qu'il est véritablement." (Hélène-Hedy Ehrlich, Montaigne: La critique et le langage, p.43)

to grasp the essence of discontinuous experiences. By placing sporadic incidents in a linear plane the author aspires to attain a clearer image of the Human Condition. "His most important contribution to psychological thought is no doubt, the notion of the dissolving personality, the multitude of characteristics, motives, impulses, which we habitually reduce to an illusory unity."⁴ As Montaigne states in Book Three: "Il n'est aucune qualité si universelle en cette image des choses que la diversité et varieté." (III, 13, 516)

Imaginary fears impede the self's ability to cope with an existing situation in an objective manner. "C'est la misere de nostre condition, que souvent ce qui se presente à nostre imagination pour le plus vray, ne s'y presente pas pour le plus utile à nostre vie." (II, 12, 569) Before the self can channel energy towards the effective resolution of conflict it must first determine the extent of the imagination's contributing factors and consequently reduce their negative effects. By patiently enduring inevitable hardships, while realistically

⁴ Sayce, p.136.

striving to minimize their intensity, the self learns to adapt to change with less anticipation. "Il n'en faut point pour agiter nostre ame; une resverie sans corps et sans sujet le regente et l'agite." (III, 4, 260) Fear of the unknown is subsequently replaced by a positive attitude towards sporadic changes.

Man's unsatiated need for self-sufficiency evolves into a quest for personal advancement that depletes the inner self of consistent responses towards the external world, thereby augmenting its fear of imminent failure. The imagination's exaggerated vision of reality compounds the existing discrepancy between desired achievements and actual aptitudes.⁵ "Nos sens sont non seulement alterez, mais souvent hebetez du tout par les passions de l'ame." (II, 12, 671-2)

Montaigne's skeptical view of mankind reinforces the impending need for self-awareness as well as behavioral temper-

⁵ "Il s'agit d'un décalage entre le dehors et le dedans dont la cause peut être intentionnelle ou non." (Ehrlich, p.43)

ance and self-unification. He advocates a simple return to Nature based on a direct adherence to natural inclinations which curb desires in compliance with immediate needs. "A quoy nous sert cette curiosité de preoccuper tous les inconvenients de l'humaine nature, et nous preparer avec tant de peine à l'encontre de ceux mesme qui n'ont à l'avanture point à nous toucher?" (III, 12, 500) Because man is deceived by vanity and presumption his distorted view of reality hinders the judgment's reasoning faculties, eventually leading to an unstable disposition. "Quelles differences de sens et de raison, quelle contrariété d'imagination nous presente la diversité de nos passions!" (II, 12, 637)

Man egotistically alleges that scientific advances and individual accomplishments clearly denote the superiority of the human species in the universal order. He imagines that mankind has been created in accordance with the Divine Image, thereby affirming human perfection. "C'est par la vanité de cette mesme imagination qu'il s'egale à Dieu, qu'il s'attribue les conditions divines, qu'il se trie soy mesme et separé de la presse des autres creatures." (II, 12, 496) He embellishes

personal aptitudes unjustly by imputing characteristic traits to the personality that are, in effect, lacking. "C'est de pareille vanité que nous desirons estre autre chose que ce que nous sommes." (II, 3, 388)

Man's unsatiated need for perfection causes him to pursue goals that surpass natural propensities and often lead to the ultimate disdain of self. "Ne cherchons pas des illusions du dehors et inconneuës, nous qui sommes perpetuellement agitez d'illusions domestiques et nostres." (III, 11, 480)

Montaigne's negative portrayal of mankind visibly clashes with the Renaissance view of man as being the Divinity's ideal creation. According to the Essais, vanity and presumption abound, causing the self to permeate judgment with preconceived notions of reality. "La presumption est nostre maladie naturelle et originelle. La plus calamiteuse et fraile de toutes les creatures, c'est l'homme, et quant et quant la plus orgueilleuse." (II, 12, 496)

Man is thus no longer a reflection of Divinity but a minute

component of the total cosmic structure. His intellectual fortitude is often abated by subjective delusions. He unjustifiably refutes the existence of natural phenomena that continuously elude scientific explanations. Judgment remains ineffectual as it incessantly seeks to comprehend universal processes. "La raison m'a instruit que de condamner ainsi résolument une chose pour fauce et impossible, c'est se donner l'avantage d'avoir dans la teste les bornes et limites de la volonté de Dieu et de la puissance de nostre mere nature; et qu'il n'y a point de plus notable folie au monde que de le ramener à la mesure de nostre capacité et suffisance."

(I, 27, 193-4) To attest a comprehensive knowledge of universal functions is to assert personal ignorance and egotistical folly. Hence Montaigne's famous "Que sais-je?" is born out of his conscious scrutinization of human limitations.

"Protagoras dict qu'il n'y a rien en nature que le doute; que, de toutes choses, on peut esgalement disputer, et de cela mesme, si on peut esgalement disputer de toutes choses."

(II, 12, 586)

Since the universal structure is predominantly charac-

terized by incessant flux the self's view of the external world also fluctuates in conjunction with psycho-physiological disturbances. Fear, anxiety, distress, anger, and unbridled emotions tend to impede the judgment's perceptual aptitudes. It is, therefore, not the particular incident itself that engenders an explicit behavioral response but rather the self's preconceived notion as to how the immediate change will affect the realization of psychological needs and impending goals.⁶ This principle explicates the diversity that is often perceived in an individual's behavioral digressions over a period of time. "Il est certain que nostre apprehension, nostre jugement et les facultez de nostre ame en general souffrent selon les inconveniens et alterations du corps, lesquelles alterations sont continuelles." (II, 12, 633)

The Human Condition abounds with immoderation, conflict, irresolution, and inconstancy. Vice flourishes while the self

⁶ "Notre jugement et par conséquent nos actions, ne dépendent pas uniquement de la réalité objective; ce ne sont pas nécessairement des événements qui provoquent notre choix et notre engagement, mais l'idée que l'esprit s'en est fait." (Ehrlich, p.63)

passively strives to present an image of grandeur to the external world. "Tous les abus du monde s'engendrent de ce qu'on nous apprend à craindre de faire profession de nostre ignorance." (III, 11, 477) Unsatiated ambitions are incorporated into the self's quest for knowledge causing the individual to abandon a natural deportment in hopes of attaining ultimate supremacy. Because man is no longer appeased by past achievements he is constantly being plagued by higher ideals that dissipate inner tranquility. He consequently loses touch with reality as he blindly pursues future endeavors.⁷

Montaigne concludes that only a faithful adherence to natural inclinations may enable the self to grasp the essence of life's fleeting moments and, in this manner, grant the individual spiritual deliverance from stress. "Il faut juger avec plus de reverence de cette infinie puissance de nature

⁷ "Notre esprit, outil dérégulé, n'a qu'une connaissance pervertie; conscience de ce qui nous fait défaut, ou, plus souvent, de l'écart entre nous et cet objet qui nous manque, et que nous ne pouvons même pas définir." (Joukovsky, p.211)

et plus de reconnaissance de notre ignorance et foiblesse."

(I, 27, 195)

* * *

Chapter VI
Divine Nature

Man's quest for knowledge inevitably leads him to ponder the essence of perfect truth and also reflect upon the accessibility of Divine Truths as he strives to decipher the universal code in order to explicate Nature's balance. He erroneously pursues universal truths through introspection. By analyzing the self's interactions with environmental modifications he hopes to construct a lucid image of the nature of God. "Qu'il est impossible d'establir quelque chose de certain de l'immortelle nature par la mortelle? Elle ne fait que fourvoyer par tout, mais specialement quand elle se mesle des choses divines." (II, 12, 578-9)

Since man's perception of the external world is modified to a significant degree by his psycho-physiological state an explicit conception of divine truths is implausible. "Omnia incerta ratione et in natura majestate abdita, dict Pline." ¹

¹ "Toutes ces choses sont impénétrables à la raison et cachées dans la majesté de la nature." (II, 12, 602)

(II, 12, 602) Divine truths cannot be deciphered through the reasoning process because they are logically inconceivable. Reason only grasps the essence of partial truths because it is often swayed by acquired customs, social mores, and behavioral norms that are formulated by the conscience. ² "Es choses naturelles, les effects ne rapportent qu'à demy leurs causes." (II, 12, 592) Perfect truth is evident only to God, the sole Creator of the cosmic structure and all it entails. Man's capacity to detect Nature's laws is impaired by unsatiated emotions and biased philosophical views. Man's psycho-physiological limitations as well as inability to effectively assess reality ultimately results in a distorted concept of Divine Nature. "Or rien du nostre ne se peut assortir ou raporter, en quelque façon que ce soit, à la nature divine qui ne la tache et marque d'autant d'imperfection." (II, 12, 582) God alone possesses the essence of universal truths because only He has the power to govern and direct Nature. "La cognoissance des causes appartient seulement à celui qui a la

² "Montaigne prend la précaution de rappeler que la Vérité est d'essence divine et que l'homme ne peut prétendre la posséder que partiellement, selon sa mesure." (Naudeau, p.104)

conduite des choses, non à nous qui n'en avons que la souffrance, et qui en avons l'usage parfaitement plein, selon nostre nature, sans en penetrer l'origine et l'essence." (III, 11, 473)

Incessant changes that occur in nature and the countless transformations that are sustained by the self in its daily interactions with the external world impede the apperception of divine truths. "Because he is constantly changing never being but only becoming man cannot know other things which are also changing. Nor can he know unchanging God, for flux has no knowledge of being.³ Man's intellectual fortitude with respect to divine wisdom is therefore infinitesimal. His reasoning faculties cannot grasp the concept of infinity. Nor can they explicate Nature's role in the perpetuation of universal equilibrium. "Quand nous disons que l'infinité des siecles, tant passez qu'avenir, n'est à Dieu qu'un instant; que sa bonté, sapience, puissance sont mesme chose avecques son essence, nostre parole le dict, mais nostre intelligence ne l'apprehende point." (II, 12, 588)

³ Frame, Montaigne's Discovery of Man, p.60.

Man's basic fallacy pertaining to the accessibility of divine truths is evident in his inept attempts to explain his dualistic nature through the reasoning process. Montaigne does not seek to define the nature of God but rather utilizes the concept of divinity in order to expound on man's ignorance and inefficient logic, through the analysis of diverse speculations regarding Divine Nature and the universal order. ⁴

The acquisition and comprehension of divine truths is relentlessly pursued by man who hopes to achieve the ultimate goal--the attainment of perfect knowledge. Although Montaigne does not negate the existence of such truths he discloses that man's intellect remains inadequate in that it cannot detect divine truths without God's grace. Without divine intervention man's resources are continuously abated by natural occurrences which defy logical explications. "La participation

⁴ "Il a usé du caractère absolument inaccessible de Dieu comme d'un argument parmi d'autres pour faire redescendre la philosophie du ciel sur la terre, pour détourner l'homme de toute tentation métaphysique et la renvoyer à sa 'principale charge' qui est de 'mener l'humaine vie selon l'humaine condition.'" (Francis Jeanson, Montaigne par lui-même, pp.77-8)

que nous avons à la connoissance de la verité, quelle qu'elle soit, ce n'est pas par nos propres forces que nous l'avons acquise. Dieu nous a assez appris cela par les tesmoins qu'il a choisi du vulgaire, simples et ignorans, pour nous instruire de ses admirables secrets." (II, 12, 554)

God accentuates man's limited intellectual potential by revealing explicit truths to only a selected few faithful followers. Without His graceful intervention divine mysteries cannot be apprehended. "Real and Essential reason resides only in God, and man's feeble intellect is totally impotent to handle sacred questions." ⁵ The most brilliant scientific minds fail to explicate natural phenomena that drastically alter the human condition. "Tout ce que nous entreprenons sans son assistance, tout ce que nous voyons sans la lampe de sa grace, ce n'est que vanité et folie." (II, 12, 619)

Man's reality consists of a conglomeration of facts and fallacies emerging from psychological or sociological observa-

⁵ Craig B. Brush, Montaigne and Bayle: variations on the theme of skepticism, p.111.

tions and conditioned responses to recurrent stimuli. The mind elicits past experiences in its attempt to define unresolved phenomena. Thus, man remains subjective in his perception of universal functions. Only God's grace can enlighten the soul in order to prepare it for the acquisition of divine truths. By providing form and substance for random observations God directs the intellect to formulate definitive conclusions regarding Nature. "When discussing God, Montaigne concludes (or assumes) that we must suspend our judgment because to hope to understand Him by reason alone is irreverant and futile." ⁶

God's grace is imperative for the acquisition of divine truths, but what are the prerequisites for the attainment of the Lord's grace? Obedience, for one thing, and faith in the Lord's will places man in a favorable position for spiritual enlightenment. "La premiere loy que Dieu donna jamais à l'homme, ce fust une loy de pure obeissance." (II, 12, 540) Obedience entails honesty, simplicity, basic goodness or morality, as well as the recognition and acceptance of human limitations. Faith

⁶ Ibid., p.98.

effectuates a bond between the divinity and the soul which leads to spiritual edification. "The uncertainty of knowledge and the ensuing wretched condition lead to an inevitable self-abnegation and submission to God's will."⁷ Only complete faith in God's wisdom renders the soul free to accept mysteries that become apparent through God's grace. "C'est une carte blanche préparée à prendre du doigt de Dieu telles formes qu'il luy plaira y graver." (II, 12, 562)

God's presence is manifested throughout Nature. Because man is incapable of attaining a state of perfection and since he comprises only a minute portion of the cosmic structure the existence of a Superior Being that is responsible for the creation of the entire universe is irrefutable. "Nous sommes incapables d'avoir fait le monde; il y a donc quelque nature plus excellente qui y a mis la main. --Ce seroit une sottise arrogante de nous estimer la plus parfaite chose de cet univers; il y a donc quelque chose de meilleur; cela, c'est Dieu." (II, 12, 591)

⁷ Marcel Tetel, Montaigne, p.50.

Man savors the essence of divinity through the contemplation of Nature's unique beauty. The earth is a shrine which attests and glorifies the Lord's grandeur. God is therefore perceived through His Creation. "Ce monde est un temple tres-sainct, dedans lequel l'homme est introduict pour y contempler des statues, non ouvrées de mortelle main, mais celles que la divine pensée a fait sensibles: le Soleil, les estoilles, les eaux et la terre, pour nous représenter les intelligibles." (II, 12, 489-90) To ascertain how a balance of nature is maintained through divine omnipotence man must be receptive to Nature's intricate cycles. "C'est ce qu'il nous dit luy mesme, que ses operations invisibles, il nous manifeste par les visibles." (II, 12, 489)

Since all things which were created by God play an explicit role in the manifestation of universal equilibrium the cosmic structure offers a substantial indication of divine wisdom. "Les choses invisibles de Dieu", dit Saint Paul, 'apparoissent par la creation du monde, considerant sa sapience eternelle et sa divinité par ses oeuvres." (II, 12, 490) The universal structure constitutes an amassment of diverse beings that

contribute towards cosmic balance through specific reactions towards natural changes. ⁸

Although man's presence enhances the universal structure Montaigne does not regard man as the complementary factor in universal perfection. He views man as being only one essential link in a spectrum of natural phenomena. Montaigne's assertions that man's judgment attributes negative characteristic traits to incomprehensible occurrences justify the divinity. Man's ego impedes him from objectively assessing other creatures as he continuously alleges human superiority. "Est-il possible de rien imaginer si ridicule que cette miserable et chétive creature, qui n'est pas seulement maîtresse de soy, exposée aux offenses de toutes choses, se die maîtresse et emperière de l'univers, duquel il n'est pas en sa puissance de cognoistre la moindre partie, tant s'en faut de la commander?" (II, 12, 493)

Man predicates that the universe was created solely for

⁸ "Tous les êtres créés, touchés par le branle universel, sont donc pénétrés en leur fond le plus intime par l'influence transcendante et unifiante de Dieu." (Naudeau, p.12)

human exploitation not realizing that the Lord created a complete spectrum of beings for which He provides guidance. The Lord rules the universe justly and uniformly. He does not favor one species to the detriment of others. "La main de son gouvernement se preste à toutes choses de pareille teneur, mesme force et mesme ordre; nostre interest n'y apporte rien." (II, 12, 589)

Montaigne's negative perception of mankind accentuates divine wisdom by diminishing the credibility of man's egocentricity. "Ce que nous appelons monstres ne le sont pas à Dieu, qui voit en l'immensité de son ouvrage l'infinité des formes qu'il y a comprinses." (II, 30, 118)

Montaigne uses the terms God and Nature interchangeably when denoting the divinity because the Lord's presence is reflected in Nature. "Nature, the creation of God, shares in His attributes; thus the laws of nature, which depend ultimately upon the infinite wisdom of God, are beyond man's comprehension."⁹ At this point it is vital to distinguish between God

⁹ Schwartz, p.89.

who is eternal and Nature which is transient. Nature reinforces divine wisdom through its processes. There is a direct correlation between nature's seasonal transformations and the divine supervision of cosmic equilibrium.¹⁰ A persistent evaluation of natural occurrences engenders an awareness of God's presence in Nature which, in turn, leads to a limited comprehension of the essence of divinity.

Montaigne admonishes individuals who utilize religious principles in order to avail personal ambitions. He regards religion as a moral guideline by which behavioral norms are founded by the conscience. Inducement into a particular sect is, to a large extent, prompted by desires which can be readily gratified by certain customs or beliefs. "Je voy cela évidemment que nous ne prestons volontiers à la devotion que les offices qui flattent noz passions." (II, 12, 486)

In religious organizations where the furtherment of personal

¹⁰ "La nature apporte en contribution sa force, mais la direction de l'oeuvre et la personnalité n'appartiennent qu'à Dieu." (M. Dreano, La Religion de Montaigne, p.229)

ambitions is of paramount concern leaders manipulate unsuspecting followers through the use of self-serving ideologies. During turbulent times passive individuals are often assimilated into the dominant social culture and are thereby compelled by those in authority to adapt to a new way of life. Organized religion tends to absorb those who are disenchanted with their existence because it offers ample hope for a brighter future. "Voyez l'horrible impudence dequoy nous pelotons les raisons divines, et combien irreligieusement nous les avons et rejettées et reprises selon que la fortune nous a changé de place en ces orages publiques." (II, 12, 485)

Atheism is regarded as being anti-nature by Montaigne who affirms that atheists often implore the aid of divine intervention in moments of imminent danger once they are unable to cope with an existing crisis. "L'Atheisme estant une proposition comme desnaturée et monstrueuse, difficile aussi et malaisée d'establir en l'esprit humain, pour insolent et desreglé qu'il puisse estre." (II, 12, 488)

Religious beliefs serve a multi-faceted purpose, enabling

man to cope with reality in diverse ways. They imbue hope in a distant future when the immediate existence is unbearable, offer incentives for the patient endurance of unavoidable hardships, provide an outlet for inner anxiety, and pave the way for divine revelations.

Montaigne's criticism of organized religion stems from his basic concern regarding abusive practices that are often utilized by corrupt leaders who pursue the gratification of personal needs through the manipulation of believers.

Through the ages man has strived to depict an accurate image of the supernatural force which is reflected in Nature. Because of his inability to decipher the essence of divinity man contrives an image of God that concurs with his own nature. "Qu'est-il plus vain que de vouloir deviner Dieu par nos analogies et conjectures, le regler et le monde à nostre capacité et à nos loix, et nous servir aux despens de la divinité de ce petit eschantillon de suffisance qu'il luy a pleu despartir à nostre naturelle condition?" (II, 12, 570)

For the ancient Greek civilization divinity was manifested in the form of twelve powerful "Gods" and "Goddesses" that were comprised of a human stature endowed with human traits and mannerisms as well as with a spectrum of emotions ranging from compassion to revengeful wrath. "Parquoy de faire de nous des Dieux, comme l'ancienneté, cela surpasse l'extreme foiblesse de discours." (II, 12, 574) The ancient Greeks ascribed their good fortune or hardships to variations in mood that were often "displayed" by the "Gods" and, in this manner, sought to explicate incredible circumstances. "Mais d'avoir fait des dieux de nostre condition, de laquelle nous devons connoistre l'imperfection, leur avoir attribué le desir, la cholere, les vengeances, les mariages, les generations et les parentelles, l'amour et la jalousie, nos membres et nos os, nos fievres et nos plaisirs, nos morts, nos sepultures, il faut que cela soit party d'une merveilleuse yvresse de l'entendement humain." (II, 12, 574)

Since man cannot explicate occurrences which do not relate directly to his immediate existence he attributes known characteristic traits to the omnipotent Being that governs his life. "Nous disons que Dieu craint, que Dieu se courrouce,

que Dieu ayme, 'Immortalia mortali sermone notantes', ¹¹ ce sont toutes agitations et émotions qui ne peuvent loger en Dieu selon nostre forme; ny nous, l'imaginer selon la sienne." (II, 12, 553-4)

Montaigne discredits philosophical ideologies that limit the divinity by ascribing human intentions to divine strategies. "Toutesfois nous prescrivons des bornes, nous tenons sa puissance assiegée par nos raisons." (II, 12, 582-3) Man postulates that Divine Nature epitomizes positive human qualities such as goodness, compassion, and a keen sense of justice; and thus, perceives the Lord as an enlargement of man's basic form. "Nous avons vie, raison et liberté, estimons la bonté, la charité et la justice; ces qualitez sont donc en luy." (II, 12, 592) Instead of attaining a level of perfection man is debased by his incessant need to depict Divine Nature as an amplification of Human Nature.

According to man's assertions God is concerned with the

¹¹ "Exprimant des choses immortelles en termes mortels--
Lucrèce V, 122; Essais II, 12, 553.

human condition and consequently directs his attention towards the prompt resolution of conflicts in order to insure a prosperous existence for mankind. Man egotistically perceives God as a personal benefactor, oblivious of the fact that the Lord perpetuates universal order through an intricate balance of nature regardless of any adverse effects that may necessarily be sustained by a particular species as a result of environmental transformations. "Et est cause de ce qui nous advient tous les jours d'attribuer à Dieu les evenemens d'importance, d'une particuliere assignation. Parce qu'ils nous posent, il semble qu'ils luy posent aussi et qu'il y regarde plus entier et plus attentif qu'aux evenemens qui nous sont legiers ou d'une suite ordinaire." (II, 12, 589)

Montaigne concludes that since God's image is indecipherable only a religion based on the unqualified acceptance of a divine presence which is reflected in Nature's transformations is justifiable. "De toutes les opinions humaines et anciennes touchant la religion, celle là me semble avoir eu plus de vraysemblance et plus d'excuse, qui reconnoissoit Dieu comme une puissance incomprehensible, origine et conservatrice de

toutes choses, toute bonté, toute perfection, recevant et prenant en bonne part l'honneur et la reverence que les humains luy rendoient sous quelque nom et en quelque maniere que ce fut." (II, 12, 570)

Since an explicit apperception of Divine Nature is inconceivable God is, was, and always will remain a paradox for mankind. Although His omnipotent presence is manifested and reflected throughout His Creation, He remains an eternal mystery. ¹²

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¹² "Il y a entre l'homme et Dieu un abîme qualitatif. Le Dieu dont on parle et duquel on raisonne n'est qu'un produit de l'anthropomorphisme." (Conche, p.50)

Chapter VII

The Essais: Stylistic Effects
in conjunction with Nature's Theme

The literary style that is inherent in the Essais embodies traits of an open structure, that is, one which remains uninhibited by a strict order or form. This is basically due to the fact that the author utilizes a personal manner of writing that concurs with his free-flowing thoughts. "Au demeurant, mon langage n'a rien de facile et poly: il est aspre et desdaigneux, ayant ses dispositions libres et desreglées." (II, 17, 38)

The internal movements which intensify the essence of the work parallel the transformations that constitute an intricate part of Nature's recurrent cycles. "Je jette le plus souvent la plume au vent, comme on dict, et m'abandonne à la mercy de la fortune." (II, 37, 57) "Montaigne's greatest achievement is to have caught in his mirror the inner oscillation between object and subject, between Being and Process, between identity

and freedom." ¹ The movement which is apperceived goes beyond a simple disarray of thought: it depicts the self's transient state which fluctuates in conjunction with Nature's modifications.

The overall naturalness that ensues is attained through the deliberate utilization of certain stylistic procedures, including: antithesis, theme variations, a diversification of syntax, multiple images, as well as an undefined structural mode. ² Although he consciously employs diverse stylistic effects the author is not limited by rigid literary regulations. He is free, within the confines of the essay's constitution, of course, to pursue whatever perspective is deemed necessary for the elaboration of an explicit theme.

Montaigne's thoughts seem to be generated spontaneously, of their own accord, without the hindrance of a distinct

¹ Rider, p.102.

² "Chez lui le mouvement créateur n'est pas canalisé par les exigences d'une forme stricte, ne suit jamais une voie unique." (Gray, p.227)

objective. The approach that comprises the constitution of a particular essay is never predetermined. Thus, Montaigne does not specifically set out to illustrate a precise theory: he simply jots down his observations and recollections as they emerge as a result of the mind's impressions of the external world.³ He often begins by probing a certain notion only to find himself pursuing contrasting tangents leading to a different set of unresolved questions all within the same essay. This gives the composition a free-flowing movement that surpasses the directives of a preconceived theory. "Mes conceptions et mon jugement ne marche qu'à tastons, chancelant, bronchant et chopant." (I, 26, 155) The author is, therefore, never bound by the power of his pen but, rather, driven by the soul to express ideas that arise as a result of sporadic experiences which are sustained in the immediate present. "Le vrai miroir de nos discours est le cours de nos vies." (I, 26, 181) Because experiences often contradict one another

³ "Cette attitude vis à vis de la liberté, du mouvement de la plume qui reste fidèle au mouvement de la pensée sans s'adapter à une forme extérieure, est très importante dans l'esthétique de Montaigne." (Gray, p.235)

the author remains free to alter the scope of his work in conjunction with life's modifications. "Mon stile et mon esprit vont vagabondant de mesmes." (III, 9, 438-9)

Montaigne's conversational manner enhances the authenticity of the Essais. He often conducts an intimate dialogue with the reader causing him to lose track of his own reality while he is engrossed in the author's immediate present.⁴ The Essais demand the audience's total involvement. The reader experiences the sensation of being transposed to another time and place. His active participation is not only implored, but actually instigated by Montaigne's conversational style. "Je parle au papier comme je parle au premier que je rencontre." (III, 1, 205) The easy-going tone that emanates throughout the Essais reflects the author's sincere quest for knowledge. He consciously probes relative truths that he encounters during life's imminent stages in order to determine the value of present experiences.

⁴ "Le style, la langue de Montaigne sont pris dans le mouvement de sa pensée, ou plutôt s'accordent à ce mouvement." (Thibaudet, p.492)

"Je ne peints pas l'estre. Je peints le passage." (III, 2, 222)

The Essais contain numerous anecdotes depicting personal experiences which offer a concrete representation of Montaigne's abstract thoughts and philosophical ideologies. "J'ay naturellement un stile comique et privé, mais c'est d'une forme mienne, inepte aux negotiations publiques, comme en toutes façons est mon langage: trop serré, desordonné, coupé, particulier, et ne mentens pas en lettres ceremonieuses, qui n'ont autre substance que d'une belle enfileure de paroles courtoises." (I, 40, 284) Their naturalness solicits the reader's complete attentiveness: it cajoles, questions, criticizes, evokes compassion, and often incites a direct audience response. It presents divergent views concerning a particular problem that is intriguing the author at a given moment. "Les auteurs se communiquent au peuple par quelque marque particuliere et estrangiere; moy, le premier, par mon estre universel, comme Michel de Montaigne, non comme grammairien, ou poëte, ou juri-consulte." (III, 2, 223)

Montaigne's self-analysis establishes a direct rapport with his audience. The reader readily identifies with the author's experiences and psychological dilemmas. The naturalness of style comforts the reader and makes him feel as if he is spending some leisurely time in the presence of a close friend who is relating anecdotes of past events and investigating future possibilities in order to evaluate his existence. "Je n'enseigne point, je raconte." (III, 2, 224)

Even though the Essais are presented in a haphazard fashion a close examination of their philosophical content reveals an underlying continuity and complexity of style. Montaigne divulges thoughts in an unrestricted manner, but nevertheless, one which is imperceptibly manipulated to some degree.⁵ It becomes apparent after repeatedly scrutinizing the work that the individual essays are actually composites of several philosophical layers that involve considerable lapses in time. "J'adjouste, mais je

⁵ "Montaigne parle souvent du 'naturel' de son style, mais on n'a qu'à jeter un coup d'oeil sur l'Exemplaire de Bordeaux pour voir qu'il n'est pas de premier jet, que c'est un livre que Montaigne a travaillé soigneusement." (Gray, p.18)

ne corrige pas." (III, 9, 402) Additions span over many years. As the author's immediate situation sheds new light on queries regarding life's transformations he enhances former views and qualifies observations in order to comply with circumstances that directly affect his present state. "Ce sont icy mes fantasies, par lesquelles je ne tasche point à donner à connoistre les choses, mais moy." (II, 10, 447)

The multiplicity of additions gives an impression of structural discontinuity that augments the degree of naturalness that prevails throughout the Essais. Superimposed images create associations of ideas that lead from one theme to another with no apparent motive. "Je commence volontiers sans project; le premier tract produit le second." (I, 40, 285) Although his thoughts are sporadically generated the author has deliberately chosen the series of contrasting images that pervades his parallel sentence constructions. ⁶ "Moy, je m'offre par mes opinions les plus vives et par la forme plus

⁶ "Il veut une prose dont les mots respirent d'une vie intérieure et qui révèlent de très près les contours de sa pensée." (Gray, p.101)

rienne." (III, 1, 207) He has diligently calculated the overall effect of contrasting themes that concur with Nature's transient state. The reader apperceives an existing correlation between the structural composition of the Essais and Nature's Theme.

The subsistent world that is exemplified by the Essais represents a microcosm of reality. The author plays a dual role in its manifestation: as an actor who actively participates in Nature's transformations; as an avid observer whose speculative notions strive to decipher Nature's code. The Essais not only capture one being's transient existence, but also reveal its innermost thoughts and desires. "Je veux représenter le progrès de mes humeurs, et qu'on voye chaque piece en sa naissance." (II, 37, 169)

Montaigne's impressions oscillate between philosophical and subjective observations in both context and style. The text is regarded as being transient in that it varies in accordance with the author's altered perception of reality. Its changeability is due, for the most part, to lapses in time. The judgment is

stimulated by new encounters that often cause it to question or even revise previous beliefs. For this reason, the Essais are interwoven with life itself. They constitute a living entity because they are dependent upon psycho-physiological deviations which are exhibited by the self over a substantial period of time. "Mon metier et mon art, c'est vivre. Qui me defend d'en parler selon mon sens, experience et usage, qu'il ordonne à l'architecte de parler des bastimens non selon soy mais selon son voisin." (II, 6, 416)

Montaigne's world is characterized by incessant flux; his work of art substantiates this change in its antithetical constructions. A distinct idea is generated, explored, enhanced and then pursued on a different plane which, in turn, gives rise to a new concept and an infinite possibility of relative truths that perpetuate the cycle. "Je n'ay pas plus fait mon livre que mon livre m'a fait." (II, 38, 69)

During the sixteenth century the term "essai" signified an apprenticeship, a trial, experimentation, a probing of unresolved phenomena, as well as an experience. It derived its meaning

from the Latin "exagium" or balancing. Throughout the Essais one is conscious of a weighing of infinite possibilities epitomized by the author's incessant evaluation of Nature. An essay is thus an investigation. It is one man's effort to decipher inner tendencies in order to assess the self's interactions with the environment.

Montaigne and the Essais share a common factor: they are both composites of the passage of time. They remain inconclusive because in the final analysis both Being and Knowledge are relative. "J'ay faict ce que j'ay voulu: tout le monde me reconnoit en mon livre, et mon livre en moy." (III, 5, 303) In the author's mind opposites coexist because they convey the innumerable variations that subsist in Nature. The antithetical phraseology and concrete images reflect the diversity which is inherent in Montaigne's vivid examination of Nature's elusive phenomena.

The anecdotes that permeate the Essais offer a panoramic view of humanity in which contrasting elements abound: vice and virtue; strengths and limitations; modesty and presumption ...

to name a few. Because truths are relative the anecdotes serve a dual purpose: they (1) present the self's perception of reality and (2) offer a comprehensive evaluation of knowledge gained through practical experiences. By utilizing concrete images to sustain philosophical ideas the author reinforces his arguments. Montaigne elucidates abstract concepts through concrete images. In this manner, he explores Human Nature through the Study of Self and contemplates Divinity through its Creation. Nature's phenomena are thus apperceived through the consideration of effects that are endured during life's successive stages.⁷

The apparent disarray resulting from the juxtaposition of contradictory images gives rise to an internal unity that links the essay's fluctuations to the author's reappraisal of self. The profusion of images found in the Essais compounds the author's multiple perception of reality as it accentuates facets of natural occurrences that continuously abate reason. Thus the internal movement of the Essais parallels the growth, development,

⁷ "Les images, tout comme les définitions, se construisent au contact d'une multiplicité d'expériences humaines qui permettent à Montaigne d'exprimer sa pensée." (Naudeau, p.74)

oscillations, and changeability of Human Nature.

Montaigne asserts that unity persists in diversity. The common denominator that transcends the constituents of the universe is their perpetual flux. Change is therefore regarded as the underlying constant of universal order. It is their intrinsic affinity for change that gives living things a distinct similarity. "Toutes choses se tiennent par quelque similitude, tout exemple cloche, et la relation qui se tire de l'experience est tousjours defaillante et imparfaicte."

(III, 13, 522)

Because the transformation of all things including knowledge is inevitable, the internal metamorphosis that is inherent in the composition of the Essais gives the work a persistent continuity. Thus, the antithetical structure augments its ultimate essence; for contradiction is the prevalent trait of Universal Order.

* * *

Conclusion

Montaigne's Concept of Nature

Within the scope of this paper my primary objective has concerned the tangible assessment of Nature's role in the Essais. Through a comprehensive evaluation of Montaigne's impressions regarding divergent experiences and his philosophical outlook on life, I have strived to discern his concept of Nature. The order of chapters concurs with the author's progressive movements of thought.

The Essais reveal three distinct levels of analytical observations that coincide with Montaigne's complex view of Nature: the physical domain, characterized by the Animal Kingdom in conjunction with Human Nature; the philosophical plane, depicted by the avid examination of the Life Cycle and Human Condition; as well as the spiritual realm, exemplified by Montaigne's contemplation of Divinity.

The author's proposal effectively pursues the essence of abstract truths through the appraisal of evident phenomena,

reinforcing the traditional premise that knowledge of Nature's imperceptible properties may only be grasped through the constructive analysis of characteristic traits which are inherent in Nature's living constituents. "Les choses invisibles de Dieu, dit saint Paul, apparoissent par la creation du monde, considerant sa sapience eternelle et sa divinité par ses oeuvres." (II, 12, 490) This principle formulates the basis for Montaigne's philosophical perspectives and justifies his inquisitive style. It manifests the need for an explicit portrayal of self, for the self is ultimately perceived as a valid indication of Nature's physical as well as abstract properties.

Montaigne attempts to decipher universal truths through the analysis of Human Nature. He begins with Nature's physical realm by disclosing a distinct correlation between Animal and Human inclinations. Nature is regarded as being a concrete entity that surrounds us ($\varphi\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$), as well as an imperceptible force that qualifies behavioral motivations in accordance with universal principles: "Vaine est l'intreprise de celuy qui presume d'embrasser et causes et consequences, et mener par la

main le progres de son fait." (III, 8, 370) This belief leads the author to pursue the interrelation between environmental transformations and behavioral deviations.

Montaigne scrutinizes the mannerisms of diverse species in the Animal Kingdom in order to ascertain the extent of behavioral alterations that may be directly attributed to ecological variations. Although he is not overly concerned with the countryside per se, he does allude to natural boundaries when dealing with cultural or communicative discrepancies that emerge as a result of physical isolation. "Et la difference de langage qui se voit entre nous, selon la difference des contrées, elle se treuve aussi aux animaux de mesme espece." (II, 12, 504)

His study of Animal Nature reveals the existence of a basic form which prevails in spite of behavioral modifications that may be instigated by the environment's diverse stimuli. This natural form exemplifies communicative abilities, moderate responses to change, mannerisms, and instincts which are necessary for the conservation of the species.

Montaigne strives to attain a comprehensive awareness of Human Nature and, more specifically, a distinct perception of man's placement in the universe through a philosophical and personal evaluation of life's experiences. He maintains that the inner self preserves man's individuality by instinctively adhering to natural tendencies both physically and psychologically. "Mes conditions corporelles sont en somme trèsbien accordantes à celles de l'ame." (II, 17, 43)

The conscience reinforces the self's natural disposition by endorsing acts that concur with the self's basic form. "Elle nous fait trahir, accuser et combattre nous mesme, et, à faute de tesmoing estrangier, elle nous produit, contre nous." (II, 5, 401) A natural comportment is, therefore, comprised of actions that are generated spontaneously without engendering inner strife.

Montaigne's conformity to Nature is epitomized by his acceptance of life's imminent challenges and his resolution to face life's climax with dignity, (faire bien l'homme). Self-awareness has accentuated the essence of moderation, emphasizing the need for behavioral limits that concur with natural propen-

sities. "Mes actions sont réglées et conformes à ce que je suis et à ma condition." (III, 2, 232) He advocates a just medium (ἀρετὸν μέτρον), a temperance of unbridled reactions that are often stimulated by the imagination, ambition, fear, and presumption. "On se doit moderer entre la haine de la douleur et l'amour de la volupté." (III, 10, 447)

Montaigne's analysis of Animal and Human Nature asserts that the pronounced similarity which prevails denotes a pre-conceived specialization of function that constitutes the essence of universal continuity and equilibrium. "Nous ne sommes ny au dessus, ny au dessous du reste: tout ce qui est sous le Ciel, dit le sage, court une loy et fortune pareille. Il y a quelque difference, il y a des ordres et des degrez; mais c'est sous le visage d'une mesme nature." (II, 12, 505)

* * *

The second and most elusive domain contemplated by Montaigne involves Nature's abstract state. Nature's imperceptible forces play an intricate role in the Essais. They serve to manifest as

well as equilibrate innumerable interactions between contrasting elements of the cosmic structure, thereby preserving universal balance. The stability that ensues can only emanate as a result of Nature's unique ability to mold dissonant movements into a cohesive unity. "Comme nul événement et nulle forme ressemble entièrement à une autre, aussi ne diffère nulle de l'autre entièrement. Ingénieux mélange de nature." (III, 13, 522)

In spite of the diversity exemplified by living things each being has a distinct function and placement in the universe which is designated by its basic nature.¹ Man only comprises a minute aspect of this vast continuum and, for this reason, inadvertently remains incapable of discerning Nature's intricate processes.

After exploring the imminent changes that enhance life's

¹ "Il existe une vérité universelle, elle est à l'intérieure de nous, elle est notre nature même; voilà la foi profonde de Montaigne." (Baraz, p.105)

successive phases Montaigne ponders Divine Nature. He envisions the Divinity through its infinite Creation concluding that the overwhelming order which underlies perpetual flux affirms the unequivocal presence of a Superior Being. "Il s'en faut tant que nos forces conçoivent la hauteur divine, que, des ouvrages de nostre createur, ceux-là portent mieux sa marque et sont mieux siens, que nous entendons le moins." (II, 12, 553)

Montaigne often utilizes the terms "God" and "Nature" interchangeably when denoting the infinity of universal possibilities. Nature, being limitless, reflects the Divinity's omnipotent and omniscient presence. Because of this, there are many instances in the Essais where the two words are juxtaposed within the same phrase. As a matter of fact, where earlier editions had the word God in the following phrase, 'il faut juger des choses avec plus de reverence de cette infinie puissance de Dieu' Montaigne substituted the word Nature.²

Montaigne's quest for absolute truths not only directs him

² Brush, p.46.

to accept life's transformations in a serene manner, but to also admit the intellect's inefficient ability to delve into the essence of Divine truths. "C'est à Dieu seul de se cognoistre, et d'interpreter ses ouvrages." (II, 12, 554) Because man is an active constituent of Nature's intrinsic cycles he cannot objectively perceive universal truths. As a result of his intense quest for knowledge Montaigne comes to terms with his existence. He is content to apperceive the self's innate aptitudes and comprehend its behavioral preferences because the self-portrait offers a valid indication of Nature's principles. Thus, external reality has been metamorphosed into an inner nature that embodies the self's individuality.

The Essais have transposed one man's incessant search for Divine Truths into an awareness of Self which is ultimately channeled towards the comprehensive analysis of Humanity.³ The self's basic form distinguishes it from other beings. Each creature responds to the external world in a specified manner

³ "La nature n'est pas seulement extérieure à l'homme, mais aussi en lui; et là, son inconnaissable essence est accessible à l'expérience intérieure." (Friedrich, p.331)

depending on the outcome of numerous interactions between its basic tendencies, inherent condition, momentary disposition, and predominant laws of conscience. "Quant aux actions de la vie, ils sont en cela de la commune façon. Ils se prestant et accommodent à l'impulsion et contrainte des passions, aux constitutions des loix et des coutumes et à la tradition des arts." (II, 12, 561) Being natural, therefore, implies simplicity, spontaneity, and instinctive behavior; it denotes something which is unlearned, which surges freely without generating conflict. Montaigne affirms that Nature's most prominent trait is perpetual flux. There is an inherent unity in diversity which augments Nature's spontaneity.

* * *

Montaigne's concept of Nature does not merely denote personal observations and practical experiences. It is inspired by the diligent evaluation of countless philosophical theories. Being an avid reader, Montaigne aptly enumerates sources that concur with as well as enhance personal views. He expounds ideas by Lucretius, Horatio, Seneca, Cicero, Aristotle, Plato and Socrates ... to name

a few. The belief that Nature is a guiding force that protects man in a maternal manner, for example, evolves from Lucretius's work. Seneca has defined Nature as being a form of divine reason that binds all living things in an infinite but continuous chain.⁴ Socrates implores his followers to pursue a life of moderation based on a natural existence. Rabelais speaks of man's innate goodness and inherent ability to live in harmony with Nature.

Although Montaigne is inspired by external sources, the Essais transcend other philosophical theories regarding Nature in that they present a vivid account of man's flight through time. They capture the essence of Nature's transformations through images that reflect life's successive stages. We perceive Nature's infinite motion through an individual's perception of reality. The validity of the Essais prevails as Montaigne effectively analyzes the interrelationship between the Self's inner and external world, thereby offering a comprehensive view of Humanity.

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⁴ Friedrich, p.332.

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