

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

ESSAYS



Book 3 · Chapter 1

Translation by Charles Cotton (1685, Public domain) · Last updated on June 18, 2026

HYPERESSAYS is a project to create a modern and accessible online edition of the *Essays* of Michel de Montaigne. More information at www.hyperessays.net

ESSAYS-3-1-20260831-212250

On the Useful and the Honorable

No man is free from speaking foolish things; but the worst on it is, when a man labors to play the fool.

Næ iste magno conatu magnas nugas dixerit.

This does not concern me; mine slip from me with as little care as they are of little value, and 'tis the better for them. I would presently part with them for what they are worth, and neither buy nor sell them, but as they weigh. I speak on paper, as I do to the first person I meet; and that this is true, observe what follows.

To whom ought not treachery to be hateful, when Tiberius refused it in a thing of so great importance to him? He had word sent him from Germany that if he thought fit, they would rid him of Arminius by poison: this was the most potent enemy the Romans had, who had defeated them so ignominiously under Varus, and who alone prevented their aggrandisement in those parts. He returned answer, "that the people of Rome were wont to revenge themselves of their enemies by open ways, and with their swords in their hands, and not clandestinely and by fraud": wherein he quitted the profitable for the honest. You will tell me that he was a braggadocio; I believe so too: and 'tis no great miracle in men of his profession. But the acknowledgment of virtue is not less valid in the mouth of him who hates it, forasmuch as truth forces it from him, and if he will not inwardly receive it, he at least puts it on for a decoration.

Our outward and inward structure is full of imperfection; but there is nothing useless in nature, not even inutility itself; nothing has insinuated itself into this universe that has not therein some fit and proper place. Our being is cemented with sickly qualities: ambition, jealousy, envy, revenge, superstition, and despair have so natural a possession in us, that its image is discerned in beasts; nay, and cruelty, so unnatural a vice; for even in the midst of compassion we feel within, I know not what tart-sweet titillation of ill-natured pleasure in seeing others suffer; and the children feel it;

Truly he, with a great effort will shortly say a mighty trifle. • TER., HAUT., 3.4

*Suave mari magno, turbantibus æquora ventis,
E terra magnum alterius spectare laborem.*

Of the seeds of which qualities, whoever should divest man, would destroy the fundamental conditions of human life, likewise, in all governments there are necessary offices, not only abject, but vicious also. Vices there help to make up the seam in our piecing, as poisons are useful for the conservation of health. If they become excusable because they are of use to us, and that the common necessity covers their true qualities, we are to resign this part to the strongest and boldest citizens, who sacrifice their honor and conscience, as others of old sacrificed their lives, for the good of their country: we, who are weaker, take upon us parts both that are more easy and less hazardous. The public weal requires that men should betray, and lie, and massacre; let us leave this commission to men who are more obedient and more supple.

In earnest, I have often been troubled to see judges, by fraud and false hopes of favor or pardon, allure a criminal to confess his fact, and therein to make use of cozenage and impudence. It would become justice, and Platonhimself, who countenances this manner of proceeding, to furnish me with other means more suitable to my own liking: this is a malicious kind of justice, and I look upon it as no less wounded by itself than by others. I said not long since to some company in discourse, that I should hardly be drawn to betray my prince for a particular man, who should be much ashamed to betray any particular man for my prince; and I do not only hate deceiving myself, but that any one should deceive through me; I will neither afford matter nor occasion to any such thing.

In the little I have had to mediate betwixt our princes in the divisions and subdivisions by which we are at this time torn to pieces, I have been very careful that they should neither be deceived in me nor deceive others by me. People of that kind of trading are very reserved, and pretend to be the most moderate imaginable and nearest to the opinions of those with whom they have to do; I expose myself in my stiff opinion, and after a method the most my own; a tender negotiator, a novice, who had rather fail in the affair than be wanting to myself. And yet it has been hitherto with so good luck (for fortune has doubtless the best share in it), that few things have passed from hand to hand with less suspicion or more favor and privacy. I have a free and open way that easily insinuates itself and obtains belief with those with whom I am to deal at the first meeting. Sincerity and pure truth, in what age soever, pass for current; and besides, the liberty and freedom of a man who treats without any interest of his own is never hateful or suspected, and he may very well make use of the answer of Hyperides to the Athenians, who complained of his blunt way of speaking: "Messieurs, do not consider whether or no I am free, but whether I am so without a bribe, or without any advantage to my own affairs." My liberty of speaking has also easily cleared me from all suspicion of dissembling by its vehemence, leaving nothing unsaid, how home and bitter soever (so that I could have said no worse behind their backs), and in that it carried along with it a manifest show of simplicity and indifference. I pretend to no other fruit by acting than to act, and add

It is sweet, when the winds disturb the waters of the vast sea, to witness from land the peril of other persons.

• LUCR., 2.1

to it no long arguments or propositions; every action plays its own game, win if it can.

As to the rest, I am not swayed by any passion, either of love or hatred, toward the great, nor has my will captivated either by particular injury or obligation. I look upon our kings with an affection simply loyal and respectful, neither prompted nor restrained by any private interest, and I love myself for it. Nor does the general and just cause attract me otherwise than with moderation, and without heat. I am not subject to those penetrating and close compacts and engagements. Anger and hatred are beyond the duty of justice; and are passions only useful to those who do not keep themselves strictly to their duty by simple reason. All legitimate intentions are temperate and equable of themselves; if otherwise, they degenerate into seditious and unlawful. This is it which makes me walk everywhere with my head erect, my face and my heart open.

In truth, and I am not afraid to confess it, I should easily, in case of need, hold up one candle to St. Michael and another to his dragon, like the old woman; I will follow the right side even to the fire, but exclusively, if I can. Let Montaigne be overwhelmed in the public ruin if need be; but if there be no need, I should think myself obliged to fortune to save me, and I will make use of all the length of line my duty allows for his preservation. Was it not Atticus who, being of the just but losing side, preserved himself by his moderation in that universal shipwreck of the world, among so many mutations and diversities?

For private man, as he was, it is more easy; and in such kind of work, I think a man may justly not be ambitious to offer and insinuate himself. For a man, indeed, to be wavering and irresolute, to keep his affection unmoved and without inclination in the troubles of his country and public divisions, I neither think it handsome nor honest. *Ea non media, Sed nulla via est, velut eventum expectantium, quo fortunae consilia sua applicent.*

This may be allowed in our neighbors' affairs; and thus Gelo, the tyrant of Syracuse, suspended his inclination in the war betwixt the Greeks and barbarians, keeping a resident ambassador with presents at Delphos, to watch and see which way fortune would incline, and then take fit occasion to fall in with the victors. It would be a kind of treason to proceed after this manner in our own domestic affairs, wherein a man must of necessity be of the one side or the other; though for a man who has no office or express command to call him out, to sit still I hold it more excusable (and yet I do not excuse myself upon these terms) than in foreign expeditions, to which, however, according to our laws, no man is pressed against his will. And yet even those who wholly engage themselves in such a war may behave themselves with such temper and moderation, that the storm may fly over their heads without doing them any harm. Had we not reason to hope such an issue in the person of the late Bishop of Orleans, the Sieur de Morvilliers? And I know, among those who behave themselves most bravely in the present war, some whose manners are so gentle, obliging, and just, that they will certainly stand firm, whatever event Heaven is preparing for us. I am of opinion that it properly belongs to kings only to quarrel with kings; and I laugh at those spirits who, out of lightness of

That is not a middle way, but no way, to await events, by which they refer their resolutions to fortune. •
LIVY, 32.21

heart, lend themselves to so disproportioned disputes; for a man has never the more particular quarrel with a prince, by marching openly and boldly against him for his own honor and according to his duty; if he does not love such a person, he does better, he esteems him. And notably the cause of the laws and of the ancient government of a kingdom, has this always annexed to it, that even those who, for their own private interest, invade them, excuse, if they do not honor, the defenders.

But we are not, as we nowadays do, to call peevishness and inward discontent, that spring from private interest and passion, duty, nor a treacherous and malicious conduct, courage; they call their proneness to mischief and violence zeal; 'tis not the cause, but their interest, that inflames them; they kindle and begin a war, not because it is just, but because it is war.

A man may very well behave himself commodiously and loyally too among those of the adverse party; carry yourself, if not with the same equal affection (for that is capable of different measure), at least with an affection moderate, well tempered, and such as shall not so engage you to one party, that it may demand all you are able to do for that side, content yourself with a moderate proportion of their, favor and goodwill; and to swim in troubled waters without fishing in them.

The other way, of offering a man's self and the utmost service he is able to do, both to one party and the other, has still less of prudence in it than conscience. Does not he to whom you betray another, to whom you were as welcome as to himself, know that you will at another time do as much for him? He holds you for a villain; and in the meantime hears what you will say, gathers intelligence from you, and works his own ends out of your disloyalty; double-dealing men are useful for bringing in, but we must have a care they carry out as little as is possible.

I say nothing to one party that I may not, upon occasion, say to the other, with a little alteration of accent; and report nothing but things either indifferent or known, or what is of common consequence. I cannot permit myself, for any consideration, to tell them a lie. What is intrusted to my secrecy, I religiously conceal; but I take as few trusts of that nature upon me as I can. The secrets of princes are a troublesome burthen to such as are not interested in them. I very willingly bargain that they trust me with little, but confidently rely upon what I tell them. I have ever known more than I desired.

One open way of speaking introduces another open way of speaking, and draws out discoveries, like wine and love.

Philippides, in my opinion, answered King Lysimachus very discreetly, who, asking him what of his estate he should bestow upon him? "What you will," said he, "provided it be none of your secrets." I see every one is displeased if the bottom of the affair be concealed from him wherein he is employed, or that there be any reservation in the thing; for my part, I am content to know no more of the business than what they would have me employ myself in, nor desire that my knowledge should exceed or restrict

what I have to say. If I must serve for an instrument of deceit, let it be at least with a safe conscience: I will not be reputed a servant either so affectionate or so loyal as to be fit to betray any one: he who is unfaithful to himself, is excusably so to his master.

But they are princes who do not accept men by halves, and despise limited and conditional services: I cannot help it: I frankly tell them how far I can go; for a slave I should not be, but to reason, and I can hardly submit even to that. And they also are to blame to exact from a freeman the same subjection and obligation to their service that they do from him they have made and bought, or whose fortune particularly and expressly depends upon theirs. The laws have delivered me from a great anxiety; they have chosen a side for me, and given me a master; all other superiority and obligation ought to be relative to that, and cut, off from all other. Yet this is not to say, that if my affection should otherwise incline me, my hand should presently obey it; the will and desire are a law to themselves; but actions must receive commission from the public appointment.

All this proceeding of mine is a little dissonant from the ordinary forms; it would produce no great effects, nor be of any long duration; innocence itself could not, in this age of ours, either negotiate without dissimulation, or traffic without lying; and, indeed, public employments are by no means for my palate: what my profession requires, I perform after the most private manner that I can. Being young, I was engaged up to the ears in business, and it succeeded well; but I disengaged myself in good time. I have often since avoided meddling in it, rarely accepted, and never asked it; keeping my back still turned to ambition; but if not like rowers who so advance backward, yet so, at the same time, that I am less obliged to my resolution than to my good fortune, that I was not wholly embarked in it. For there are ways less displeasing to my taste, and more suitable to my ability, by which, if she had formerly called me to the public service, and my own advancement toward the world's opinion, I know I should, in spite of all my own arguments to the contrary, have pursued them.

Such as commonly say, in opposition to what I profess, that what I call freedom, simplicity, and plainness in my manners, is art and subtlety, and rather prudence than goodness, industry than nature, good sense than good luck, do me more honor than disgrace: but, certainly, they make my subtlety too subtle; and whoever has followed me close, and pryed narrowly into me, I will give him the victory, if he does not confess that there is no rule in their school that could match this natural motion, and maintain an appearance of liberty and licence, so equal and inflexible, through so many various and crooked paths, and that all their wit and endeavor could never have led them through. The way of truth is one and simple; that of particular profit, and the commodity of affairs a man is entrusted with, is double, unequal, and casual. I have often seen these counterfeit and artificial liberties practised, but, for the most part, without success; they relish of Aesop's ass who, in emulation of the dog, obligingly clapped his two fore-feet upon his master's shoulders; but as many caresses as the dog had for such an expression of kindness, twice so many blows with a cudgel had the poor ass for his compliment. *Id maxime quemque decet, quod est cuiusque suum maxime.* I will not deprive deceit of its

That best becomes every man which belongs most to him. • CIC., OFF., 1.31

due; that were but ill to understand the world: I know it has often been of great use, and that it maintains and supplies most men's employment. There are vices that are lawful, as there are many actions, either good or excusable, that are not lawful in themselves.

The justice which in itself is natural and universal is otherwise and more nobly ordered than that other justice which is special, national, and constrained to the ends of government: *Veri iuris germanæque iustitiae solidam et expressam effigiem nullam tenemus; umbra et imaginibus utimur*; insomuch that the sage Dandamis, hearing the lives of Socrates, Pythagoras, and Diogenes read, judged them to be great men every way, excepting that they were too much subjected to the reverence of the laws, which, to second and authorize, true virtue must abate very much of its original vigor; many vicious actions are introduced, not only by their permission, but by their advice: *Ex senatus consultis plebisquescitis scelera exercentur*. I follow the common phrase that distinguishes betwixt profitable and honest things, so as to call some natural actions, that are not only profitable but necessary, dishonest and foul.

But let us proceed in our examples of treachery two pretenders to the kingdom of Thrace were fallen into dispute about their title; the emperor hindered them from proceeding to blows: but one of them, under color of bringing things to a friendly issue by an interview, having invited his competitor to an entertainment in his own house, imprisoned and killed him. Justice required that the Romans should have satisfaction for this offense; but there was a difficulty in obtaining it by ordinary ways; what, therefore, they could not do legitimately, without war and without danger, they resolved to do by treachery; and what they could not honestly do, they did profitably. For which end, one Pomponius Flaccus was found to be a fit instrument. This man, by dissembled words and assurances, having drawn the other into his toils, instead of the honor and favor he had promised him, sent him bound hand and foot to Rome. Here one traitor betrayed another, contrary to common custom: for they are full of mistrust, and 'tis hard to overreach them in their own art: witness the sad experience we have lately had.

Let who will be Pomponius Flaccus, and there are enough who would: for my part, both my word and my faith are, like all the rest, parts of this common body: their best effect is the public service; this I take for presupposed. But should one command me to take charge of the courts of law and lawsuits, I should make answer, that I understood it not; or the place of a leader of pioneers, I would say, that I was called to a more honorable employment; so likewise, he that would employ me to lie, betray, and forswear myself, though not to assassinate or to poison, for some notable service, I should say, "If I have robbed or stolen anything from any man, send me rather to the galleys."

For it is permissible in a man of honor to say, as the Lacedaemonians did, having been defeated by Antipater, when just upon concluding an agreement: "You may impose as heavy and ruinous taxes upon us as you please, but to command us to do shameful and dishonest things, you will lose your time, for it is to no purpose." Every one ought to make the same

We retain no solid and express portraiture of true right and germane justice; we have only the shadow and image of it; • CIC., OFF., 3.17

Crimes are committed by the decrees of the Senate and the popular assembly. • SEN., EP., 9

vow to himself that the kings of Egypt made their judges solemnly swear, that they would not do anything contrary to their consciences, though never so much commanded to it by themselves. In such commissions there is evident mark of ignominy and condemnation; and he who gives it at the same time accuses you, and gives it, if you understand it right, for a burden and a punishment. As much as the public affairs are bettered by your exploit, so much are your own the worse, and the better you behave yourself in it, 'tis so much the worse for yourself; and it will be no new thing, nor, peradventure, without some color of justice, if the same person ruin you who set you on work. If treachery can be in any case excusable, it must be only so when it is practised to chastise and betray treachery.

There are examples enough of treacheries, not only rejected, but chastised and punished by those in favor of whom they were undertaken. Who is ignorant of Fabricius sentence against the physician of Pyrrhus? But this we also find recorded, that some persons have commanded a thing, who afterward have severely avenged the execution of it upon him they had employed, rejecting the reputation of so unbridled an authority, and disowning so abandoned and base a servitude and obedience.

Jaropelk, Duke of Russia, tampered with a gentleman of Hungary to betray Boleslaus, king of Poland, either by killing him, or by giving the Russians opportunity to do him some notable mischief. This worthy went ably to work: he was more assiduous than before in the service of that king, so that he obtained the honor to be of his council, and one of the chiefest in his trust. With these advantages, and taking an opportune occasion of his master's absence, he betrayed Vislicza, a great and rich city, to the Russians, which was entirely sacked and burned, and not only all the inhabitants of both sexes, young and old, put to the sword, but moreover a great number of neighboring gentry, whom he had drawn thither to that end. Jaropelk, his revenge being thus satisfied and his anger appeased, which was not, indeed, without pretense (for Boleslaus had highly offended him, and after the same manner), and sated with the fruit of this treachery, coming to consider the fullness of it, with a sound judgment and clear from passion, looked upon what had been done with so much horror and remorse that he caused the eyes to be bored out and the tongue and shameful parts to be cut off of him who had performed it.

Antigonus persuaded the Argyraspides to betray Eumenes, their general, his adversary, into his hands; but after he had caused him, so delivered, to be slain, he would himself be the commissioner of the divine justice for the punishment of so detestable a crime, and committed them into the hands of the governor of the province, with express command, by whatever means, to destroy and bring them all to an evil end, so that of that great number of men, not so much as one ever returned again into Macedonia: the better he had been served, the more wickedly he judged it to be, and meriting greater punishment.

The slave who betrayed the place where his master, P. Sulpicius, lay concealed, was, according to the promise of Sylla's proscription, manumitted for his pains; but according to the promise of the public justice, which was free from any such engagement, he was thrown headlong

from the Tarpeian rock. They hang them with the purse of their reward about their necks; after having satisfied their second and special faith, they satisfied the general and first. Mohammed II having resolved to rid himself of his brother, out of jealousy of state, according to the practice of the Ottoman family, he employed one of his officers in the execution, who, pouring a quantity of water too fast into him, choked him. This being done, to expiate the murder, he delivered the murderer into the hands of the mother of him he had so caused to be put to death, for they were only brothers by the father's side; she, in his presence, ripped up the murderer's bosom, and with her own hands rifled his breast for his heart, tore it out, and threw it to the dogs. Our King Clovis, instead of the arms of gold he had promised them, caused three of Cararie's servants to be hanged after they had betrayed their master to him, though he had debauched them to it.

And even to the worst people it is the sweetest thing imaginable, having once gained their end by a vicious action, to foist, in all security, into it some show of virtue and justice, as by way of compensation and conscientious correction.

To which may be added, that they look upon the ministers of such horrid crimes as upon men who reproach them with them, and think by their deaths to erase the memory and testimony of such proceedings.

Or if, perhaps, you are rewarded, not to frustrate the public necessity for that extreme and desperate remedy, he who does it cannot for all that, if he be not such himself, but look upon you as an accursed and execrable fellow, and conclude you a greater traitor than he does, against whom you are so: for he tries the malignity of your disposition by your own hands, where he cannot possibly be deceived, you having no object of preceding hatred to move you to such an act; but he employs you as they do condemned malefactors in executions of justice, an office as necessary as dishonorable. Besides the baseness of such commissions, there is, moreover, a prostitution of conscience. Seeing that the daughter of Sejanus could not be put to death by the law of Rome, because she was a virgin, she was, to make it lawful, first ravished by the hangman and then strangled: not only his hand but his soul is slave to the public convenience.

When Amurath I, more grievously to punish his subjects who had taken part in the parricide rebellion of his son, ordained that their nearest kindred should assist in the execution, I find it very handsome in some of them to have rather chosen to be unjustly thought guilty of the parricide of another than to serve justice by a parricide of their own. And where I have seen, at the taking of some little fort by assault in my time, some rascals who, to save their own lives, would consent to hang their friends and companions, I have looked upon them to be of worse condition than those who were hanged. 'Tis said, that Witold, Prince of Lithuania, introduced into the nation the practice that the criminal condemned to death should with his own hand execute the sentence, thinking it strange that a third person, innocent of the fault, should be made guilty of homicide.

A prince, when by some urgent circumstance or some impetuous and unforeseen accident that very much concerns his state, compelled to

forfeit his word and break his faith, or otherwise forced from his ordinary duty, ought to attribute this necessity to a lash of the divine rod: vice it is not, for he has given up his own reason to a more universal and more powerful reason; but certainly 'tis a misfortune: so that if any one should ask me what remedy? "None," say I, "if he were really racked between these two extremes: *Sed videat, ne quærat latebra periurio*, he must do it: but if he did it without regret, if it did not weigh on him to do it, 'tis a sign his conscience is in a sorry condition."

Let him see to it that it be not a
loophole for perjury that he seeks, •
CIC., OFF., 3.29

If there be a person to be found of so tender a conscience as to think no cure whatever worth so important a remedy, I shall like him never the worse; he could not more excusably or more decently perish. We cannot do all we would, so that we must often, as the last anchorage, commit the protection of our vessels to the simple conduct of heaven. To what more just necessity does he reserve himself? What is less possible for him to do than what he cannot do but at the expense of his faith and honor, things that, perhaps, ought to be dearer to him than his own safety, or even the safety of his people. Though he should, with folded arms, only call God to his assistance, has he not reason to hope that the divine goodness will not refuse the favor of an extraordinary arm to just and pure hands?

These are dangerous examples, rare and sickly exceptions to our natural rules: we must yield to them, but with great moderation and circumspection: no private utility is of such importance that we should upon that account strain our consciences to such a degree: the public may be, when very manifest and of very great concern.

Timoleon made a timely expiation for his strange exploit by the tears he shed, calling to mind that it was with a fraternal hand that he had slain the tyrant; and it justly pricked his conscience that he had been necessitated to purchase the public utility at so great a price as the violation of his private morality. Even the Senate itself, by his means delivered from slavery, dared not positively determine of so high a fact, and divided into two so important and contrary aspects; but the Syracusans, sending at the same time to the Corinthians to solicit their protection, and to require of them a captain fit to re-establish their city in its former dignity and to clear Sicily of several little tyrants by whom it was oppressed, they deputed Timoleon for that service, with this cunning declaration; "that according as he should behave himself well or ill in his employment, their sentence should incline either to favor the deliverer of his country, or to disfavor the murderer of his brother." This fantastic conclusion carries along with it some excuse, by reason of the danger of the example, and the importance of so strange an action: and they did well to discharge their own judgment of it, and to refer it to others who were not so much concerned. But Timoleon's comportment in this expedition soon made his cause more clear, so worthily and virtuously he demeaned himself upon all occasions; and the good fortune that accompanied him in the difficulties he had to overcome in this noble employment, seemed to be strewed in his way by the gods, favorably conspiring for his justification.

The end of this matter is excusable, if any can be so; but the profit of the augmentation of the public revenue, that served the Roman Senate for a

pretense to the foul conclusion I am going to relate, is not sufficient to warrant any such injustice. Certain cities had redeemed themselves and their liberty by money, by the order and consent of the Senate, out of the hands of L. Sylla: the business coming again in question, the Senate condemned them to be taxable as they were before, and that the money they had disbursed for their redemption should be lost to them. Civil war often produces such villainous examples; that we punish private men for confiding in us when we were public ministers: and the self-same magistrate makes another man pay the penalty of his change that has nothing to do with it; the pedagogue whips his scholar for his docility; and the guide beats the blind man whom he leads by the hand; a horrid image of justice. There are rules in philosophy that are both false and weak. The example that is proposed to us for preferring private utility before faith given, has not weight enough by the circumstances they put to it; robbers have seized you, and after having made you swear to pay them a certain sum of money, dismiss you. 'Tis not well done to say, that an honest man can be quit of his oath without payment, being out of their hands. 'Tis no such thing: what fear has once made me willing to do, I am obliged to do it when I am no longer in fear; and though that fear only prevailed with my tongue without forcing my will, yet am I bound to keep my word. For my part, when my tongue has sometimes inconsiderately said something that I did not think, I have made a conscience of disowning it: otherwise, by degrees, we shall abolish all the right another derives from our promises and oaths. *Quasi vero forti viro vis possit adhiberi.* And 'tis only lawful, upon the account of private interest, to excuse breach of promise, when we have promised something that is unlawful and wicked in itself; for the right of virtue ought to take place of the right of any obligation of ours.

As though a man of true courage
could be compelled. • CIC., OFF., 3.30

I have formerly placed Epaminondas in the first rank of excellent men, and do not repent it. How high did he stretch the consideration of his own particular duty? he who never killed a man whom he had overcome; who, for the inestimable benefit of restoring the liberty of his country, made conscience of killing a tyrant or his accomplices without due form of justice: and who concluded him to be a wicked man, how good a citizen soever otherwise, who among his enemies in battle spared not his friend and his guest. This was a soul of a rich composition: he married goodness and humanity, nay, even the tenderest and most delicate in the whole school of philosophy, to the roughest and most violent human actions. Was it nature or art that had intenerated that great courage of his, so full, so obstinate against pain and death and poverty, to such an extreme degree of sweetness and compassion? Dreadful in arms and blood, he overran and subdued a nation invincible by all others but by him alone; and yet in the heat of an encounter, could turn aside from his friend and guest. Certainly he was fit to command in war who could so rein himself with the curb of good nature, in the height and heat of his fury, a fury inflamed and foaming with blood and slaughter. 'Tis a miracle to be able to mix any image of justice with such violent actions: and it was only possible for such a steadfastness of mind as that of Epaminondas therein to mix sweetness and the facility of the gentlest manners and purest innocence. And whereas one told the Mamertines that statutes were of no efficacy against armed men; and another told the tribune of the people that the time of justice and of war were distinct things; and a third said that the

noise of arms deafened the voice of laws, this man was not precluded from listening to the laws of civility and pure courtesy. Had he not borrowed from his enemies the custom of sacrificing to the Muses when he went to war, that they might by their sweetness and gaiety soften his martial and rigorous fury?

Let us not fear, by the example of so great a master, to believe that there is something unlawful, even against an enemy, and that the common concern ought not to require all things of all men, against private interest, *manente memoria etiam in dissidio publicorum fœderum privati iuris*:

*et nulla potentia vires
Præstandi, ne quid peccet amicus, habet;*

and that all things are not lawful to an honest man for the service of his prince, the laws, or the general quarrel. *Non enim patria præstat omnibus officiis, et ipsi conducit pios habere cives in parentes.* 'Tis an instruction proper for the time wherein we live: we need not harden our courage with these arms of steel; 'tis enough that our shoulders are inured to them: 'tis enough to dip our pens in ink without dipping them in blood. If it be grandeur of courage, and the effect of a rare and singular virtue, to condemn friendship, private obligations, a man's word and relationship, for the common good and obedience to the magistrate, 'tis certainly sufficient to excuse us, that 'tis a grandeur that can have no place in the grandeur of Epaminondas's courage.

I abominate those mad exhortations of this other discomposed soul,

*dum tela micant, non vos pietatis imago
Ulla, nec adversa conspecti fronte parentes
Commoveant; vultus gladio turbate verendos.*

Let us deprive wicked, bloody, and treacherous natures of such a pretense of reason: let us set aside this guilty and extravagant justice, and stick to more human imitations. How great things can time and example do! In an encounter of the civil war against Cinna, one of Pompey's soldiers having unawares killed his brother, who was of the contrary party, he immediately for shame and sorrow killed himself: and some years after, in another civil war of the same people, a soldier demanded a reward of his officer for having killed his brother.

A man but ill proves the honor and beauty of an action by its utility: and very erroneously concludes that every one is obliged to it, and that it becomes every one to do it, if it be of utility:

Omnia non pariter rerum sunt omnibus apta.

Let us take that which is most necessary and profitable for human society; it will be marriage; and yet the council of the saints find the contrary much better, excluding from it the most venerable vocation of man: as we design those horses for stallions of which we have the least esteem.

the memory of private right remaining even amid public dissensions: • LIVY, 25.18

No power on earth can sanction treachery against a friend. • OV., PONT., 1.7.37

The duty to one's country does not supersede all other duties. The country itself requires that its citizens should act piously toward their parents. • CIC., OFF., 3.23

While swords glitter, let no idea of piety, nor the face even of a father presented to you, move you: mutilate with your sword those venerable features. • LUC., 7.320

All things are not equally fit for all men. • PROP., 3.9.7

MONTAIGNE'S SOURCES

Cic., Off.	Cicero, <i>On Duties</i>
Livy	Livy, <i>History of Rome</i>
Luc.	Lucan, <i>Civil War</i>
Lucr.	Lucretius, <i>On the Nature of Things</i>
Ov., Pont.	Ovid, <i>Ex Ponto</i>
Prop.	Propertius, <i>Elegies</i>
Sen., Ep.	Seneca, <i>Epistles</i>
Ter., Haut.	Terence, <i>Heautontimorumenos</i>