

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE
ESSAYS



Book 2 · Chapter 14

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How that our spirit hindereth it selfe

IT IS a pleasant imagination, to conceive a spirit justly balanced betweene two equall desires. For, it is not to be doubted, that he shall never be resolved upon any match: Forsomuch as the application and choise brings an inequality of prise: And who should place us between a Bottle of wine, and a Gamon of Bacon, with an equall appetite to eate and drinke, doubtles there were no remedie, but to die of thirst and of hunger. To provide against this inconvenient, when the Stoikes were demanded, whence the ellection of two indifferent things commeth into our soule (and which causeth, that from out a great number of Crownes or Angels we rather take one then another, when there is no reason to induce us to prefer any one before others) they answere, that this motion of the soule is extraordinarie and inordinate, comming into us by a strange, accidentall and casuall impulsion. In my opinion, it might rather be said, that nothing is presented unto us, wherein there is not some difference, how light so ever it be: And that either to the sights, or to the feeling, there is ever some choise, which tempteth and drawes us to it, though imperceptible and not to be distinguished. In like maner, he that shall presuppose a twine-third equally strong all-through, it is impossible by all impossibilitie that it breake; for, where would you have the flaw or breaking to beginne? And at once to breake in all places together, it is not in nature. Who should also adde to this, the Geometricall propositions, which by the certaintie of their demonstrations, conclude, the contained greater then the containing, and the centre as great as his circumference: And that finde two lines uncessantly approaching one unto another, and yet can never meete and joyne together: And the Philosophers stone, and quadrature of the circle, where the reason and the effects are so opposite: Might peradventure drawe thence some argument to salve and helpe this bold speech of *Plinie*. *Solum certum nihil esse certi, & homine nihil miserius aut superbis. This onely is sure, that there is nothing sure; and nothing more miserable, and yet more arrogant then man.*