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CONCEPTS OF HISTORY IN MONTAIGNE'S "ESSAIS"

The Ohio State University

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CONCEPTS OF HISTORY IN MONTAIGNE'S ESSAIS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
Susan J. Litton, M.A.

* * * * * * * *

The Ohio State University
1980

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is a pleasure to thank my adviser, Professor Robert Cottrell, for all the assistance he gave me and all the patience he demonstrated during the preparation of this study. I would also like to thank Professor Charles Williams for his most helpful and sympathetic reading of this work while it was still in draft form. My thanks also go to Professor Micheline Besnard-Coursodon for the many useful comments and suggestions she made upon reading the draft. I owe a special debt of gratitude to two other friends and colleagues: to Gregg Friedberg for his careful and detailed readings of Chapters I, II and IV; and to Claire Carpenter for her stern but bracing and encouraging commentary on early versions of Chapters I and II.
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iv
INTRODUCTION

It is well known that history figured prominently in Montaigne's favorite reading-matter. Twice in the *Essais* he says so himself, and of the 271 books which can be assumed to have been in his possession, 87, or just less than one third, are histories. Moreover, his views on the usefulness of history are to be found in two of the most widely-read chapters of the *Essais*, "De l'institution des enfans" and "Des livres."

In perhaps the best-known chapter of all, "De l'institution des enfans," Montaigne gives the study of history great importance in the young nobleman's intellectual formation. Although a practical education is stressed and the pupil is to learn by observing how people act in real life, nevertheless,

> en cette practise des hommes, j'entends y comprendre, et principalement, ceux qui ne vivent qu'en la memoire des livres. [L'élève] practiquera, par le moyen des histoires, ces grandes ames des meilleurs siecles. C'est un vain estude, qui veut; mais qui veut aussi, c'est un estude de fruit inestimable (emphasis is mine).

Biographies are seen as particularly valuable: "Quel profit ne fera-il... à la lecture des *Vies* de nostre Plutarque?"^4

History can, Montaigne admits, be dry: "A d'aucuns c'est un pur estude grammairien."^5 But for those who know better it is essential reading, the source of our knowledge of man's psychological make-up. For these readers history is "l'anatomie de la philosophie, en laquelle
les plus abstruses parties de nostre nature se penetrent. Moral as well as psychological insights can be found in history if it is well presented to the pupil:

que mon guide se souvienne où vise sa charge; et qu'il n'imprime pas tant à son disciple la date de la ruine de Carthage que les meurs de Hannibal et de Scipion, ny tant où mourut Marcellus, que pourquoi il fut indigne de son devoir qu'il mourut là.

In keeping with the rest of Montaigne's educational philosophy, then, history is not to be seen as a source of facts for the young nobleman to learn, but as an area for the training of his judgment: "qu'[on] ne lui apprenne pas tant les histoires qu'à en juger." If this is Montaigne's stated theory of the use of history, how does he describe his personal practice? Except for the last element, the training of judgment, the two are very similar. In the chapter "Des livres," begun at approximately the same time as "De l'institution des enfans," Montaigne writes with enthusiasm: "Les historiens sont ma droiture bale"; no longer envisaging the unwilling scholar learning his dates, he claims that "ils sont plaisans et aysez." Again history is seen as a source of psychological and moral knowledge:

l'homme en general, de qui je cherche la cognoissance, y paroit plus vif et plus entier qu'en nul autre lieu, la diversité et verité de ses conditions en gros et en destail, la varieté des moyens de son assemblage et des accidentens qui le menacent.

As before, biographies are preferred:

Or ceux qui escrivent les vies, d'autant qu'ils s'amusent plus aux conseils qu'aux evenemens, plus à ce qui part du dedans qu'à ce qui arrive au dehors, ceux là me sont propres.
If the parallel between the two sections is not complete and the value of history for the formation of judgment is not stressed here, it is because Montaigne presents himself in this chapter as the curious but capricious and forgetful reader. He adopts the same tonality at the beginning of "De l'institution des enfans" in a passage that remains separate from the serious matter of discussing another person's education. With fairly gentle irony history is presented here as the light reading enjoyed by the dilettante who is incapable of more sustained study:

\[\text{de m'estre rongé les ongles à l'estude d'Aristote, monarque de la doctrine moderne, ou opinionstré après quelque science, je ne l'ay jamais faict. . . . l'histoire c'est plus mon gibier, ou la poesie . . .}\]

History is thus presented as fascinating reading which provides useful—even inspiring—insights into human behaviour. The same views are evident when we consider the works Montaigne wishes had been left to us by the past. He wishes that the words of the dying Seneca had been recorded, that there had been more biographers like Diogenes Laertius, and that there were memoirs of Plutarch's life. He wishes that someone of the intellectual stature of the great German humanist Justus Lipsius (with whom he corresponded) would write a history of the ancient philosophies.

There is also a sharp sense that much of the past has been lost. He regrets the zeal of the early Christians who destroyed many non-Christian works: "J'estime que ce desordre ait plus porté de nuisance aux lettres que tout les feux des barbares." In fact, most human actions are soon forgotten: "Les fortunes de plus de la moitié du
monde, à faute de registre, ne bougent de leur place, et s'évanouissent sans durée." This sense of loss exists on the personal level also. He wishes that he knew more about his own ancestors, and that he was as assiduous in keeping records of his family's activities as his father had been.

The past is, indeed, a matter of personal concern: "j'ay attaqué cent querelles pour la deffence de Pompeius et pour la cause de Brutus." Reading history sparks his imagination: "je ne ly guere és histoires ces confusions des autres estats que je n'aye regret de ne les avoir peu mieux considerer present." This imaginative dimension that history has for Montaigne is shown perhaps most clearly at the end of III.9, "De la vanité," when he remarks of the ancient Romans,

Montaigne is scornful of mere study of these same artifacts, if such study lacks this imaginative aspect. He is not interested in "combien de pas a Santa Rotonda, ou ... combien le visage de Neron, de quelque vieille ruyne ... est plus long ou plus large de celuy de quelque pareille medaille." History does not only serve the imagination, it seems to fill a need for vicarious excitement—a need whose fulfillment has been partially overtaken by fiction today:
Rien ne chatouille qui ne pince. Et les bons historiens fuyent comme une eau dormante et mer morte, des narrations calmes, pour regagner les séditations, les guerres, où ils savaient que nous les appelons.\textsuperscript{27}

Montaigne was not alone in his enthusiasm for history. As Corrado Vivanti demonstrates in an article entitled "Paulus Aemilius condidit historias?" history flourished in the sixteenth century: 657 histories were published in France between 1550 and 1610, and of these more than half were published in the years 1560-88.\textsuperscript{28} The Essais were composed during these years of greatest historical activity. Montaigne began them around 1572 and added to them and modified them until his death in 1592. Much of this interest in history was stimulated by the religious and civil wars, for all three factions—the Catholics, the Protestants and the Politiques—looked to history for justification of their position, as did individual members of those factions in their memoirs. Memoirs were only one form adopted by the prolific historians of the period. Chronicles, histories of France and of the Church, universal histories, artes historicae, and compendia of historical materials such as Nicolas Vignier's Bibliothèque historiale of 1588 all had their place also. Montaigne was well aware of his contemporaries' enthusiasm for history. "Il ne fut jamais tant d'historiens," he remarks in III.8, "De l'art de conferer."\textsuperscript{29}

Montaigne was thus part of a generation which read and studied history avidly. He was also a member of the social class, the robins (literally meaning, "men of the robe" i.e., nobles of recent bourgeois origin, now members of the magistrature), which dominated French cultural life in the latter part of the sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{30} A statistical
study by George Huppert in *The Idea of Perfect History* indicates that between the years 1540 and 1584 some eighty per cent of authors in letters, the arts and the sciences were robins.\textsuperscript{31} Although many of these men entered the magistrature with only a limited knowledge of the law, as Roger Trinquet makes clear in *La Jeunesse de Montaigne*,\textsuperscript{32} many had studied comparative Roman law with such proponents of the mos gallicus as Cujas, Hotman and Alciato at the universities of Bourges, Toulouse and Pavia. And, as such scholars as Donald Kelley and Julian Franklin have pointed out, this comparative historical study of law did much to foster the interest in history and the growing historical relativism of the later part of the century.\textsuperscript{33}

To what extent does Montaigne, in his enthusiasm for history, share in the historical-mindedness of his class and his generation? Scholars have disagreed on this question to the extent that the essayist has been variously described as "un apprenti historien" (by Jean Plattard in 1935)\textsuperscript{34} and as suffering from "a total absence of a sense of history" (Abraham C. Keller in 1957).\textsuperscript{35}

The problem is complicated by several factors. First, some of the best-known and most-commented passages in the *Essais* in which history is explicitly discussed (passages from "De la force de l'imagination," "De l'institution des enfans," and "Des livres" in particular) make few or no specific references and have thus been variously interpreted. Second, the difficulties of interpretation are compounded by Montaigne's irony, which appears to some critics to pervade the *Essais* but which others find less extensive. The third factor is the related problem of
the extent of Montaigne's skepticism. Historical criticism developed in the sixteenth century against a background of—and partly in reaction to—a radical skepticism which sought to put all forms of knowledge into question. Skepticism and historical criticism are of course linked in the Essais also, and so assumptions about Montaigne's relation to sixteenth-century skepticism can color the critic's attitude toward the function of history in Montaigne's thought. The fourth main problem is the question of progression in the Essais. Whether one prefers to describe differences in Montaigne's attitudes over twenty years in terms of his classical sources, referring to a stoic, then a skeptical and ultimately an Epicurean phase (Villey's view, with its nuances disregarded for the sake of convenience as has so often been the case), or whether one prefers Donald Frame's modified view of "the humanization of a humanist," or whether one prefers to concentrate on the permanent elements in Montaigne's thought, as Philip Hallie does, for example, in The Scar of Montaigne, the question will not go away and is constantly re-posed by the three different levels of the text. Naturally, varying assumptions about the development of the Essais affect the view critics take of Montaigne's skepticism, and thus of his attitudes towards history.

Through detailed textual analysis I give close attention to Montaigne's attitude towards historical criticism, to the extent to which he shares the historical-mindedness of his generation, and to the status of the subject-matter of history in the Essais. In Chapters II and III Montaigne's discourse is compared to the discourse of representative historical thinkers of the time as I attempt to establish
characteristic similarities and differences. Chapters IV and V examine rather Montaigne's own modes of argument in order to demonstrate the internal dynamics of his text along a given axis, that of historical reflection.

In the course of this discussion I attempt to deal with three of the four problems which are outlined above. First, while I do not ignore the *Essais* well-known passages on history, I give at least equal attention to the lesser-known points Montaigne makes about history and historians. Unlike many of the critics who have dealt with this problem, I examine the language not only of Montaigne's direct statements, but also of the passages in which he uses a historical method without telling the reader he is going to do so. The problem of the relationship between Montaigne's historical criticism and his skepticism is specifically addressed in my second chapter in which the relevant passages from the *Essais* are compared to representative texts of the variously skeptical thinkers Cornelius Agrippa, Francesco Patrizzi, Melchor Cano and Jean Bodin. While the second chapter also contains some discussion of the change in Montaigne's views, this topic is dealt with at length in the fourth and fifth chapters. There I isolate the aspects of historical reflection which most interest Montaigne, and, by approaching him on his own terms, as it were, attempt to see how his historical interests changed—or developed—from the early 1570s, when he began working on the *Essais*, to his death in 1592.

One difficulty remains, however, and I make only a partial attempt to resolve it here: this is the question of Montaigne's irony. In this regard I approach the *Essais* with much caution and the moderate
assumption that their author is sometimes ironic, sometimes not—a point which Donald Frame saw fit to make in a recent address to the Société des Amis de Montaigne in reaction to critics who would describe the Essais as a totally ironic work. 39
NOTES


3. Essais, I.26: VS, 156.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.


11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.


15. Essais, II.35: VS, 749.
Similar observations occur many times in the Essais: single acts of courage, however great, are soon forgotten (II.16: VS, 628); hope that one's own military efforts will be remembered is quite vain (I.26: VS, 158); historical records are often muddled and the facts thus lost (I.46: VS 277-78); we have an infinitesimally small amount of information about the past (II.16: VS, 627 & III.6: VS, 908); indeed, whole nations have been destroyed and totally forgotten (II.18: VS, 667); within a hundred years few people will even know there have been civil wars in France (II.16: VS, 628).


It is well known that Montaigne preferred to regard himself as a member of the noblesse d'épée. As Lanson remarks in his Histoire de la littérature française (Paris: Hachette, 1951, p. 327): "Il est curieux qu'au milieu de cette abondance de souvenirs, sa mémoire ne lui représente jamais qu'il a été conseiller au parlement, robin." On this question see also Roger Trinquet, La Jeunesse de Montaigne (Paris: Nizet, 1972), pp. 516-26, 537-60, 574-77 & 587-603.


Pierre Villey presents his work, *Les livres d'histoire moderne utilisés par Montaigne,* as one section of his ongoing research into the origins of the *Essais.* He begins with a brief justification of this type of research and a short *état présent* showing the difference between his own and previous methods. Then he goes on to outline Montaigne's attitudes towards history.

Briefly Villey's claim, already well known to Montaigne scholars, is that in studying sources one can ascertain first a writer's originality (by comparing the parts of his text which are borrowed with those which are not), secondly the development of his thought (by comparing the works which are most influential at given stages of his life), and third the development of his artistry (by comparing the different types and manners of borrowing, and thus showing changes in his method of composition).

Villey mentions the work of Mlle de Gournay who researched the sources of Montaigne's quotations and briefly describes the work of Coste and Leclerc who both sought the *Essais'* historical sources. These last two scholars, however, simply expanded the information given by Montaigne, referring on occasion to works to which Montaigne did not have access. Villey's claim, on the other hand, is to establish which
books Montaigne actually used, seeking thus to "pénétrer dans l'intimité du travail de l'auteur." To illustrate his method he quotes the anecdote concerning Conrad III from the first chapter of Book I of the Essais, and shows that while Coste simply refers the reader to a seventeenth-century history which mentions the same events, the book Montaigne in fact used as a source was the Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem of his contemporary, Jean Bodin. Further, Villey shows that whereas Bodin used the anecdote simply as proof that pleasure can be derived from reading history, Montaigne uses it more suggestively to imply a moral question, namely whether pleading or steadfastness is the better way to obtain merciful treatment. Such research was not undertaken by Coste, Villey points out, chiefly because so few of the historians or moralists who were "modern" for Montaigne were still read in the eighteenth century. (Exceptions were Monstrelet, Froissart, Commines, Joinville and the brothers Du Bellay.)

Villey begins the second part of his introduction by stressing Montaigne's enjoyment of history and the important role that he recommends history should perform in the child's education. (He bases his observations on the relevant sections of "De l'institution des enfants" and "Des livres." Montaigne's student is to learn by experience and as a source of indirect experience, as Villey puts it, history is an excellent "école de morale" in which he can sharpen his judgment and his moral sense. Villey finds that this view of history, as a series of events which are less important in themselves than for
the exercise of moral judgment that they afford, influences Montaigne's views in three other areas: his choice of subject-matter from history, his opinions on how history should be written, and his attitude towards historical criticism.16

In the case of subject-matter, Montaigne prefers to use events with a psychological or moral content, including military and political exploits which, during the wars of religion, had a particular interest for the noble reader he envisaged.17 Villey exemplifies this by showing that Montaigne's enjoyment of reading Tacitus is qualified by the observation that the latter could well have dwelt longer on individual actions in the Historiae since private actions are more within our control than public ones and thus advice applicable to the private man is the more useful.18 And since Montaigne's interest is in l'homme intérieur his declared preference is for biography, especially, of course, Plutarch.19

In considering how history should be written Montaigne is interested in whether the historian should merely record events or also pass judgment on them. To the unhappily common type of historian, ever-ready to pass mistaken or hasty judgments, he prefers the historian who refrains from all judgment and the rare excellent historian who judges masterfully.20 Judgment here is taken to mean moral judgment, although I would disagree with Villey at this point since in this passage Montaigne seems rather to be talking in terms of establishing what actually happened.21 Yet despite his dislike of poor judgment, says Villey, Montaigne does not see the self-effacing historian as the
ideal. It is indeed part of his orientation as a moralist that he should want the able historian to make his presence felt via his commentary. Thus he especially appreciates the moral commentaries of Tacitus and Plutarch.

Montaigne takes history seriously as befits its instructive value. He demands that the historian be both competent and sincere. Preferably he should have directed or participated in the events described, or at least events similar to them, and he should not display any biases. But apart from competence and sincerity, Villey points out, Montaigne makes no other definite demands because, as a moralist, he does not need to. Despite examples of his own critical sense (the value of using a simple person as an informant in "Des cannibales" and the comparison of information in "De la liberté de conscience") it is not one of his requirements that the historian concentrate on establishing historical truth in every detail. Referring to his comments on Asinius Pollio's criticism of Caesar's inattention to detail, Villey notes, "cet exemple l'étonne plutôt qu'autre chose." And although Montaigne seems to agree with Bodin on the dangers of historical error, he does not press the point. In fact, Villey claims, the criterion for belief in historical matters is for Montaigne the personal credibility the historian reveals in his writings and not any systematic method of historical criticism he may use. Thus Plutarch, Caesar, Tacitus and St. Augustine should be believed, but Bouchet and Froissart, for example, need be given less credence. Villey points out that the historian's authority risks being established by very
doubtful criteria: tradition, public opinion, impressions formed while reading.  

Also curious, to the modern reader, is Montaigne's apparent acceptance of exaggerated stories and extraordinary customs. But as Villey indicates, the sudden and bewildering expansion of knowledge in the sixteenth century meant that intellectual prudence required a suspension of disbelief rather than the modern hesitation to believe. And so when Montaigne puts forward the dangers of too much and too little credulity in "C'est folie de rapporter le vrai et le faux à nostre suffisance," he stresses the latter. As Villey puts it, Montaigne "est crédule avec prudence, je dirai même avec scepticisme."  

This credulity is seen by Villey as a habit of mind developed by his preferred study, man's moral rather than his physical qualities:  

Dans le monde moral il n'y a pas de règle fixe. Sans cesse, une expérience nouvelle vient déformer ou même briser l'idée générale qui se dégageait des observations antérieures. Elle reste toujours en voie de formation, elle évolue sans fin. A promener toujours sa pensée à travers les phénomènes moraux, Montaigne avait peu de chances de sortir de l'attitude à la fois sceptique et crédule qu'il devait à une extrême prudence intellectuelle.  

But Montaigne went further than accepting doubtful stories and using as sources such historians as Jean Bouchet and Paul Jove whom he admits to be of doubtful authority. Towards the end of "De la force de l'imagination" he also says that events that never happened, provided they are possible, are valid subjects for him. And, as we have just seen, he had very flexible views on what was possible.  

Il s'ensuit que tout conte, même fabuleux, est suggestif; il n'en est aucun qui ne mérite sa place dans les Essais, et voilà la critique inutile. Que l'exemple soit faux, peu
importe, pourvu que le raisonnement soit juste. Ainsi voilà Montaigne invité par son genre d'études à se désintéresser complètement de la vérité historique.39

But of course Montaigne did not go quite as far as that. Realizing that if he did, his writings would lose much in authority, he tells the reader that he is careful never to change the facts and goes on to state the difficulty of establishing historical fact only a few lines away from the passage in which he claims not to rely on historical veracity.40 For Villey this means that:

'il a un sentiment très vif de l'extrême difficulté qu'il y a à saisir la réalité; il semble dire que, s'il se décharge de l'obligation de l'atteindre, c'est qu'il désespère de pouvoir y parvenir.'41

Montaigne certainly did have a critical spirit, Villey concludes, but because of the nature of his writings he did not feel the need to apply it to his study of history. He does not make the demands of history that we are accustomed to: reconstitution of the past, a self-effacing writer, critical apparatus in evidence. His demands are those of his time: history should be a source of moral reflections.42

Lanson's views on Montaigne and history are largely to be found in the eleventh chapter of his Les Essais de Montaigne, entitled "La philosophie des Essais: IV, A la recherche d'une méthode."43

Given the title it is understandable that Lanson's attention goes to only one of Villey's three main points, that is to say Montaigne's attitudes towards historical criticism. Villey's starting-point, the use Montaigne makes of history, does not come into the picture.
In the first part of the chapter Lanson establishes that Montaigne saw, or at least glimpsed, the need for an experimental method in the sciences and that, particularly in "De la ressemblance des enfans aux peres," he gave "non pas encore l'ébauche d'une méthode expérimentale, mais l'énumération des difficultés qu'il faudra vaincre pour en rendre la pratique possible." These difficulties are: the apparently infinite diversity of observed phenomena, the difficulty of organizing and controlling observations, and the difficulty of deciding that a given experiment's results are conclusive. Montaigne, Lanson concludes,

... a conçu les difficultés et la nécessité d'une méthode expérimentale. Du point où il a porté la question, il n'y a qu'un pas à faire pour organiser cette méthode. Mais ce pas, Montaigne ne le fait pas.

Similarly, in the second part of the chapter we are shown a Montaigne who, in the realm of historical criticism, sees the need for a method, but stops short of elaborating one.

Starting from the point of view of method rather than from the use made of history as Villey had done, Lanson nevertheless covers much of the same ground as Villey and makes many of the same evaluations. Like Villey he mentions Montaigne's enjoyment of history and especially of biography, his discussion of the three basic types of historian, his criteria of competence and honesty when judging a historian's worth, and the insufficiency of these criteria which leave unanswered the question of how to judge the historical facts themselves. The discussion becomes more delicate (and thus more open to interpretation) as Lanson moves towards the question of Montaigne's limits of belief.
It is here that the two critics diverge, for two reasons.

First, for Villey, Montaigne as a moralist who does not need a critical historical method shows a marked tendency towards credulity (albeit a credulity tinged with skepticism), whereas Lanson's Montaigne, one step away from an experimental and a critical method, is credited with a much greater tendency to doubt.53

The second reason is that Lanson, without saying so directly, has widened the meaning of historical criticism to include matters which are not properly historical at all. The question thus becomes: What reported fact of any kind is worthy of belief? Put in these terms by Lanson, the question of belief was unavoidable "dans un livre où, d'une part, l'auteur nous propose son expérience de l'homme ou de la vie, et demande à être cru, et où, d'autre part, il recueille les témoignages des anciens et des modernes et souvient de ses contemporains de toutes conditions, et fonde là-dessus ses réflexions."54 Villey, on the other hand, limiting himself to historical matters, came to the quite different conclusion that Montaigne was usually well able to avoid having to take a critical stance since his interests precluded the need to do so.

It follows then that for Lanson Montaigne's disavowal of responsibility for the truthfulness of his anecdotes at the end of "De la force de l'imagination" is merely an early stance which he soon found it necessary to modify. Villey, however, as we have seen (p. 18 above), thought that this disavowal was a result of Montaigne's realization that a rigorous critical attitude was too onerous for him to sustain.55
The difference between these two Montaignes, one critical and the other preferring not to be so, is best shown by the two critics' differing interpretation of the brief passage in "Des livres" in which Montaigne comments on Asinius Pollio's criticism of Caesar. (The passage is quoted in full in note 29.) Villey had remarked "cet exemple l'étonne plutôt qu'autre chose," implying that Montaigne saw no need for close attention to details. But Lanson believes that Montaigne approves of the criticism and notes that "c'était un grand progrès alors de se représenter la besogne de l'historien sur le modèle d'une instruction judiciaire." In the same vein Lanson infers a greater degree of skepticism than does Villey in considering the following opinion of Montaigne on the difficulty of writing history:

(c) Comment peuvent ils engager leur foy sur une foy populaire? Comment répondre des pensées de personnes incognues et donner pour argent contant leurs conjectures? Lanson concludes that Montaigne suspected history was impossible to reconstruct: "... la matière de la certitude historique s'évaporait." Villey on the other hand had noted only "l'extrême difficulté qu'il y a à saisir la réalité." His Montaigne does not suspect any ultimate impossibility of arriving at historical truth.

Thus, although the two critics agree on certain of Montaigne's views on history, they differ, for the reasons we have seen, when they consider his capacity for belief. Lanson's Montaigne tends to doubt, but because "il lui a manqué le goût de l'effort," he does not quite reach a critical method: "Il aboutit au seuil de la critique historique;
il prépare chez son lecteur cet esprit de défiance et d'examen qui n'est pas encore la méthode critique mais qui achemine à en concevoir la nécessité. Villey's Montaigne, while quite capable of critical thought, tends to prefer credulity.

In 1932, five years after the publication of Lanson's study and sharing its view of a critically oriented Montaigne, Jean Plattard, tracing the route by which Montaigne came to use the form of the essay, suggests that history was one of the genres that tempted him first.

This suggestion is based on a reading of a series of articles by Reinholdt Dezeimeris on Montaigne's annotations of the Annales et Chroniques de France of Nicole Gilles, and on a reading of Montaigne's annotations of Caesar's Commentarius, as well as on the end of the chapter "Des livres" in which Montaigne records his opinions of Guicciardini, Commines and Guillaume Du Bellay.

Plattard observes that the books annotated by Montaigne which are still in existence are histories and that in these notes Montaigne compares historians' reports and even makes occasional remarks such as "A ce que le lecteur ne s'y trompe." Plattard asks himself if this "lecteur" might be simply another prospective user of Montaigne's library, but concludes "C'est bien peu vraisemblable, et il est plus naturel de voir dans ces annotations si soigneusement élaborées les tâtonnements d'un apprenti historien. Désireux de faire œuvre d'écrivain, il cherchait sa voie. L'histoire le tentait."

Later, Plattard points out, when Montaigne worked on the Essais, he would enjoy history as the genre with the most to say about human
nature. But during the early 1560s when he was writing his marginal notes in the *Annales et Chroniques de France*, "Il ne va pas si avant; il se contenterait encore de ce qu'il y a de plus superficiel dans l'histoire: des particularités de moeurs, des anecdotes, des singularités." This interest in compilation, Plattard notes, matches Montaigne's interest in the popular genres of "leçons" and "leçons de morale," both of which have affinities with the composition of the earliest chapters of the *Essais*.  

Plattard, as we have seen, limits his speculations to one period in Montaigne's life. On the other hand Friedrich, in his monumental *Montaigne*, places him in the history of thought as Lanson had done. But he specifically refutes Lanson's claim that Montaigne is the precursor of any scientific method.  

On a parfois essayé de revendiquer Montaigne comme précurseur de la pensée scientifique moderne. De l'idée juste que son scepticisme dénote l'épuisement des forces spéculatives de la théologie et de la philosophie, on a tiré la conclusion erronée qu'il prépare la voie aux nouvelles méthodes de la certitude. On a voulu établir un rapport entre son amour des faits et les science expérimentales. On semblait admettre qu'il ne lui avait manqué que "le goût de l'effort" pour faire lui aussi le pas que d'autres avaient fait à la même époque ou un peu après.

After this direct refutation of Lanson, Friedrich goes on to place Montaigne in a totally different line of thinkers. (I leave aside the question of whether thinkers and philosophers really do divide themselves up like this, refusing to stray from their categories.)
du monde. Montaigne suit une ligne qui, partie de la sagesse et de l'anthropologie hellénistiques, était passée par la théologie chrétienne pour se continuer, après qu'il l'eut de nouveau sécularisée, chez les moralistes du XVIIe siècle. Cette ligne laisse de côté les sciences mathématiques, physiques et techniques. Montaigne ne les devance pas plus qu'il ne cherche gauchement à les rejoindre, pour la bonne raison que sa pensée ne va pas dans le même sens. Vouloir placer Montaigne sous la dépendance des sciences exactes serait le trahir, et prêterait une apparence de régression ou de philosophie populaire au plus fécond de sa pensée.74

Montaigne, then, is not the "pre-scientist" he was for Lanson. Indeed Friedrich insists that his mind works in a way which quite precludes any form of scientific generalization. For Friedrich, Montaigne's division between ever-changing phenomena and man's changeable cognitive faculties, which receives such emphasis in "Du repentir," is not confined to that chapter but is a permanent element in the essayist's thought. Thus phenomena can only be observed and no valid generalizations can be inferred from these observations.

La fluctuation universelle domine les <<objeets>> come le <<sujet>> et produit entre eux un jeu incessant de combinaisons, de mouvements indéfinissables qui s'enveloppent et s'entrecroisent. Aucun espoir de sortir de cette confusion en y reconnaissant un déterminisme ou au moins une constance. On ne peut ques'y abandonner et en décrire les éléments distincts en se limitant à l'instant.75

The nomothetic and even the generalizing character of scientific thought are, for Friedrich, quite alien to Montaigne.

Aussi sa conception de l'expérience n'a-t-elle rien de commun avec l'expérimentation scientifique. Celle-ci n'est qu'un détour par le monde concret des choses et des phénomènes, dans le but de laisser ensuite le concret derrière soi. Dans deux pierres qui tombent, ce n'est pas leur caractéristique commune, la loi de la gravitation, qui intéresserait Montaigne, mais bien leurs différences, de couleur, de forme, de poids.76
Having established Montaigne's lack of interest in systematizing observed facts, Friedrich, in dealing with his attitudes towards history, is not interested in inferring any pre-critical stance, but in showing Montaigne's interest in the concrete details history provides. And so historians are described initially as "les sources d'où les Essais . . . tirent la matière de leur vision concrète des hommes." 77

Friedrich emphasizes Montaigne's wide reading in history, stressing Montaigne's own claim in "Des livres":

En ce genre d'estude des Histoires, il faut feuilleter sans distinction toutes sortes d'auteurs, et vieils et nouveaux, et barragouins et François, pour y apprendre les choses de quoy diversement ils traictent. 78

He sees this passage as indicating that Montaigne makes no value differentiation between ancient and modern historians as he reads to find out concrete details about men's lives. 79 Given what we have established above about the orientation of Villey and Lanson, it is instructive to note that Lanson took the passage to mean that Montaigne was thinking in terms of comparing historical accounts, 80 and Villey interpreted it as being Montaigne's advice to return again and again to histories for moral lessons. 81

Of the historians of antiquity (and Montaigne knew all the important ones except Thucydides, Friedrich reminds us) Plutarch, Herodotus and Tacitus are seen as being particularly compatible with Montaigne's way of thought, the first because of his interest in psychology, the second for his episodic manner, and the third for his caustic commentary and the deliberate ambiguity of his accounts. 82
A paragraph on modern historians is given over to the comparison made in "Des livres" between historians who are "fort simples" and those who are "excellens." Because Friedrich sees Montaigne as "en quête de faits purs, présentés sans idée préconçue," he also sees him as preferring the historians who are "fort simples" and as giving an ironic twist to the word "excellent." Villey, who saw Montaigne as enjoying an able moralist's discussions, took the same passage at face value and interpreted it in exactly the opposite manner.

Friedrich's discussion of the worst historians mentioned in this three-fold comparison in "Des livres" concentrated on only one of Montaigne's criticism: that these historians let the form dictate the content of their narrative. Here Montaigne is seen as in accord with, or perhaps ahead of, his time: "il n'est pas surprenant de voir Montaigne se joindre à la polémique contre la manière rhétorique d'écrire l'histoire. Celle-ci est pour lui le genre 'réaliste' objectif par excellence, conception qui s'imposera définitivement au XVIIe siècle."

But, Friedrich points out, in keeping with a way of thought that refuses to systematize, Montaigne avoids two other current attitudes. First is the traditional pragmatic view of history which claims the usefulness of the discipline in helping one foresee the outcome of future events and which is summed up by the Ciceronian formula "Historia vitae magistra." (In "De l'institution des enfans," Friedrich indicates, it is the student's judgment which is to be trained, and not any practical ability to apply the lessons of the past to his own
Secondly, Montaigne disregards the opinion of Bodin who recommended that, for ease in learning, historical facts should be classed according to the _topoi_ they illustrate.

Friedrich ends his section on history in the _Essais_ with the observation that Montaigne's preference for the concrete fact, rather than the law it might illustrate, is also found in his disregard for historical chronology and periodization—a disregard that is all the more remarkable given his readings in Lucretius, Sallust, Livy and St. Augustine, all of whom took a global view of the past and divided history into periods.

The next publication on this topic is a rather rambling article by Guy Desgranges published in the _French Review_ in 1951. History is very broadly defined here: "... l'histoire, c'est à dire à la fois ... l'histoire telle qu'il la lit chez les historiens anciens et contemporains, et l'histoire telle qu'il la voit se faire sous ses yeux."
The first characteristic of Montaigne's historical reflection that Desgranges would have us notice is its relativism. Mentioning respectively "Des coustumes anciennes" and "Des cannibales" he attributes both historical and geographical relativism to Montaigne: "il n'est pas de valeur absolue au nom de quoi les sociétés humaines devraient s'organiser."  

Secondly he notes that Montaigne's statements about history contain a contradiction since at one point there is the claim that it is impossible to establish any historical causality (thanks to the capricious nature of Fortune) yet at other moments Montaigne seems to indicate that historical repetitions do occur. Moreover, Desgranges—unlike Friedrich—thinks that Montaigne believed psychological and moral lessons could be derived from history. This, he argues, necessarily presupposes some sort of recurring historical pattern.  

In discussing the history of Montaigne's own times, which Montaigne could have written but did not want to, Desgranges finds that the Essais do contain elements of a contemporary history in the sense that we find therein: "le diagnostic d'une crise, celle où se débat la France au temps de Montaigne." The symptoms of this crisis which Montaigne identifies are the individual suffering imposed, social disorder, and loss of political morality—all points at which unfavorable comparisons of modern times with antiquity are indicated. If Montaigne does not despair, Desgranges says, it is because "sa sagesse répugnerait à ce nihilisme," and because his relativism, which included a large portion of anti-French sentiment, forbade him to limit his horizons to French troubles.
His detachment, in fact, allowed him to see that, despite their dangers, the religious wars did not destroy the social organism. This taught him that the state was a natural, not man-made, structure and he came to the conclusion that as such it was best left without interference from any necessarily inferior human agency. His conservatism is thus seen as a reasoned stance based on observation of history in the making, and not as a purely emotional reaction to his times.  

The next substantial publication on this topic is Abraham C. Keller's article "Historical and Geographical perspective in the Essais of Montaigne." Interestingly Keller claims to refute what he calls the "obvious explanation" of Montaigne's conservatism in emotional terms. No mention is given of the reasoning process, outlined at the end of Desgranges' article, which could have led to the same conservative attitudes.

Setting out, then, on his task of giving "new and rational dimensions" to the question of Montaigne's conservatism, Keller points out Montaigne's interest in ethnic and cultural diversity and shows that his sense of sociological relativism which resulted was largely in accord with the thought of his time, placing him in line with such thinkers as Pico della Mirandola, Cusanus, and Leonardo Bruni.  

This attitude, which Keller calls geographical relativism, is, he points out, documented by many examples in the Essais, the best known being the chapter "Des cannibales." Montaigne also claimed that people differ according to the time in which they lived, but (a fact which Keller suggests has often passed unnoticed by readers of the Essais)
Keller then suggests two possible reasoning processes which could have prevented Montaigne from dwelling on historical change and thus putting into question the permanent value of the status quo. First, in "Des vaines subtilités," Montaigne distinguishes three levels of knowledge: unquestioning ignorance, partial knowledge which makes one proud and questioning, and a third higher level at which point the thinker becomes humbly aware of his own ignorance and of the value of the norms which, at the second level, he had put into question. (Montaigne has in mind free inquiry into Christian religious practices.) Keller asks himself if Montaigne has thus decided to be content with a certain amount of ignorance in the historical sphere, but concludes that he does not content himself with ignorance in other areas and that this is therefore not a sufficient explanation.

Secondly, in "De la coustume," and "L'Apologie de Raimond Sebond" Montaigne says that probing into the foundations of the laws will undermine people's faith in institutions. But again Keller finds that Montaigne's statement contains insufficient explanation for his lack of emphasis on historical relativism. Montaigne, he argues, does not refrain from showing the unreasonable hold custom has on men's minds. Indeed in another passage in "De la coustume" he declares that it is useful to the judgment to understand the laws' lack of foundation in reason. Moreover he is quite content to use geographical comparison to undermine faith in institutions, without any of the worry that historical comparisons seem to cause him.
If Montaigne is worried by historical relativism it is because, Keller says, he has an imperfect sense of history: "everything points to a total absence of a sense of history in the Essays." Montaigne's preoccupation with the great figures of antiquity is seen as a barrier to historical perspective, and his dislike of political change prevents him from appreciating the necessity of change in the historical process.

As proof that Montaigne is worried by history's "peculiar power to undermine the status quo," Keller turns to the end of "De la force de l'imagination" where Montaigne explains why he did not write a history of his own time. Those who try to persuade him to do so, says Montaigne, "ne disent pas . . . que ma liberté, estant si libre, j'eusse publié des jugemens, à mon gré même et selon raison, illégitimes et punissables." Keller reasons that this means that Montaigne would have taken a relativistic approach critical of the state, and that he felt this would be dangerous. Ignoring the irony inherent in showing first that Montaigne has no sense of history (because he dislikes change) and then that he does have a sense of history (which he is afraid to use), in an article that claims to bring "new and rational dimensions" to the problem, Keller goes on to draw two conclusions. The first is that Montaigne was dishonest both in refusing to give his readers the benefit of his own historical perspective and acquaintance with history, and in refusing to let himself come to intellectual conclusions which contradicted his own inclinations. The second conclusion is, however, that Montaigne was
praiseworthy within his own scheme of things which included an appreciation of thinkers who "know when to stop."  

Montaigne is further absolved by Keller's observation that he was not alone in his failure to write in historical and relative terms. Scholars of the period 1550-90 talked about historical relativity but practised it little, probably, Keller surmises, because in this area there was no compelling imaginative force to parallel the influence of the Renaissance's geographical discoveries. And those historians who did recognize that change was an important part of past history failed to include the present in this process. Consequently Montaigne's position was normal and unshocking for his time. Keller ends his article by observing that if this attitude towards historical change surprises us today it is because we have over-stressed Montaigne's liberalism and this has led us to assume too readily that we will find in him that appreciation of change which is a necessary part of liberal thought.

In 1972 Karlheinz Stierle published a very dense article, "Geschichte als Exemplum. Exemplum als Geschichte," part of which deals with the **Essais**. Since the word "Geschichte," like "histoire," covers the meaning of both the English "story" and "history," it is less than surprising to see that Stierle is concerned not only with how Montaigne deals with history but in how he deals with the recounting of events in general. His findings in this area lead him to place this problem in the larger context of Montaigne's concern with the relation between the general and the particular, "qui constitue pour Montaigne
la véritable problématique de la connaissance."\textsuperscript{125}

Underlying the beginning of the section on Montaigne are two concepts of history designated by Stierle which he sees as having been prevalent up to the eighteenth century. The first is a paradigmatic view of the past which implies that in history can be found unchanging truths about human nature and that events from the past can be classified according to the truths which they represent. Correspondingly, in this view, the only events worthy of being recorded as history are those which demonstrate these truths. It is this view of history which permits the formula "historia magistra vitae" and which was particularly the view of antiquity. The Christian Middle Ages added a second view which Stierle terms syntagmatic. Historical events were now seen as steps toward, and prefigurations of, the redemption of man. In the eighteenth century, at which point the paradigmatic view of history tends to be lost, the syntagmatic view continues; helped along by a growing concept of progress, one supposes (Stierle does not say so), history, though de-Christianized, is still seen as leading somewhere.\textsuperscript{126}

Montaigne, however, is unusual for his time in holding neither the paradigmatic nor the syntagmatic view. For the essayist the facts of history neither demonstrate fixed moral values nor do they move in a direction which can be charted. Stierle is very close here to Friedrich, whose influence he acknowledges, though elsewhere. As has been seen (p. 27 above) Friedrich pointed out that Montaigne neither classified history according to topoi nor took a developmental view of any kind. In fact, Stierle says, going further than Friedrich, Montaigne totally suspends judgment, a stance which even forbids
drawing the conclusion that nothing can be derived from a study of history. It is precisely this stance at degré zéro however, Sierle tells us, which allows reflection and permits the "essaying" of one's judgment.127

Stierle moves away from Friedrich when he claims that Montaigne was less interested in the facts of history than in the relationship that exists between the facts and the finished work of history, a relationship determined by the character and method of the individual historian. In trying to prove this interest, Stierle seems to overstress Montaigne's criticism of historians and makes an interesting point which one feels could have been Montaigne's had he gone through the reasoning process outlined in Stierle's article and reached some of Stierle's particular skepticism before writing "Des livres." Referring to the malleable passage in that chapter in which Montaigne speaks of historians who are "fort simples" and those who are "excellens,"128 Stierle finds that in the case of the first, who report all that they know without changing anything, "le devenir historique" is obscured by the multiplicity of opinions reported. (It is difficult to reconcile this with Montaigne's approving statement in the same passage that these historians give "la matière de l'Histoire, nue et informe,"129) Montaigne's other type of preferred historians, the "excellens," are also supposed to be lacking, for in their accounts events are hidden behind "la perfection d'une conception close sur elle-même."130 Stierle is probably nearer to Montaigne's intended meaning here, yet he misrepresents his attitude insofar as Montaigne says of these historians that "il ont raison de prendre l'autoricté de regler nostre
On the whole Stierle forces his point here, wishing a certain meaning onto this passage in order to fit it in with the rest of the article and his claim that Montaigne puts the validity of all types of histoire into question.

Stierle goes on, however, to adduce more convincing evidence. Usually, he points out, in historical or moral writings, a sentence and the example illustrating it exist in complement to each other. In the Essais on the other hand, Stierle discerns the complementarity of the "sentence problématisée" and the "exemple problématisé." To demonstrate this he examines in detail the whole of the first chapter of the Essais, "Par divers moyens on arrive à pareille fin." As a sentence he finds that the title is problematic in itself since it is so general. (Or, as he chooses to put it, "dans une certaine mesure la sentence ne caractérise ici qu'une forme de son absence."). He then shows that all the parts of the chapter challenge the veracity of the already problematic sentence, cumulatively suggesting the truth of the best-known of the chapter's lines: "Certes c'est un subject merveilleusement vain, divers et ondoyant que l'homme. Il est malaisé d'y fonder jugement constant et uniforme."

Stierle holds that Montaigne's chief concern in this chapter is the unknowable element in human behaviour. The example which best shows this is the final one, on Alexander the Great, which Stierle points out is the most developed passage on that commander in the Essais. This anecdote tells that, having defeated the town of Gaza after a long siege, Alexander took the townspeople's commander captive. Instead of admiring the courage shown by his captive when threatened with violent
death, as one might have expected, Alexander, enraged, had him tortured to death.

Dans cet anti-exemple qui met une nouvelle fois la sentence du titre en question, c'est l'imprévisibilité du comportement humain qui est déterminante. Ce qui se trouve entre l'instant $t_1$ de la capture du commandant, et l'instant $t_3$ de la mort du commandant, c'est-à-dire le déroulement temporel $t_2$, ne peut plus être démêlé. Ainsi l'histoire se dissocie en deux parties. Ce qui se trouve entre ces deux parties n'est plus sur le plan de l'histoire, mais sur celui des présomptions de celui qui raconte l'histoire. A cet endroit décisif, on trouve, au lieu d'une réponse, la mention de possibilités qui en prennent la place.134

Doubt about the psychological motivation, which constitutes the meaning of the example, provides the subject-matter for reflection.

Ce qui devient problématique chez Montaigne, c'est précisément la partie intermédiaire, déterminante, qui relie la situation et l'issue de la situation, et qui seule constitue le sens de l'exemple. Alors que dans l'exemple classique, le rapport entre la situation et la solution était donné sans ambiguïté et ne pouvait qu'être perçu, ce rapport lui-même devient maintenant énigmatique, et de ce fait, intéressant pour la réflexion psychologique du moraliste.135

The result is that the example does not represent a given moral value, but becomes an account or story whose meaning is not even intended to be evident. Thus the movement described in the title of Stierle's article has taken place within the *Essais*: history-as-example has given way to the example-as-story.

The complex use of the historical example that is found in "Par divers moyens on arrive à pareille fin" is not the only use of the example, however. In the later *Essais*, Stierle claims, the simple, non-problematized form of the historical example reappears. On the other hand, once having been put into question, the historical example loses some of its authority, and so the most reliable examples are
considered by Montaigne to be those taken from his own life, because they have behind them the authority of experience. "Ainsi le moi prend la place de l'histoire comme domaine propre des histoires garanties."136

And yet the self is no more a magister vitae than history was able to be a magistra vitae because "chez Montaigne, les exemples, y compris ceux qui sont tirés de sa propre vie, ont paradoxalement pour fonction d'être des exemples du particulier, non du général."137 (Stierle backs this up with a reference to "De l'expérience": "La multiplication de nos inventions n'arrivera jamais à la variation des exemples."138) Montaigne, then, reflects on incidents from his life in much the same way as he reflects on history, not with a view to classifying them and planning the future from them, but to create an opportunity for the exercise of his judgment.

This way of looking at history and one's own past life as a series of discontinuous events leads to the extreme view expressed at the beginning of "Du repentir" that the story of a life, told from a single view-point and showing events leading up to a single point in time, can never be truthful since both subject-matter and author are continually changing.139 Truth resides only in the instant, not in any imposed continuity. Yet Christian repentance presupposes a structure similar to that of the life-story (and the history) in that there is presumed to exist a privileged moment in time to which previous moments are subordinate and which they lead up to. But for Montaigne the present has no more privilege or authority than any other moment. Both the story and the act of repentance are invalid in this perspective, says
Stierle, because they ignore the diversity of experience and force a false pattern on events.

For Stierle the unity of the chapter "Du repentir" is based on Montaigne's refutation of these two similar structures. Similarly, as we have seen, he finds that an unwillingness to generalize in the temporal sphere underlies Montaigne's attitude to each type of reference to the past mentioned in the article: the self lacks continuity, examples from history have no easily-extracted meaning, even the best historians obscure the truth, history neither teaches nor advances in any traceable direction. This méfiance is very different from Villey's view of a credulous Montaigne, which I outline above on pages 13-18.

Does Montaigne fit into this neatly-tied package? Little attention is paid to the fact that he might make contradictory statements. Yet there is a very obvious contradiction hidden in Stierle's article: Montaigne approves of the historians whom Stierle judges so harshly on his behalf.

Interestingly, the contradictions to be found in the Essais are one of the starting points of the next work in question, Olivier Naudeau's La Pensée de Montaigne. The third chapter of this book is called "Montaigne interroge les historiens," a helpful title in that it refers to the book's basic thesis, namely that Montaigne's apparent contradictions are not the result of his successive (or simultaneous) adherence to different points of view, but rather the result of his temporarily questioning or "essaying" them. In this chapter Montaigne is thus seen questioning historians who present him with a
view of man in society "aux prises avec les événements."¹⁴² Naudeau, however, is not interested in Montaigne's critical attitudes towards individual historians or their subject-matter, but in how the *Essais'* method of composition is exemplified when Montaigne's reasoning includes references to history.

The method of composition is traced in the book's preceding chapter, "Montaigne interroge les philosophes," in which Naudeau examines Montaigne's attempts to form a general view of human nature, and in the first chapter, "La méthode de Montaigne." It is shown that, as Montaigne writes, he seeks both to form himself and his judgment and to command continued attention and agreement from his reader. The result is a "double mouvement dialogique simultané,"¹⁴³ the first dialectical movement being Montaigne's reasoning aloud, as it were, for his own benefit, and the second being his communication with his readers, who are regarded as a collective entity by Naudeau and called the "public-interlocuteur."¹⁴⁴ (Since the third chapter deals mainly with the first of these movements, the second, the rhetorical element of Montaigne's method of composition, will not be discussed here.)

Naudeau believes that "Montaigne n'a eu d'autre méthode pour composer ses *Essais* que celle de suivre l'idée qu'il se faisait de lui-même. . ."¹⁴⁵ His idea of himself, however, was double: he saw himself both as "estre universel"¹⁴⁶ (which Naudeau often modifies to include "être social"), and "moi particulier"¹⁴⁷; consequently much of the *Essais* can be seen as an effort to reconcile these two levels of being. In "Montaigne interroge les historiens" Naudeau's discussion of "De la coustume" (I:23) attempts to show Montaigne dealing with this
problem in historical terms. Here history and society, Man's inherited and thus unavoidable setting, are equated. In the following paragraph I briefly outline Naudeau's discussion of "De la coustume," for two reasons: first because Naudeau claims that "l'écrivain expose ici, en termes clairs, le principe qui dirige sa pensée et qui commande la composition de son œuvre," and secondly because the discussion reveals the shortcomings of Naudeau's own method.

Naudeau reduces the essentials of the chapter's composition to four steps: Montaigne begins by demonstrating the power of custom and then goes on to examine, at three different levels of human existence, the question of whether or not custom should be followed. First he considers the individual who is capable of questioning a custom's rationality and who should refuse to conform if the custom is unreasonable; secondly the individual is considered within the social structure and here conformity is found to be desirable; third, Naudeau sees Montaigne as considering man in relation to a divinely-ordered whole, so interconnected that any change undertaken by short-sighted human agency is bound to create unforeseen damage. Thus on the third level Naudeau implies a sort of Cornelian "dépassement" of the freedom-versus-obligation paradox as Montaigne examines man's obligations towards God. Unfortunately Naudeau demonstrates this third level of Montaigne's thinking simply by citing the following passage:

En voicy d'un'autre cuvée. Il y a grand doute, s'il se peut trouver si évident profit au changement d'une loy receue, telle qu'elle soit, qu'il y a de mal à la remuer, d'autant qu'une police, c'est comme un bastiment de diverses pieces jointes ensemble, d'une telle liaison, qu'il est impossible d'en esbranler une que tout le corps ne s'en sente.
It is difficult to see, however, that Montaigne regards "un bastiment de diverses pieces jointes ensemble" as anything more divine than the remarkable mechanical devices he was to admire during his travels in Italy.\textsuperscript{150} Moreover, Naudeau seems to ignore the ironical tinge in Montaigne's wonder that all this human imperfection manages to hold together at all. He makes the mistake of assuming that his own inferences, drawn from reflection on other passages of the \textit{Essais}, are so obvious as to preclude the need for justification.

Another part of the difficulty in working with this book is that it is often not clear which statements Naudeau offers as personal reflections and which he intends to represent an inarticulate movement of Montaigne's mind. Thus, earlier in the same chapter, without any supporting reference to the \textit{Essais}, he offers the following paragraph characterizing history:

\begin{quote}
L'histoire est création et mouvement. Création d'abord, car elle représente l'apport de l'espèce—la race humaine envisagée comme un tout organique—et la contribution particulière de chaque personne au tout qui est l'humanité. Mouvement aussi, parce que, à travers les personnes et les actes, l'humanité se fait dans une suite de générations, la société se forme par le commerce et l'interdépendance des hommes entre eux.\textsuperscript{151}
\end{quote}

Are these Naudeau's thoughts or does he attribute them to Montaigne? No indication is given. Similarly, when describing Montaigne's aim in examining history, he claims that each historical character is considered by Montaigne "dans tout ce qu'il apporte de personnel à la construction progressive de l'humanité."\textsuperscript{152} On both of these occasions he appears to attribute what, in the absence of further evidence,
one can only take to be his own progressive view of history to Montaigne. This contrasts strangely with his suggestion, made else­where, that the juxtaposition of different historical moments in the Essais stems from Montaigne's feeling that history does not really change. 153

But perhaps Montaigne contradicts Naudeau more effectively than Naudeau contradicts himself. When we read, "le commerce entre esprits, constate partout [sic] Montaigne, est cause de confiance: 'c'est un progres naturel!'" we are surprised. 154 We check the reference, and find that Montaigne is talking about the progressive growth of false rumours, brought about by each successive teller's desire to impress his listener!

L'erreur particulière faïct premierement l'erreur publique, et, à son tour, après, l'erreur publique faïct l'erreur particulière. Ainsi va tout ce bastiment, s'estoffant et formant de main en main; de maniéré que le plus eloigné tesmoin en est mieux instruit que le plus voisin, et le dernier informé mieux persuadé que le premier. C'est un progres naturel. 155

Naudeau's implied attribution of a theory of progress to Montaigne is contradicted (although not mentioned) in a short article by John Priestley published two years later. 156

The article contains little that has not already been said, most of it by Villey in Les Livres d'histoire moderne utilisés par Montaigne, as Priestley admits. He claims, however, that by discussing not only Villey's two topics (the qualities necessary to a historian and the uses of historical writing) but also a third (Montaigne's philosophy of history) he can show "a fuller understanding of the Essais since the
relationships among the three topics reflect a logic fundamental to the
author's thought. 157

This "fundamental logic" could be taken to mean a constant in the
way Montaigne's mind works. Instead, however, Priestley concentrates
on "the essential development we can trace in his thought." 158 This
development, says Priestley:

can be called one of 'progressive interiorization'. . . That
is to say that as time went on, and as current events seemed
more and more confused and sinister, Montaigne became con­
vinced that in order to acquire sound knowledge of anything,
his in fact to abandon the study of all that was external
to his being—all past and present events and objects—and
look within himself and his own experiences for substan­
tive truths about the human condition. 159

Priestley thus stresses that Montaigne was a moralist, increasingly
bent on studying (and perhaps improving) himself. He restates Villey's
observation that, after careful choice of which historians to believe,
Montaigne will accept whatever the chosen ones say. But he differs
from Villey in arguing that Montaigne was more interested in facts
from history than in a historian's interpretation of them. This
opinion is supported by a reference to Montaigne's own differentiation
between the respective tasks of the historian and the moral philoso­
pher. ("il y a des auteurs desquels la fin c'est dire les evenements.
La mienne, si j'y sceavo ye advenir, seroit dire sur ce qui peut
advenir."

160) This argument leads him to add a new wrinkle to the
interpretation of the passage on three different types of historians,
to which we have already referred so many times. 161 Montaigne,
Priestley argues, gives no examples of the historians he calls
"excellens"; moreover, they, like the vast majority of poor historians
whom he derides, choose to interpret events. Thus Priestley concludes that Montaigne has most confidence in "the historian who honestly and frankly records in chronicle fashion what has happened even when what he records may appear absurd."\(^{162}\)

Despite this preference for the bare facts which is attributed to Montaigne, Priestley notes that: "the lessons of history are particular incidents chosen by Montaigne for their intrinsic merits, with little regard for when or where the specific events took place."\(^{163}\) This, he says, can be explained by the philosophy of history in which Montaigne believed. Priestley finds the key to Montaigne's philosophy of history in the well-known passage from "Du repentir" which contains the sentences: "Le monde n'est qu'une branloire perenne. Toutes choses y branlent sans cesse: la terre, les rochers du Caucase, les pyramides d'Agypte, et du branle publique et du leur."\(^{164}\) Looking more closely at this passage, Priestley finds that "Montaigne's notion of history . . . is characterized by two fundamental qualities: dynamism and diversity."\(^{165}\) This precludes, he notes, any progressive notion. Priestley concludes his article with the observation:

No comfort can be taken from the fact that time progresses. . . . Mankind . . . had made virtually no moral progress since antiquity, and it seemed the world was being plunged into the worst kind of depravity. Unlike many historians of his own day, Montaigne saw no progression in the history of man, but rather consistent chaos and disorder.\(^{166}\)

Several questions emerge from this review of past writing on the topic in hand. Villey, Lanson, Friedrich and Stierle offer various views about Montaigne's faith in history as a source of truth. Keller
claims that Montaigne lacks a sense of historical change. Naudeau, on the other hand, appears to attribute an accepting, developmental view to Montaigne's historical thought. Stierle, though, who uses the word "syntagmatic," denies that Montaigne has such an attitude, and Priestley claims that history in the Essais is seen as "consistent chaos and disorder." The critics reviewed here are not primarily concerned with the question of development in Montaigne's views. But we did see disagreement between Villey and Lanson, Villey placing an important passage from "De la force de l'imagination" at the end of a process of development, and Lanson placing the same passage at the beginning of such a process. 167

In the chapters that follow I will endeavor to answer some of these questions. In Chapter II, I address the question of Montaigne's historical criticism. Was he the moraliste who chose to be credulous, as Villey states, the pre-historian suggested by Lanson, or a critic of historical narrative as Stierle seems to suggest? Chapter III explores Montaigne's sense of historical development comparing his views with the views of his contemporaries who were beginning to see history as purely secular process. In Chapters IV and V, I examine the Essais on their own terms, as it were. I explore the types of generalization Montaigne makes about history and attempt to establish first which pattern he believed the human past follows, and then, how the nature of his historical thinking changed during the twenty years in which he wrote the Essais.
NOTES


2 Villey, pp. 7-18.

3 Villey, pp. 18-36.


6 Villey, p. 10.

7 Ibid.

8 Villey, p. 10; Essais, I.1: VS, 8.

9 Villey, p. 11. Coste refers the reader to Calvisius' Opus Chronologicum.

10 Villey, p. 11. See also pp. 58-60 for a discussion of Bodin as a source for Montaigne.


12 Villey, p. 17.

13 Villey, p. 19; Essais, I.26: VS, 156.

14 Villey, p. 19; Essais, II.10: VS, 416.

15 Villey, p. 21.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Villey, pp. 21-22; Essais, III.8: VS, 940.

19 Villey, p. 23; Essais, I. 26: VS, 156: "Quel profit ne fera-il . . . à la lecture des Vies de nostre Plutarque?"; and II.10: VS, 416.

20 Villey, p. 24; Essais, II.19: VS, 417.

21 Villey, p. 25.

22 Ibid.
Si nous voulons remarquer la religion que les Romains avoient en cela [in attention to historical detail], il n'en faut que cet exemple: Asinius Pollio trouvait ests histoires mesme de Caesar quelque mesconte, en quoy il estoit tombé pour n'avoir peu jetter les yeux en tous les endroits de son armée, et en avoir creu les particuliers qui luy rapportoient souvent des choses non assez verifiées; ou bien pour n'avoir esté assez curieusement adverty par ses Lieutenans des choses qu'ils avoient conduites en son absence. On peut voir par cet exemple si cette recherche de la verité est delicate, qu'on ne se puisse pas fier d'un combat à la science de celuy qui y a commandé, ny aux soldats de ce qui s'est passé prés d'eux, si, à la mode d'une information judiciaire, on ne confronte les tesoins et reçoit les objects sur la preuve des pontilles de chaque accident. Vrayement, la connoissance que nous avons de nos affaires est bien plus lâche. Mais cecy a esté suffisamment traicté par Bodin, et selon ma conception.


25 Villey, pp. 26-27; Essais, II.10: VS, 418; and Essais, II. 10: VS, 419.

26 Villey, p. 27.

27 Villey, p. 28; Essais, I.31: VS, 205.

28 Villey, p. 28; Essais, II: 19.

29 Villey, p. 27; Essais, II. 10: VS, 418;

Si nous voulons remarquer la religion que les Romains avoient en cela [in attention to historical detail], il n'en faut que cet exemple: Asinius Pollio trouvait ests histoires mesme de Caesar quelque mesconte, en quoy il estoit tombé pour n'avoir peu jetter les yeux en tous les endroits de son armée, et en avoir creu les particuliers qui luy rapportoient souvent des choses non assez verifiées; ou bien pour n'avoir esté assez curieusement adverty par ses Lieutenans des choses qu'ils avoient conduites en son absence. On peut voir par cet exemple si cette recherche de la verité est delicate, qu'on ne se puisse pas fier d'un combat à la science de celuy qui y a commandé, ny aux soldats de ce qui s'est passé prés d'eux, si, à la mode d'une information judiciaire, on ne confronte les tesoins et reçoit les objects sur la preuve des pontilles de chaque accident. Vrayement, la connoissance que nous avons de nos affaires est bien plus lâche. Mais cecy a esté suffisamment traicté par Bodin, et selon ma conception.

Villey, p. 29.

30 Villey, pp. 30-31; Essais, I.27: VS, 181; II. 32: VS, 723 and III.8: VS, 941.

Villey, p. 31.

33 Villey, p. 30.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Villey, p. 31.

37 Villey, p. 29.

38 Villey, p. 32; Essais, I. 21: VS, 105.
39 ^Ibid.
40 Villey, pp. 32–33; Essais, I. 21: VS, 106.
41 Villey, p. 33.
42 Villey, pp. 34–36.
44 Lanson, pp. 265–82.
45 Lanson, p. 276; Essais, II. 37: VS, 781–83.
46 Lanson, p. 278.
47 Ibid., p. 279.
48 Ibid., p. 291.
49 Ibid., p. 286.
50 Ibid., p. 287.
51 Lanson, p. 285.
52 Lanson, p. 289.
53 Lanson, p. 290.
54 Ibid., p. 283.
55 Ibid., p. 284; Villey, op. cit., p. 33; Essais, I. 21: VS, 105–106. Lanson quotes the well-known 1580 passage "... les Histoires que j'emprunte, je les renvoie sur la conscience de ceux de qui je les prens" but unfortunately also much of the long 1595 addition, as proof that Montaigne's disavowal of responsibility was an early stance.
56 Villey, p. 27. See above, p. 16.
57 Lanson, pp. 288–89.
59 Lanson, p. 291.
60 Villey, p. 33.
61 Lanson, p. 280.
Ibid., p. 291.


Plattard, op. cit., p. 28.

Ibid.

Dezeimeris (op. cit., Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France 13 [1909], p. 214), sees 1564 as the date of these annotations.

Plattard, p. 28.

Ibid., pp. 30-31.


Ibid., p. 151.

Ibid.

Ibid., p. 152.

Ibid., p. 153.


82. Friedrich, p. 211.

83. Ibid., p. 212.

84. Ibid.

85. Ibid.


87. Friedrich, p. 214.

88. Ibid.

89. Ibid.


92. Ibid., p. 216.

93. Ibid.


95. Ibid., p. 371.

96. Ibid., p. 372; *Essais*, I.49: VS, 297.

97. Desgranges, p. 372. Reference is made to *Essais*, I.26 only in a very generalized way.

98. Desgranges, p. 372.

99. Ibid., p. 372; *Essais*, III.10: VS, 1018.

100. Desgranges, p. 373; *Essais*, III. 9: VS, 946.

101. Desgranges, p. 373.


103. Desgranges, p. 373.
Desgranges, p. 375.

Ibid., pp. 376-77.


Ibid., p. 145.

Ibid.

Ibid., p. 146.

Ibid., p. 150.


Keller, p. 150.


Ibid., II. 12: VS, 583.

Ibid., I. 23: VS, 117.

Keller, p. 152.

Ibid.

Ibid., p. 153.

Ibid., p. 152.


Keller, p. 154. As epigraph to his article Keller quotes from Essais, I. 9; VS, 35:

"Et n'est rien oû la force d'un cheval se cognoisse plus qu'à faire un arrest rond et net."

Keller, p. 155.

Ibid., p. 157.


Ibid., p. 198.
126 Stierle, pp. 184-85.
127 Ibid., p. 191.
128 See note 20.
129 Essais, II. 10: VS, 417.
130 Stierle, p. 192.
131 Essais, II. 10: VS, 417.
132 Stierle, pp. 193-95.
133 Ibid., p. 193.
134 Ibid., p. 195.
135 Ibid.
136 Ibid., p. 196.
137 Ibid.
138 Essais, III.13: VS, 1066.
139 Stierle, p. 197; Essais, III.2: VS, 804-805.
141 Ibid., p. 4.
142 Ibid., p. 79.
143 Ibid., p. 16.
144 Ibid., p. 35.
145 Ibid., p. 103.
147 Naudeau, p. 104.
148 Ibid., p. 87.
149 Ibid., p. 89; Essais, I. 23: VS, 119.
For example the description of the grotto at Pratellino,
*Journal de voyage*, TR, 1193.

151 Naudeau, p. 80.
152 Ibid., p. 77.
153 Ibid., p. 82.
154 Ibid., p. 80.


157 Ibid., p. 85.
158 Ibid.
159 Ibid.
160 Ibid., p. 85; *Essais*, I. 21: VS, 105-106.
161 See above pp. 15, 19, 26, 34 and 38.

162 Priestley, p. 87.
163 Ibid., p. 89.
164 Ibid., p. 89; *Essais*, III. 2: VS, 804-805.

165 Priestley, p. 90.
166 Ibid., pp. 91-92.
167 See page 20 above.
CHAPTER II

MONTAIGNE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF
HISTORICAL CRITICISM

As we have seen in Chapter I, one of the areas of disagreement among critics who have written on Montaigne and history is their estimation of Montaigne's historical criticism. They disagree, in other words, on how critical Montaigne was prepared to be of the truth of the historical accounts he read. Villey, as we have seen, is inclined towards a view of a somewhat credulous Montaigne, while Lanson sees the essayist as being considerably more critical. Friedrich, on the other hand, specifically disagrees with Lanson on this question. And from the article by Stierle there emerges a Montaigne who, while not critically appraising the truth of each individual historical event, mistrusts the form of the historical narrative.

Until fairly recently, the view of a non-critical Montaigne fitted in well with the general view of sixteenth-century historical criticism. The critical and relativistic attitudes that characterize modern historical thinking began, it was believed by scholars of the 1920s and 1930s in particular, only in the eighteenth century. Paul Hazard, for example in his _La Crise de la conscience européenne (1680-1715)_ , of 1935, describes a sudden change in attitudes: "Quel contraste! quel brusque passage! ... La majorité des Français pensait
comme Bossuet, tout d'un coup, les Français pensent comme Voltaire: c'est une révolution."\(^1\) Abraham Keller seems to share this view when he says that Montaigne was not alone in his failure to write in historical and relative terms.\(^2\)

But was there really such a great divide at the beginning of the eighteenth century? In fact more recent scholars, such as Julian Franklin in his *Jean Bodin and the Sixteenth-century Revolution in the Methodology of Law and History*,\(^3\) Donald R. Kelley in *Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship*,\(^4\) and George Huppert in *The Idea of Perfect History*,\(^5\) have shown that the achievements of sixteenth-century thinkers were considerable in the field of historical criticism.

As these scholars have demonstrated, it was in the sixteenth century that thinkers began to develop a theoretical basis for the study of history. Partly as a result of increased teaching of history and partly in answer to a resurgence of skepticism that put all forms of knowledge into question, historians began to formulate the questions of what constitutes historical fact and how one can justify giving—or lending—credence to a historical account. Thus there develops in the sixteenth century what one might call an interest in history as the art of reading the past.

Of course history in the well-established sense of writing about the past continues in the theories of rhetoric. History in this latter sense is an art in which the actual labor of research is considered as a mere preliminary and not as an ingredient of the art itself. But in the view of history that develops in the sixteenth century, past accounts are seen not only as rhetorical models but as sources to be
criticized. At the same time this research becomes an essential part of the writer's task.

Montaigne was acquainted with some of the writings on this topic and with the works of skepticism which contributed to its development (the Academica of Cicero, for example, and the Hypotyposeis of Sextus Empiricus). In this chapter I will explore the extent to which Montaigne is willing to accept historical accounts as being truthful, and attempt to see how far he is in agreement with the writers of his time who took a more sustained scholarly interest in the question. My procedure will be to describe in outline the development of historical criticism in the sixteenth century; then to show more specifically the attitudes of those writers, some of whom we know Montaigne read, and to compare their views with Montaigne's reflections and practice. We will see that Montaigne asks many of the questions that presented themselves to the historians of his time and that his thought takes the same direction of "probabilistic skepticism" that characterized the development of sixteenth-century historical criticism.

As Franklin explains it, historical criticism develops in three stages in the sixteenth century. The first stage is that of an utter and dogmatic skepticism which declares that the truth is not to be found in history and that it is theoretically impossible for a historian to tell the truth. An empirical approach is taken by Agrippa von Nettesheim in his De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum (1530). Agrippa describes the types of error that historians in general and several historians in particular have made. Then, moving from demonstrations of error to generalization, he claims to show that the truth
is never made available to the reader of history. The theoretical approach is exemplified by Francesco Patrizzi in his Della historia; diece dialoghi (1560). Arguing from the historian's position relative to the events described, Patrizzi claims that every historian is either involved and biased or uninvolved and uninformed. Thus, he concludes, no historian will be able to tell the whole truth.

The next stage in sixteenth-century historical thinking moves away from the sweeping conclusions of such extreme skepticism. François Baudouin in his De institutione historiae universae (1561) and Melchor Cano in the eleventh book of his De locis theologicis (1573) exemplify this next step in which the thinker demands not complete certainty but a reasonable amount of certainty to justify belief. Some historians are recognized as acceptably truthful, and the criterion is whether or not they show good faith and good judgment. But this second stage is lacking in a method by which to estimate these qualities.

The beginnings of such a method are found by Franklin in the work of Jean Bodin. In his Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem (1566) Bodin accepts that a historian will be biased despite himself on certain topics. But by applying a moderate, one might say productive, skepticism, one can discover what these topics are and make the allowances necessary to arrive at a reasonable approximation of the truth.

Thus as Franklin shows, and as I will discuss at greater length in the following pages, the use of skepticism as a tool of inquiry was developed—from its beginnings in skepticism of an extremely negative kind—well before the end of the sixteenth century. The work of these
sixteenth-century thinkers, particularly Bodin, was widely used in the eighteenth century and so is the source of a development which some see as having begun only in the latter period as a by-product of the development of the scientific method. (Thus, as I show in Chapter I, Lanson links historical criticism and the adumbrations of a scientific method in his consideration of the *Essais*.) But in fact the basic method of arriving at a believable historical account had been first formulated some two centuries earlier. In the pages that follow I will attempt to place Montaigne in relation to the thinkers who contributed to the formulation of this method.

The First Stage: Agrippa von Nettesheim and Francesco Patrizzi

Agrippa von Nettesheim's *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum* of 1530 shares one of the aims of Montaigne's "Apologie de Raymond Sebond": all human learning is to be discredited in order to demonstrate that the only real truth is Christian faith. Chapter VI of Agrippa's work is devoted to the demolition of historical knowledge.\(^\text{13}\)

Agrippa begins by denouncing history's moral and intellectual claims and the usual explanation given for historical error. As its moral effect history supposedly encourages people to do great things, or frightens them away from evil, but in fact some historical figures are so successful in their wickedness that the reader may learn the opposite lessons. Intellectually history promises us truth and order, but the great differences between historians show that they must be liars. In describing events long past, errors may be excusable, but they persist in histories of recent times, justifying suspicions
After these blows at three commonplace assumptions, Agrippa begins an extensive catalog of the sources of error, beginning with the least serious and ending with the most reprehensible lapses of good faith. Only Livy and Plutarch are mentioned without being criticized.

In most cases error occurs because the historian was not a contemporary of the events, or was not present, or had no acquaintance with the people involved. Or he may have traveled enough to gather only sketchy information and then begun to compile his account. He may omit part of the truth to improve the story, or, worse, he may alter all the facts. Worse again, he may invent his material altogether. Even more reprehensible is the historian who is well informed but intentionally distorts the facts to favor his own side. Then again, fear, envy or hatred may cause him to conceal part of the truth. Or he may choose to extol his own actions and vilify those of others. Worst of all, for Agrippa, is the flatterer who invents a magnificent line of descent for his sovereign. Last there are those who have no claim at all to the title of historian: writing to promote an ideal—such as the perfect prince—they describe what ought to have taken place and do not think it worthwhile to search out any facts. From this last sort of ingenuity have resulted such romances as the stories of Amadis of Gaul and Arthur.15

Thus, Agrippa concludes, there is no exact truth to be found in history, although this is what we most seek from it. Since there are no objective accounts of events each man must decide for himself where the truth lies, and so errors and differences persist. (Today we
would talk more tolerantly in terms of sources: since no written sources can be presumed objective, the historians interpreting them inevitably differ.)

Finally Agrippa links the impossibility of deciding the truth with the failed moral aim of history: unable to check their facts, historians attribute great virtues to the famous names of antiquity; yet such men as Alexander and Caesar were really "the greatest and most notorious thieves and robbers in the world." Yes, concludes Agrippa ironically, there is much wisdom to be learned from history, but even more evil.

Agrippa indicts historical knowledge totally: each historian either has inadequate information or he intentionally misuses it. Historians thus differ as they recount the same events. The sweeping conclusion is that nothing found in history can be believed to be true. This method of juxtaposing different opinions and drawing the conclusion that since there is no consensus none of the opinions is correct, is used by Montaigne to great (and well-known) effect in the "Apologie." There Montaigne goes to much greater length than Agrippa, describing and ridiculing in detail the different philosophical theories on the make-up of the soul in order to prove that the human mind does not know even itself. Montaigne, Villey surmises, read Agrippa's work in the period 1578-1580 when he was also working on some sections of the "Apologie." There are several borrowings from Agrippa in the "Apologie" and in the chapter "De la ressemblance des enfans aux peres" (II:37) which was composed in the same period. However in the "Apologie" Montaigne does not apply his radical skepticism
to history, although elsewhere he does, as I shall show, make many of
the same observations as Agrippa, albeit in a somewhat different tone.
Following his ancient models very closely in the "Apologie," Montaigne
criticizes only those areas of knowledge they criticize. In fact he
adheres quite closely to Sextus Empiricus, who, in the Outlines of
Pyrrhonism, concentrated his criticisms on the sense impressions and
the processes of cognition and judgment. History then, not having been
an institution for the classical authors, escapes specific indictment
in the "Apologie."

Montaigne is, on the other hand, well aware that the historian's
task is at best delicate. In the much-discussed passage in "Des
livres" on the three types of historian the distinction Montaigne
makes is whether or not the historian offers his own opinion of what he
relates. Montaigne approves of those historians who "n'ont pas dequoy
mesler quelque chose du leur," and, unlike Agrippa, he credits them
with good faith. Again unlike Agrippa, who draws extremely negative
conclusions from the possibility of varied interpretations, Montaigne
is pleased that these historians "nous laissent le jugement entier"
because in this way each reader "en peut faire son profit autant qu'il
a d'entendement."

But there are two other types of historian in Montaigne's thinking,
and both of these interpret the facts. The more skilled of the two
successfully choose what should be recorded, compare sources, decide
what most probably happened and infer the intentions of the people
involved and what they might have said. In other words they apply
certain techniques of historical criticism to their subject-matter.
What is Montaigne's attitude towards such historians? It is difficult to say. As I pointed out in my first chapter this passage has been very diversely interpreted. These historians are described as "biens excellens" endowed with the "suffisance" (i.e., the competence) to write history the way they do. Unfortunately "excellence" is for Montaigne a quality to be admired but not attempted, out of his reach and perhaps regarded with a tinge of irony, while "suffisance" can have overtones of self-satisfaction. Moreover Montaigne deals rather summarily with these historians: he devotes only two sentences to them, does not quote any examples, and claims that very few writers have their ability: "cela n'appartient à guieres de gens."

Montaigne is closest to Agrippa when he describes the second type of "historian-interpreter." Belonging to this group are the worst historians--those who have a biased opinion, who "veulent nous mascher les morceaux," and who "se donnent loy par consequent d'incliner l'histoire à leur fantasie." They often omit facts which would have been useful to the reader, says Montaigne, because they think such facts are unworthy to be related, or because they misunderstand and thus do not believe them, or even because they find them too difficult to express in good Latin or French.

For Montaigne, at least in the passage from "Des livres" referred to here, not many historians are good historians. The last group is, he says, by far the most numerous, and "le plus souvent on trie pour cette charge, et notamment en ces siecles-ci, des personnes d'entre le vulgaire, pour cette seule raison de sçavoir bien parler, comme si nous cherchions d'y apprendre la grammaire." But their omissions and
changes are not all intentional mendacity as Agrippa judges them to be.

With more psychological awareness than Agrippa shows, Montaigne notes
that unconscious changing of the facts can occur too: "depuis que le
jugement pend d'un costé on ne se peut garder de contournner et tordre
la narration à ce biais." (Similarly in the "Apologie" Montaigne re-
marks "on couche volontiers le sens des escris d'autrui à la faveur des
opinions qu'on a préjugées en soi." 22)

Montaigne also turns his attention to the problem of obtaining an
impartial account in "Des cannibales" (I:31). Here less good faith
seems to be attributed to the unsatisfactory reporters of events. While
describing the former settler in Brazil through whom he knows the cus-
toms of the Indians, Montaigne digresses into a commentary on the
value of eyewitness accounts.

Cet homme que j'avoy, estoit homme simple et grossier,
qui est une condition propre à rendre veritable
tesmoignage; car les fines gens remarquent bien plus
curieusement et plus de choses, mais ils les glosent;
et, pour faire valoir leur interpretation et la per-
suader, ils ne se peuvent garder d'alterer un peu
l'Histoire; ils ne vous representent jamais les choses
pures, ils les inclinent et masquent selon le visage qu'ils
leur ont veu; et pour donner credit à leur jugement et
vous y attirer, presten volontiers de ce costé là de la
matiere, l'allongent et l'amplifient. 23

Agrippa's aversion to historians who favor their own side finds
its counterpart in Montaigne's criticism of the Du Bellays' Memôres:

... il ne se peut nier qu'il ne se descouvre
evidemment en ces deux seigneurs icy, un grand
dechet de la franchise et liberte d'escrire qui
reluit ès anciens de leur sorte. ... C'est ici
plustoste un plaidoier pour le Roy François contre
l'Empereur Charles cinquiesme qu'une histoire. 24
Despite these condemnations Montaigne is aware of how difficult it is to establish the facts about the past. In a long /c/ addition to "De la force de l'imagination" (I:21) he reflects on the difficulties facing historians who have to write about events at second hand: "Comment répondre des pensées de personnes incognues et donner pour argent contant leurs conjectures?" These historians must claim that their accounts are true, yet so slippery is the truth that they would balk at having to reconstruct even recent actions at which they were present in person.

Des actions à divers membres qui se passent en leur présence, ils refuseroient d'en rendre témoignage, assermentez par un juge; et n'ont homme si familier, des intentions duquel ils entreprennent de pleinement répondre.

At this point historical knowledge seems so shaky to Montaigne that he observes:

J'entre parfois en pensée qu'il puisse assez bien convenir à un theologien, à un philosophe, et telles gens d'exquise et exacte conscience d'escrire l'histoire.

For Montaigne an important part of writing history is establishing the motives for action. We can see this from the analogy of history with private actions quoted above ("et n'ont homme si familier, des intentions duquel ils entreprennent de pleinement répondre") and from the description in "Des livres" of the good historians who "de la condition des Princes et de leurs humeurs . . . en concluent les conseils et leur attribuent les paroles convenables." Agrippa does not show this interest; he simply wants the historian to say "what happened." Montaigne sets his historian a much more difficult task, but at the
same time he recognizes its difficulty. By contrast Agrippa over­simplifies with his assertion that bad faith is the chief source of error.

Montaigne certainly shares Agrippa's contempt for those who offer incomplete information, as we saw in the passage from "Des cannibales." This is also one of the symptoms of pride that he denounces in "Un trait de quelques ambassadeurs" (I:17) and elsewhere. However, he does not automatically assume that all information is incorrect. He simply turns to those who know their topic: "à la lecture des histoires . . . j'ay accoustumé de considerer qui en sont les escrivains."²⁹

Montaigne thus shares some of Agrippa's skepticism about history, but not all of it. Agrippa's remarks about historians who erred because they were not present or had no acquaintance with the people involved in the action probably derive, at least indirectly, from Polybius. Montaigne's remarks come from the same tradition, but the ideas are given a somewhat less negative formulation:

Les seules bonnes histoires sont celles qui ont esté escrites par ceux mesme qui commandoit aux affaires, ou qui estoient participans à les conduire, ou au moins, qui ont eu la fortune d'en conduire d'autres de la mesme sorte.³⁰

Good histories, then, are rare, but they can be written, given the right person in the right circumstances. History escapes the all-out attack and the demands for total certainty that are leveled against human reason in general by Montaigne in the "Apologie" and by Agrippa in his condemnation of history. The skepticism is there in Montaigne, but it is more moderate and Agrippa's sweeping negative conclusions are not drawn.
Francesco Patrizzi also deals with the veracity of history, and in the fifth dialogue of his *Della historia; diece dialoghi* he draws negative conclusions similar to those of Agrippa. Patrizzi casts himself in the role of defeated debater, a lover of history who naively supposes that history is a source of true information but who is easily convinced by the force of the arguments made against him.

The idea is put forward that all historians are deliberate liars because "si vede manifesto che pochi sono quelli, i quali un fatto medesimo raccontino, nel modo medesimo.\(^{31}\) This of course was one of Agrippa's main contentions. But it is quickly disposed of: "egli puo bene essere . . . che l'un de due raccontanti un fatto dica vero & l'altro il dica anco; ma ve ne aggiunga, o ne sottraga."\(^{32}\) Historians may well write in good faith; their errors arise "dal non haver saputo il vero. Di che essi stessi s'accusano bene spesso."\(^{33}\)

The historian, it is argued, writes either about his own time or of past times. In the latter case he relies on the testimony of others who in turn were writing of their own experience or took their facts from other historians. Ultimately each historian depends on an eyewitness account of the events he describes. But the eyewitness is in each case either an outsider to the action or privy to the action. In the latter case the account will certainly be biased, for the eyewitness has an interest in showing his own side in the best light. And if the witness was of the former type and not closely involved in the action?

. . . . se costui non dipende da veruno, & è libero d'ogni passion d'odio & d'amicitia, egli la prima
cosa no potrà sapere i consigli altrui. I quali sono tutto il momento, & tutto il peso del negotio.  

The conclusion is sweeping:

Non si può adunque . . . in verun modo . . . saper il vero delle attioni umane. Et dì qui è, che l'istoria, o antica, o moderna, che ella sì sia, non ci può tutto spiegare affatto il vero.  

The structure of this argument is very similar to the arguments of Sextus Empiricus who was of course a model for many sixteenth-century skeptics. The subject is declared to be fundamentally divided into a given number of parts. (Here it is divided into two: ultimately all history depends on accounts by people who either were eyewitnesses or were not.) One part is immediately shown to be disposable and is thrown out. (Here the reader is told that no account by a non-eye­

witness can possibly be valid.) Then the remaining argument is sub-

divided and the subdivisions similarly disposed of. (In this case the eyewitnesses are divided into those who have a part in the action and those who do not; the involved, and therefore biased, witness is assumed to be of no further interest.) Finally a slightly more detailed argument disposes of the remaining portion of the original subject. (Patrizzi argues here that the eyewitness account by a leader in the action, who seems to be capable of giving a true history of the events, will not be valid because he will always be biased in favor of one side or the other.)  

At each stage the argument gains rhetorical force from the orderly divisions. But the divisions are also its weakness, for the assump-
tion that complex phenomena can so easily be categorized into yes/no compartments is rarely correct.
Patrizzi makes a second lengthy argument against historical truth, and follows the same "divide and conquer" method. Briefly the argument is as follows. A historian is either "huom di governo od huom di volgo." In the latter case "egli ci farà l'historia delle cose di piazza, & et harremo di bellissime novelle."^36 Obviously this is unreliable history and can be disregarded. But if the historian is one of the ruling class his account will be affected by fear of his prince or by the need to flatter him. The ruler himself would seem to be the only source of a true account. But, says Patrizzi, to conserve or increase his power the prince must use or disguise the truth for his own ends. And so the truth, it is declared, is never made known.\textsuperscript{37}

Patrizzi thus shows the same excessive demand for certainty as Agrippa, while arguing in a more theoretical way. There is no assumption that a partial truth might suffice; rather, if one category of historians seems deficient then no further notice need be taken of any one of its members.

A comparison of Montaigne with Patrizzi is perhaps more revealing of what Montaigne does not say than of what he does say. In the "Apologie" he shows his attraction to this way of arguing and to Sextus Empiricus' Outlines of Pyrrhonism in general. The extreme skepticism, for example, un-named but very present in Patrizzi, finds its way from the pages of Sextus into those of the "Apologie" when Montaigne states his preference for Pyrrhonian skepticism rather than the moderate Academic position.

Les Academiciens recevoyent quelque inclination de jugement et advouoient . . . les unes choses plus
vray-ssemblables que les autres, et recevoyent en leur jugement cette faculté de se pouvoir incliner plustost à une apparence qu'à une autre. . . L'advis des Pyrrhoniens est plus hardy et, quant et quant, plus vray-ssemblable. . . Si nostre entendement est capable de la forme, des lineamens, du port et du visage de la vérité, il la verroit entiere aussi bien qu'à demie, naissante et imperfecte.38

Even in the "Apologie," however, and certainly elsewhere, Montaigne instinctively prefers an inductive method of arguing to a deductive method. Patrizzi offers the hypothesis "colui que historia scrive, è necessario che sia huom di governo, od huom di volgo." Montaigne also refers to the latter type of historian but as an established class, not as a hypothetical one:

Le plus souvent on trie pour cette charge, et notamment en ces siecles icy, des personnes d'entre le vulgaire, pour cette seule consideration de scavor bien parler. . .39

Interestingly, the results are similar. Patrizzi claims that the historian "ci farà l'istoria delle cose di piazza, & harremo di bellissime novelle." Montaigne notes that "à force beaux mots, ils nous vont patissant une belle contexture des bruits qu'ils ramassent ès carrefours des villes."40 The same idea is expressed hypothetically by Patrizzi and as a factual observation by Montaigne. The difference might appear even more striking if the two passages could be shown to derive, as they seem to, from a common source.

Montaigne's method, which stays closer to observation, gives a truer picture of the complexity of the question, and is closer, as we shall see, to the development of sixteenth-century historiography. The one passage in which one could say that historical truth seems unattainable is in "Des livres" at the point where Montaigne observes
that Asinius Pollio found Caesar to be in error because of incomplete information and incomplete checking of the facts. Here again we have a concrete example that leads to the more general observation "On peut voir par cet exemple si cette recherche de la vérité est délicate. . . Vraiment, la connoissance que nous avons de nos affaires est bien plus lâche." Montaigne is attracted to an example in which individual facts are considered; these facts were not checked completely and the result was error. It is obvious that he does not only use an inductive method but that his interest is seized by examples of such a method.

This passage from "Des livres" is instructive not only because it shows a difference in method between Montaigne's reasoning and the dogmatic skepticism of Patrizzi, but also because of its conclusion. Montaigne finds that "cette recherche de la vérité est délicate." The truth is difficult to find, but there is no indication that it should be despaired of totally. Even the statement that "vraiment la connoissance que nous avons de nos affaires est bien plus lâche" does not imply that we know nothing of them. Patrizzi, on the other hand, draws a conclusion as negative as Agrippa's statement that "the truth is not to be found in history even though that is what we most seek from it." As I shall show in the rest of this chapter, Montaigne has more in common with those thinkers who use skepticism as a tool in trying to reach a reasonable amount of certainty than with the ultra-skeptical Agrippa or Patrizzi.
Melchor Cano (1509-60), a Dominican theologian of the School of Salamanca, makes the first constructive contribution to the problem of historical belief in the last two books of his De locis theologicis. Cano's work is a response to the explicit rejection, by the Protestants, of the Church's traditional system of authorities. In his attempts at defining the sources of belief, Cano breaks new ground in treating history as a separate source of authority. Aware of the novelty of his approach, Cano asks under what conditions an argument derived from history is probative. His answers to this question result in a preliminary definition of the logical bases of historical belief, applicable also to secular thought.

Cano first deals with the skeptics' total refusal to believe any historian. This refusal is based on their rejection of human goodness, he claims. (All historians are liars, and so on.) But therein lies a contradiction, declares Cano, for all human existence requires, in practical terms, trust and therefore acquiescence in the assumption of at least some good in human nature. (Here Cano follows St. Augustine's argument in Faith in Things Unseen.)

Cano admits that secular historians are prone to error. In fact, "Praeter auctores sacros nullus historicus certus esse potest, id est idoneus ad faciendam certam in theologia fidem." But, he asserts, there do exist historians who intend to tell the truth and who, by and large, succeed. The existence of such historians is grounds for probable belief:
Further, if one such historian recounts an event that is intrinsically plausible, good grounds for belief exists: "Nec enim est hominis bene instituti, & ad vitam humanam recte compositi, viro gravi rem credibilem afferenti non credere." Cano's final point is that if tested and serious historians agree about the same event, their authority is certain:

Si omnes probati ac graves historici in eandem rem gestam concurrant, tunc ex horum auctoritate certum argumentum promitetur.47

He strengthens his argument with a geographical analogy: one cannot reasonably refuse to believe reports of geographical facts, if they are made by multiple witnesses, simply because one has not seen the evidence oneself:

Quid enim stultius esse potest, ut eundem locum diutius urgeam, quam si ea genera belluarum, quae in rubro mari Indiave gignuntur, nulla esse dicamus, quia nunquam vidimus? . . . Historiae igitur fides vel certa habenda est, cum idem auctores universi consentiunt.48

The second part of Cano's enquiry is an attempt to establish rules by which the veracity of a historian might be determined. He establishes three criteria: first the integrity and probity of the author:

Prima lex ex hominum probitate integritateque fumatetur. Quae omnino res locum habet, cum quae narrant historici, ea vel ipsi se vidisse testantur vel ab his, qui viderunt accepsisse.49

Second, the historian should be skilled in selecting and judging his informants when the information is at second hand:
Lex vero secunda in historiae judicio sanciatur, ut eos historicos reliquis anteferamus, qui ingenii severitati quandam prudentiam adjunxerunt & ad eligendum, & judicandum.50

The third criterion, which is of little interest to this discussion, is that no further investigation is needed when the Church has already stated an opinion.51

This second part of Cano's reasoning is really quite circular. An author's integrity and probity, or his capacity for good judgment, are the very qualities the reader of history needs to ascertain. Cano offers no suggestions on how to infer these qualities from a writer's work. A further disadvantage is that Cano's criteria would allow one to judge the historian himself, but not individual sections of his work. Skepticism thus applied remains too blunt a tool to be very useful for historical research.

Jean Baudouin's position, elaborated in his De institutione historiae universae of 1561, is similar to Cano's. Baudouin concedes that the records of the past are a mixture of fact and fiction. But he does not assume that the admixture of fiction negates the factual content. The reader should be cautious, but not excessively critical.

Baudouin differentiates between unreliable historians who deliberately invent "facts" and those who try to be truthful but sometimes err accidentally. An attitude half-way between credence and doubt is appropriate when dealing with the statements of the latter type of historian.52

Since he is not trying to establish the basis for an authority, Baudouin, unlike Cano, does not distinguish between the probability and the certainty of testimony. Nor does he suggest any means, even
tautological means such as Cano's, of deciding why or in what individual respects a historian might be unreliable. "The missing element in both Cano and Baudouin, is a doctrine of internal criticism," Franklin points out. Cano is vague on this, and Baudouin completely silent. But both do represent a stage beyond the excessive skepticism of Agrippa and Patrizzi.

An argument very similar to Cano's argument against excessive skepticism is found in the *Essais* on several occasions. The question is dealt with at length in I:27, "C'est folie de rapporter le vrai et le faux à nostre suffisance," and again in II:32, "Défense de Seneque et de Plutarque." In both passages Montaigne is concerned less with establishing the truth of a given moment of reported history than with the plausibility of a type of action, an action that appears to be impossible to the historian writing of it. One might argue that Montaigne's subject is thus not properly history, but rather the human judgment in general; on the other hand he refers to historians in these two passages, and refers to other witnesses to support their testimony, so I believe the comparison remains valid.

In the earlier chapter, I:27, most of which Villey places in the years 1572-74, Montaigne moves from discussing belief in apparently supernatural phenomena to discussing what we can believe when such phenomena are reported by historians. First he deals with a phenomenon that has few or no religious overtones; reports that travel unbelievably fast. He claims that some of these reports can be disregarded, for example,
Similarly one can disbelieve,

ce mesme que nos annales disent que le Pape Honorius,
le propre jour que le Roy Philippe Auguste mourut
à Mante, fit faire ses funerailles publiques et les
manda faire par toute l'Italie.

The event is implausible in each case, yet the criterion for judgment
is not the event's intrinsic plausibility or implausibility but rather
the credibility of the historian reporting it: "Car l'authorité de ces
tesmoins n'a pas, à l'adventure, assez de rang pour nous tenir en
bride." The natural impulse is to disbelieve, and the historians
mentioned have not enough credibility to bridle such disbelief.

When it comes to the historians of antiquity, however, Montaigne
is much more ready to abandon the impulse towards disbelief. Plutarch
is the source for one extended example:

... Plutarch, outre plusieurs exemples qu'il allege
de l'antiquité, dict sçavoir de certaine science que, du
temps de Domitian, la nouvelle de la bataille perdue par
Antonius en Allemagne, à plusieurs journées de là, fut
publiée à Rome et semée partout le monde le mesme jour
qu'elle avoir esté perdue. ..

Caesar is another source: "Caesar tient qu'il s'est souvent advenu que
la renommée a devancé l'accident." Montaigne puts his belief in what
these historians have to say in the form of a rhetorical question:
"dirons nous pas que ces simples gens-là se sont laissez piper apres le
vulgaire, pour n'estre pas clairvoyans comme nous?" The implication,
of course, is that no reasonable person would dare make such an assump-
tion. In the case of Plutarch and Caesar the implausible can be
accepted. Even the apparently impossible can be believed, for Caesar's claim is that a true report can arrive before the event takes place. Clearly Montaigne is more concerned with the prestige of the historian than with the plausibility of the event itself.

In this passage Montaigne thus begs the same question as Melchor Cano: the more reliable historian is to be believed, but no suggestions are offered for judging reliability.

Montaigne then goes on to consider which apparent miracles are to be believed. Again the same distinction is made. The more recent reports can be disbelieved:

> Quand nous lisons, dans Bouchet, les miracles des reliques de saint Hilaire, passe; son crédit n'est pas assez grand pour nous oster la licence d'y contredire.60

Again the type of event by itself cannot constitute grounds for belief or disbelief. "De condamner d'un train toutes pareilles histoires me semble singulière impudence."61 But the more credible reporters can be believed. For example St. Augustine reported miracles "où il dict luy mesmes avoir assisté." Again rhetorical questions dare the reader to disbelieve:

> Dequoy accuserons nous et luy et deux Saintcs Evesques Aurelius et Maximius, qu'il appelle pour ses recors? Sera ce d'ignorance, simplesse, facilité, ou de malice et imposture? Est-il homme, en nostre siecle, si impudent qui pense leur estre comparable, soit en vertu et pieté, soit en sçavoir, jugement et suffisance?62

It is interesting to note that in dealing with miracles Montaigne seems to require a little more justification for belief. Augustine is more believable because he has two witnesses, "Aurelius et Maximius,
qu'il appelle pour ses recors." However no reasons for valuing St. Augustine's judgment are given. Again, it is sufficient to state that his judgment is good.

In Chapter II.32, "Defense de Seneque et de Plutarque," written during the years 1578-80, Montaigne returns to the question of which apparently unbelievable things can be believed. He reproaches Bodin for a criticism of Plutarch:

Je le trouve un peu hardy en ce passage de sa Methode de l'histoire, où il accuse Plutarque non seulement d'ignorance (surquoy je l'eusse laisse dire, car cela n'est pas de mon gibier), mais aussi en ce que cet authour escrit souvent des choses incroyables et entierement fabuleuses (ce sont ses mots).63

The differentiation between knowledge and judgment is one of Montaigne's best-known distinctions. It is stressed at length elsewhere, notably in "Du pedantisme" and in "De l'institution des enfans," the latter also written in the period 1578-80. But he goes on to make another distinction:

Si [Bodin] eust dit simplement les choses autrement qu'elles ne sont, ce n'estoit pas grande reprehension; car ce que nous n'avons pas veu, nous le prenons des mains d'autrui et à credit.64

In other words it is acceptable for the historian to be mistaken about facts if he was not an eyewitness, since any information provided by others must be taken on trust. There is no view here of a historian obliged to research the true facts of an event. Again, Montaigne is concerned with a certain type of fact—the apparently implausible—rather than with verifying a particular historical event.
Bodin refuses to believe Plutarch when he writes that

... un enfant de Lacedemone se laissa deschirer tout le ventre à un renardeau qu'il avoit desrobé, et le tenoit caché sous sa robe, jusques à mourir plustost que de descouvrir son larecin. . .65

For Montaigne, on the other hand, this is quite believable. But it is no longer believable only because of the credibility of the source, as in the period 1572-74, although this is one of the reasons given:"charger Plutarque d'avoir pris pour argent contant des choses incroyables et impossibles, c'est accuser de faute de jugement le plus judicieux autheur du monde."66 Other references are now made to support what Plutarch says. First the credibility of the account is justified. The argument is put forward that man's spiritual capacities are far more flexible than his purely physical abilities. Consequently the ability to endure pain may well be much greater in some cultures than in others. Then again, other claims made by Plutarch--such as the claim that Pyrrhus, although wounded, was still strong enough to split another man in half--are much less plausible than the claim Bodin chose to criticize. In making these two arguments Montaigne is now concerned with the plausibility of the event. And of course this is one of Cano's requirements, that a trustworthy historian tell of an event that is inherently plausible.

Second, Montaigne shows that there are witnesses for events that are very similar. Cicero reported, as an eyewitness, an event which Plutarch also reports elsewhere. This time the event is even more difficult to believe:
Cicero a tesmoigné aussi avant lui, pour avoir, à ce qu'il dit, être sur les lieux . . . que jusques à leurs temps il se trouvait des enfants en cette preuve de patience à quoi on les essayoit devant l'autel de Diane, qui souffroyent d'y estre foytez jusques à ce que le sang leur couloït par tout, non seulement sans s'écrier, mais encore sans gemir, et aucune jusques à y laisser volontairement la vie.67

In another case Plutarch has not just Cicero as a witness, but "cent autres témoins."

Et ce que Plutarch aussi recite, avec cent autres témoins, que, au sacrifice, un charbon ardent s'estant coulé dans la manche d'un enfant Lacedémonien, ainsi qu'il encensoit, il se laissa brusler tout le bras jusques à ce que la senteur de la chair cuyte en vint aux assistants.68

These two claims that there are other witnesses are very similar to Cano's requirement that several witnesses reporting an apparently implausible event are to be believed.

In the rest of the chapter Montaigne cites examples of endurance from his own time, thus giving yet more support to Plutarch.

At another point in II.32, "Defense de Seneque et de Plutarque," Montaigne defends Plutarch against Bodin's criticisms. Bodin had claimed that the Greek historian was incorrect in stating that Agesilaus was fined by the Ephores for having become the favorite of the citizens. Montaigne does not simply argue Plutarch's reliability, but backs it up with two other arguments. First, he says, "Plutarque parle là de choses qui lui devaient estre beaucoup mieux connues qu'à nous." Second, he goes on to argue: "et n'estoit pas nouveau en Grece de voir les hommes punis et exilés pour cela seul d'agréer trop à leurs citoyens, témoign l'ostracisme et le petalisme."69
Montaigne seems thus to have become more cautious since the 1572-74 period. Rather than simply referring to the historian's judgment, he feels the need to add other evidence. He is also more self-conscious in his admiration for antiquity by the time he writes the 1578-80 texts. As another reason for believing what Plutarch has to say, he adds:

Je suis si imbu de la grandeur de ces hommes-là que non seulement il ne me semble, comme à Bodin, que son conte soit incroyable, que je ne le trouve pas seulement rare at estrange.

Compared to Melchor Cano and François Baudouin, two observations can be made about Montaigne. First, he appears to rely on the reputation of an author, without feeling the need to ask for proofs or methods of judging. But this is an early attitude. Secondly, in the later passages where Montaigne seems to be thinking along the same lines as Cano, he has become more aware of the need to verify the historian's judgment by references to other witnesses and by attempting to show the plausibility of the event described. Neither Cano nor Baudouin established any means of internal criticism. By 1578 Montaigne seems to be needing this. In the comparison of Montaigne and Bodin that constitutes the third section of this chapter I hope to show that Montaigne does in fact, mostly in the period 1578-80, use some of the methods of internal criticism that Bodin describes.

The Third Stage: Jean Bodin

Jean Bodin's Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem is a handbook of advice to the student of history. In the fourth chapter Bodin offers his judgment of a number of past and contemporary
historians, and, in the process, suggests what to look for in identifying a good historian. He also suggests, and here he goes further than Cano or Baudouin, the topics on which an individual author may be trusted.

On how easily one should lend credence to an account Bodin has the same partly skeptical overall attitude as Cano and Baudouin: "en lisant l'histoire il ne convient pas de se montrer trop crédule ni tout à fait incrédule." Such attitudes derive from foolishness and vanity respectively.

He distinguishes three kinds of historian. First are men in public office who have a natural capacity for politics and who have acquired a great deal of erudition. These men make the best historians "pourvu qu'en écrivant l'histoire ils sachent déposer toute passion personnelle." Ideally these historians also have a knowledge of the country whose laws they write about. The second type of historian consists of those who have no erudition but do have experience and ability. Third are the historians with little natural gift for political affairs and no experience in office, but who put great effort into their research.

As Franklin points out, the requirement of firsthand knowledge of statecraft comes from Polybius. But Bodin's stress on erudition is a conscious departure from the Polybian tradition. There is slowly emerging, suggests Franklin, the idea of a detached and critical secondary author. Such an author must be able to do more than say which are the "good" and "bad" historians he uses as sources. He also needs to know on which specific topics he should trust his sources and
on which topics he should be skeptical. Bodin provides a rather loosely organized list of criteria for making such judgments.

Caution is needed in believing any historian who writes well of his friends and compatriots or unfavorably of his enemies. On the other hand what he says in praise of his enemies may well be true. Even more worthy of trust will be the account of a third party who is neither friend nor enemy.  

Historians who praise one person without offering any criticism are also suspect. Their accounts should be carefully compared with those of other writers on the same topic.

Writing of one's contemporaries makes for an account of very doubtful status. One might want to avoid offending or be truly afraid of retaliation. In fact, says Bodin, the most famous historians wrote of past events.  

Historical veracity, Bodin continues, is not to be sought in the memoirs of kings boasting of their own exploits. But they will probably offer reliable information on other topics to do with their kingdoms. (Patrizzi, of course, had refused to believe that a ruler would ever be a reliable source of such information.)

An apparently implausible "fact" reported by many is probably true, especially if the historians disagree on other points. It is, however, possible that such historian is simply repeating the error of another.

Bodin's next piece of advice seems to conflict with this last admission, for he goes on to say that in cases of disagreement the more recent historian is usually to be believed:
One great source of animosity is religious difference. Consequently a historian's opinion of an opposing religion should not be allowed to obscure the facts for the reader.

There is often the possibility that the historian has been bribed. But, on the other hand, payment does not necessarily indicate corruption.

Finally Bodin ponders whether the historian should offer his own opinion of the action. He concludes that, except for very infrequent and cautious judgments, the facts should be left to speak for themselves. Superfluous opinions offered by the historian reveal a desire to impose his views, and these views may have affected his treatment of the facts. The lofty tone is out of place in history, thinks Bodin, and although digressions may be pleasing,

In these rather loosely organized observations Bodin offers objective criteria for estimating a historian's integrity and judgment: his training, his audience, his style and manner of composition, and how close he is, chronologically, to the action he describes. These critical suggestions are clearly an advance beyond the generalities of Melchor Cano for whom, as for the extreme skeptics, a historian was to be accepted in toto as "good" or "bad." Bodin's criteria provide a
means of judging individual topics within a historian's writings.

Moreover, Bodin accepts that a historian will be less reliable on some topics than others, without indulging in the skeptics' despair of ever reaching the truth. The perfect historian does not exist:

> Je n'ai jamais, en effet, considéré comme très utiles les recherches de ceux qui se forgent l'idée d'un historien accompli tel qu'il n'y en eut jamais et qu'il ne saurait y en avoir davantage, et qui en attendant oublient ceux que nos tenons sans cesse entre nos mains. 

Historical criticism has gone from the negative views of total skepticism to a moderate skepticism used as a tool in arriving at an approximation of historical certainty.

Montaigne often practices what Bodin preached. It is noteworthy that when he does it is usually in the chapters written in the period 1578-80. He seems to have become more critical than in the earlier period of 1572-74 when he wrote "De la force de l'imagination" in which the judgment of the historian is given so much importance.

In "Defence de Seneque et de Plutarque" (II:32), an essay from the later period of 1578-80, Montaigne criticizes the Greek historian Dion "duquel je ne crois aucunement le tesmoignage." 

Dion is criticized on four different counts. First, he is inconsistent:

> . . . après avoir appelé Seneque très sage tantost et tantost ennemy mortel des vices de Neron, il le fait ailleurs avaritieux, usurier, ambitieux, lâche, voluptueux et contrefaisant le philosophe à fauces enseignes. . .

Second, the evidence of Seneca's own writings contradicts Dion:
The third argument is that historians of Seneca's own country are more credible than a Greek historian could be:

Et davantage, il est bien plus raisonnable de croire en telles choses les historiens Romains que les Grecs et estrangers. Or Tacitus et les autres parlent très-honorably de sa vie et de sa mort, et nous le peignent en toutes choses personnage très-excellent et très-vertueux.®®

Fourth, Dion's judgment is not reliable. But now Montaigne gives a reason for such a criticism:

il a le sentiment si malade aux affaires Romaines qu'il ose soutenir la cause de Julius Caesar contre Pompeius, et d'Antonius contre Cicero.®9

In "Des livres" (II:10), also written in the period 1578-80, Montaigne describes what constitutes a good historian:

Les seules bonnes histoires sont celles qui ont esté escrites par ceux mesmes qui commandoient aux affaires, ou qui estoient participans à les conduire ou, au moins, qui ont eu la fortune d'en conduire d'autres de mesme sorte.®0

The stress is on the eyewitness account:

... plusieurs tesmoings oculaires ayant escrit de mesme subject ... s'il y a de la faute, elle doit estre merveilleusement legiere, et sur un accident fort doubtieux.®1

Again, as I mentioned on page 77, there is no notion of a secondary historian who acquires his knowledge only by the study of written sources. Mere erudition is ruled out here as a good background for the historian: "Que peut-on esperer d'un medecin traictant de la guerre ou d'un escholier traictant des desseins des Princes?"®2
When Montaigne discusses the Italian historian Guicciardini at the end of "Des livres" he makes several appraisals after the manner of Bodin. Guicciardini was present at most of the actions he describes: "en la pluspart [il en a] esté acteur luy mesme, et en rang honorable." He tells the truth impartially:

Il n'y a aucune apparence que, par haine, faveur ou vanité, il ayt deguise les choses: dequoy font foy les libres jugements qu'il donne des grands et notamment de ceux par lesquels il avoit esté avancé et employé aux charges, comme du Pape Clement septiesme. . .

On the other hand there is some bias:

. . . de tant de mouvements et conseils, il n'en rapporte jamais un seul à la vertu, religion et constance, comme si ces parties là estoyent du tout esteintes au monde. . . Il est impossible d'imager que, parmy cet infini nombre d'actions dequoy il juge, il n'y en ait eu quelqu'une produite par voie de la raison.

Montaigne then goes on to record his judgment of Philippe de Commines. In this case all the observations are deduced from the author's style. His narrative shows him to be impartial:

Vous y trouverez le langage doux et agreable, d'une naifve simplicité; la narration pure, et en laquelle la bonne foy de l'auteur reluit evidemment, exempte de vanité parlant de soy, et d'affection et d'envie parlant d'autrui.

He has not altered his account to make it more pleasant to read (again one of Bodin's concerns): "Ses discours et enhortements [sont] accompagniez plus de bonne zele et de verité que d'aucune exquise suffisance." Finally, his authoritative style shows his familiarity with the events he describes: "tout par tout de l'authorité et gravité, representant son homme de bon lieu et elevé aux grandes affaires."
Thus Montaigne uses many of the same criteria for judgment as Bodin. There is an even more striking resemblance in his discussion of the Du Bellays' Mémoires, which is also found at the end of the chapter "Des livres." Here he makes an unfavorable overall judgment, but indicates the areas in which the account is trustworthy.

The Du Bellays pass the test of having been involved in the events they describe:

C'est toujours plaisir de voir les choses escrites par ceux qui ont essayé comme il faut les conduire. . .99

But the account is very biased in favor of the French monarch:

il ne se peut nier qu'il ne se descouvre evidemment, en ces deux seigneurs icy, un grand dechet de la franchise et liberté d'escrire qui reluit ès anciens de leur sorte, comme au sire de Joinville, domestique de S. Loys, Eginhard, Chancelier de Charlemaigne, et, de plus fresche memoire, en Philippe de Commines. C'est icy plustost un plaidoier pour le Roy Françoys contre l'Empereur Charles cinquiesme qu'une histoire.100

However the account is not to be totally despaired of. On some matters it can be usefully consulted:

. . . ce qu'on peut faire icy de profit, c'est par la deduction particuliére de batailles et exploits de guerre où ces gentils-hommes se sont trouvés; quelques paroles et actions privées d'aucuns princes de leur temps; et les pratiques et negociations conduites par le Seigneur de Langeay, où il y a tout plein de choses dignes d'estre sceues et des discours non vulgaires.101

Thus, like Bodin, Montaigne avoids total skepticism, yet at the same time puts a certain amount of skepticism to use in establishing the extent to which a historian is reliable.

He continues to use the same method later, in his consideration of Tacitus in "De l'art de conferer" (III:8). Tacitus' judgment of
political events is good on the whole: "Il a les opinions saines et
pend du bon party aux affaires Romaines." But he went astray in his
government of Pompey. Montaigne arrives at this conclusion by comparing
Tacitus' views with the views of those closer to the Roman commander:

Je me plains un peu . . . dequoy il a jugé de Pompeius
plus aigrement que ne porte l'advis des gens de bien
qui ont vescu et traicté avec luy, de l'avoir estimé
du tout pareil à Marius et à Sylla, sinon d'autant
qu'il estoit plus couvert. Yet he is able to disagree with Tacitus on this point without altering
his overall opinion of him as a historian. Indeed he finds that
Tacitus tells the truth without bias. Montaigne puts forward tenta-
tively (saying "il se pourroit à l'adventure argumenter") a rather
strange reason for this opinion: Tacitus' personal judgments, which are
probably biased, do not cause him to change the narrative. The result
is that the two are sometimes not in conformity, and this discord
between report and opinion is, for Montaigne, a sign of Tacitus' good
faith.

Que ses narrations soient naïfves et droictes, il se
pourroit à l'adventure argumenter de cecy mesme
qu'elles ne s'appliquent pas toujours aux conclusions
de ses jugements, lesquels il suit selon la pente
qu'il a prise, souvent outre la matière qu'il nous
montre, laquelle il n'a daigné incliner d'un seul air.

Tacitus freely expresses the moral judgments of events mentioned
in this quotation. In fact: "C'est plustost un jugement que deduction
d'Histoire; il y a plus de preceptes que de contes." Montaigne
obviously enjoys reading Tacitus for this reason, whereas Bodin had
decided it was a reprehensible way for a historian to write because
bias was sure to creep in.
Montaigne's final remarks about Tacitus concern reports of events that are difficult to believe.

On le pourra trouver hardy en ses tesmoignages; comme où il tient qu'un soldat portant un fais de bois, ses mains se roidirent de froid et se collèrent à sa charge, si qu'elles y demeurent et attachées et mortes, s'estant desparties des bras.\(^{106}\)

There follows an assessment of the historian's responsibility in such cases.

[Tacite] le fait par l'exemple et devoir de tous bons historiens: ils tiennent registre des evenements d'importance; parmy les accidentes publics sont aussi les bruits et opinions populaires. C'est leur rolle de reciter les communes creances, non pas de les regler.\(^{107}\)

The historian should not suppress anything that was popularly believed at the time, even though he may not believe it himself. "Qu'ils nous rendent l'histoire plus selon qu'ils reçoivent que selon qu'ils estiment."\(^{108}\) The historian is thus more a reporter than a researcher. Although Montaigne's practice of finding at which points a historian is reliable and at which he is not is similar to Bodin's recommendations, it is obvious that he does not share with Bodin the nascent idea of an erudite secondary historian who chooses from among many accounts in order to find the truth for his reader. (The stress on eyewitness accounts in "Des livres" that I referred to on page 86, and the indication in "Defence de Seneque et de Plutarque," mentioned on page 77, that the historian is not obliged to undertake detailed research, support this view.) Montaigne may behave like such a historian at certain points when he compares accounts or assesses the judgment of an author, but the erudite, researching historian is not part of his declared ideal, even subliminally, as it is in Bodin.
From this comparison of Montaigne and representative sixteenth-century historical thinkers, we see that, although Montaigne's skepticism at times resembles the extreme views of Cornelius Agrippa and Francesco Patrizzi, history is not one of the areas in which Montaigne applies such sweeping skepticism. The intermediate attitude of Melchor Cano and François Baudouin, whereby one relies on the good judgment of the historian in question, seems to have been Montaigne's when he wrote the earliest essays, in 1572-74. But by the years 1578-80 Montaigne has reached the stage of more productive historical skepticism, akin to that of Jean Bodin in his *Methodus*. There is, however, one difference. Bodin envisaged a historian engaged in research, who would compare the accounts of past historians in an effort at reaching a definitive account. This view of the historian's task developed only in the 1560s, as George Huppert makes clear in The *Idea of Perfect History*. It is not a view shared by Montaigne, the amateur of history—for him the historian is simply the recorder of the events of his own time.
NOTES


6 The brief account which follows owes much to Franklin's Jean Bodin.

7 Franklin pp. 85-7, et passim.

8 Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum et artium atque excellentia verbi dei declamatio* (Anvers, 1530).

9 Francesco Patrizzi, *Della historia; diece dialoghi* (Venice, 1560).

10 François Baudouin, *De institutione historiae universae et ejus cum jurisprudentia conjuntione prolegomenon* (Halle, 1726).

11 Melchor Cano, *De locis theologicis in Melchioris Cani Episcopi Canariensis, ex Ordine Praedicatorum, Opera* (Padua, 1727).


15 Ibid., pp. 27-32.

16 Ibid., p. 32.

17 Ibid., pp. 32-33.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid., p. 26.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid., p. 27.
37. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
42. Ibid.


44 Cano, p. 289. (The translations of Cano which follow are my own.) "Except for the sacred authors, no historian can be absolutely reliable, that is, regarded as being a suitable basis for certain belief in theological matters."

45 Ibid. "Serious, trustworthy historians, of whom some certainly exist in the ecclesiastic and the secular spheres, provide the theologian with a probable argument both for corroborating his own propositions and for refuting the false opinions of his adversaries."

46 Ibid. "For it is not fitting for an educated person, properly adjusted to civilized life, to refuse to believe a serious man reporting a credible event."

47 Ibid. "If all trusted and serious historians agree about the same historical event, then the argument drawn from their authority is certain."

48 Ibid. "For what could be more foolish, I would argue the point again, than if we were to say there were no such beasts as live in the Red Sea and the Indian Sea, because we never saw them? . . . Therefore we should trust the historical account when all the authors agree about the same thing."

49 Cano, p. 329. "The first law is derived from the integrity and probity of men. And this is quite justified, since [with regard to] the facts which historians narrate, either they themselves testify that they have seen them, or else they testify that they have received account of them from those who saw them."

50 Cano, p. 333. "The second established law, indeed, in judging history, is that we should give preference to those historians who, in addition to a natural seriousness, show a certain wisdom in selecting and judging."

51 Cano, p. 334.

52 Baudouin, *De institutione*, p. 87.

53 Franklin, *Jean Bodin*, p. 137.


55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
63 Essais, II.32: VS, 722.
64 Ibid.
65 Essais, II.32: VS, 723.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
70 Essais, II.32: VS, 723.
72 Bodin, Methodus, p. 294.
73 Ibid., p. 295.
74 Franklin, Jean Bodin, p. 141.
75 Bodin, Methodus, p. 295.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid., p. 296.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid., p. 297.
81 Ibid.
82 Methodus, p. 298.
83 Ibid.
84 Methodus, p. 300.
85 Essais, II.32: VS, 722
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 Essais, II.10: VS, 418.
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
93 Ibid., p. 419.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
96 Ibid.
97 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid., p. 420.
102 Essais, III.8: VS, 941.
103 Ibid.
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid.
106 Ibid., p. 942.
107 Ibid.
108 *ibid.*, p. 943.

CHAPTER III

MONTAIGNE AND THE BEGINNINGS OF MODERN HISTORIOGRAPHY

As we saw in the previous chapter, the basic concepts of a critical historical method crystallized in the second third of the sixteenth century. Montaigne shares some of these concepts, as I endeavor to show, and in the light of my analysis he appears somewhat more critical vis-a-vis the facts of history—and their recorders—than Villey regarded him as being. The evidence for his critical views occurs in the later essays of the 1580 edition and in the 1588 edition, and so I speculate in the preceding chapter that Montaigne moved towards a more critical attitude in his historical thought after the composition of the earliest essays.

Besides the elaboration of a philosophy of historical criticism, other changes took place in historical thought in the sixteenth century. Alongside the tradition of placing history within a providential framework there began to emerge a view of the past which separates history from theology. As Claude Gilbert Dubois puts it in his La Conception de l'histoire au XVIe siècle,

Jusqu'alors on avait vécu sous la primauté de la théologie, sommet et pivot de la pyramide des sciences. . . . Or c'est cette subordination qui va être remise en cause . . . La nature de la méthode [historique] consiste en une mise entre parenthèses des prémises théologiques: nous constatons que, sous prétexte d'humilité et
d'incompétence, l'histoire s'établit un domaine propre, à l'abri de toutes spéculations théologiques. ¹

As we saw in the previous chapter, the critical theory that was sketched out during this period depended on the secular "authorities" of observation and comparison. Similarly the subject-matter of history became—for historians such as Bodin, Leroy, Pasquier and Vignier—the past of man and his civilization rather than the past of man guided by God towards a predestined goal. ² Thus Bodin, in the first chapter of his Methodus, carefully distinguishes three different types of history.

Il y a trois sortes d'histoire ou de récit véridique: l'histoire humaine, l'histoire naturelle et l'histoire sacrée. La première se rapporte à l'homme, la seconde à la nature, et la troisième à son auteur. L'une expose les gestes de l'homme à travers ses sociétés, l'autre étudie les causes opérant dans la nature et déduit leur marche progressive à partir d'un premier principe; la dernière enfin revendique et considère l'action et les manifestations du Dieu Souverain et des esprits immortels.

Sacred history and natural history are seen as guided by final causes:

... si l'histoire sacrée et l'histoire naturelle diffèrent beaucoup de cette dernière, c'est surtout en ce qu'elles procèdent non seulement de causes, mais encore de fins certaines. Les choses naturelles présentent en effet une série de causes nécessaires et stables... ³

On the other hand, in human history the causative factor is human will:

Mais l'histoire humaine découle principalement de la volonté des hommes qui n'est jamais semblable à elle-même et l'on n'entrevoit point son terme. ⁴

Bodin restricts human history to the realm of efficient causes, just as Bacon would appeal to efficient rather than final causes in the sciences, in his Advancement of Learning, in 1605. ⁵
The second—and closely related—aspect of history which emerged in this period was the view that history is a constant process of change through time rather than the working out of some timeless idea.

La recherche de l'historien aboutit à la transcription d'un faisceau de phénomènes en séquence rationnelle, et l'historien est bien près de dire que cela suffit, et qu'il n'y a pas un au-delà de la cohérence.7

Any institution can thus be explained historically, not as the static embodiment of certain ideas, but by the modifications ("mutations" is a favorite term of sixteenth-century historians8) which it has undergone in the past. George Huppert, in his Idea of Perfect History, singles out law, language, religious faith and historiography itself as areas in which there was a particular awareness of historical change.9

The modern idea thus began to emerge in the sixteenth century that history is secular process. There is nothing particularly exciting about much an idea today. It appears, indeed, to be very ordinary. But by virtue of its implications it was soon to be regarded as a libertine idea. It excludes the belief that the deity sanctions the actions of one's group or nation and, taken to its logical conclusion, its precludes encomiastic history because it negates any claim that the ruler might make to embody certain timeless laws or rights. It is thus a view which, after a fairly brief flowering in the later years of the sixteenth century, went underground during the absolutism of the following century.

The above is not to say that history as purely secular process dominated sixteenth-century historical thought or that all of its implications were thoroughly worked out in every detail. However it
was a widely held view for a certain length of time in the sixteenth century and, since it confers ultimate authority on the observed facts and not on religious authority or "reason," its implications seem to have been widely enough understood to make its practice unwise during the long period of monarchical absolutism which followed. 10

As we saw in Chapter I, Montaigne read history and enjoyed it, referred to it often in his writings, was aware of the current vogue for history, and wished there were more information from the past. Thus it seems reasonable to examine the extent to which he shares in his contemporaries' view of history as secular, non-programmatic process. In the pages which follow, I examine first the extent to which Montaigne regards history as a secular matter, and then the extent to which he sees history as pure process.

Montaigne and Secular History

On two occasions in the *Essais* Montaigne suggests that history is guided by God. In I. 15, "Que nostre desir s'accroist par la malaisance," an addition made in 1582 strongly suggests a providential view of history:

*C'est un effect de la Providence divine de permettre sa saincte Eglise estre agitée, comme nous la voyons, de tant de troubleds et d'orages, pour esveiller par ce contraste les ames pies, et les r'avoir de l'oisiveté et du sommeil ou les avoit plongez une si longue tranquillité."

In III.1, "De l'utile et de l'honneste," Montaigne observes that sometimes rulers are obliged to act against the dictates of their conscience, and he seems to suggest the deity has a hand in these occasions:
Le Prince, quand une urgente circonstance et quelque impétueux et inopiné accident du besoing de son estat luy fait gauchir sa parolle et sa foy, ou autrement le jette hors de son devoir ordinaire, doibt attribuer cette nécessité à un coup de la verge divine. . .12

If these were the only references to providential history in the Essais one could conclude that Montaigne thought history was intimately guided by the deity. But other references show that God's actions should be seen as extraordinary interferences. Thus in I.23, "De la coustume," providential intervention is seen as having no necessary connection with the usual rules of the world:

Se quelques fois la Providence divine a passé par-dessus les regles ausquelles elle nous a nécessairement astreints, ce n'est pas pour nous en dispenser. Ce sont coups de sa main divine, qu'il nous faut, non pas imiter, mais admirer. . .13

The acts of Providence are not amenable to interpretation, they cannot be translated into human terms: "Actes de son personnage, non du nostre."14 Most of Montaigne's commentary on interpretation of the divine follows this line of reasoning, whereas it is an assumption of providential history that God's actions do have an equivalent on the human level which is amenable to man's understanding and interpretation. In the "Apologie," in which human reason is so often criticized, the possibility of such interpretation is expressly denied:

Nous advient tous les jours d'attribuer à Dieu les evenemens d'importance, d'une particulière assignation. Parce qu'ils nous poissent, il semble qu'ils luy poissent aussi, et qu'il y regarde plus entier et plus attentif qu'aux evenemens qui nous sont legiers ou d'une suite ordinaire. . . . Comme si ce luy estoit plus et moins de remuer un empire ou la feuille d'un arbre, et si sa providence s'exerçoit autrement, inclinant l'évenement d'une bataille, que le sault d'une puce!15
The above are /b/ and /c/ additions to the "Apologie," and characteristically they concentrate on the disproportionate insignificance of man in relation to the deity. But in an earlier text in I.32, "Qu'il faut sobrement se mesler de juger des ordonnances divines," most of which was written in the period 1572-74, Montaigne had already opposed providential history on the grounds of the inconsistency of those who interpret it:

Aux guerres où nous sommes pour la religion, ceux qui eurent l'avantage au rencontre de la Rochelabeille, faisant grande feste de cet accident, et se servant de cette fortune pour certaine approbation de leur partie, quand ils viennent après à s'excuser leurs desfortunes de Mont-contour et de Jarnac sur ce que ce sont verges et chastimens paternels, s'ils n'ont un peuple du tout à leur mercy, ils luy font assez aisément sentir que c'est prendre d'un sac deux mouldures et de même bouche souffler le chaud et le froid.16

The disproportion between the human and the divine is pointed out here too, although without the exclamatory tone of the "Apologie": "Somme, il est mal-ayse de ramener les choses divines à nostre balance, qu'elles n'y souffrent du deschet." Here, as in the "Apologie," the deity's actions remain impenetrable.

Montaigne seems on the whole to say that man's actions cannot be shown to be guided by God. This is borne out if we turn from what he says to his practice in the Essais. No attempt is made to demonstrate that providential interference occasioned any act in history. The closest Montaigne comes to this is the first passage quoted above, from "Que nostre desir s'accroist par la malaisance." But this passage is a brief suggestion, and in no way a detailed working-out of the stages by which providential influence might have been exerted.
Moreover, providential history pays great attention to miracles and portents of the future. Now, at various stages of the *Essais* Montaigne both suggests that miracles do not really take place:

> Il est vraisemblable que le principal crédit des miracles, des visions, des enchantemens et de tels effects extraordinaires, vienne de la puissance de l'imagination agissant principalement contre les ames du vulgaire, plus molles. On leur a si fort saisi la créance, qu'ils pensent voir ce qu'ils ne voyent pas;\textsuperscript{17}

and that they are entirely possible:

> Il m'a tousjours semblé qu'à un homme Chrestien cette sorte de parler est pleine d'indiscrétion et d'irréverence: Dieu ne peut faire cecy ou cela. Je ne trouve pas bon d'enfermer ainsi la puissance divine soubs les loix de nostre parolle.\textsuperscript{18}

Arguments both for and against the occurrence of miracles are made both in the passages in question and elsewhere in the *Essais*. On the one hand these arguments belittle the human mind which arrogantly refuses to believe, and on the other hand they humiliate man's tendency to believe too easily. The reader is obliged to share in that ataraxia or "mental poise" which Philip Hallie has shown is one of the characteristics of Montaigne's thought.\textsuperscript{19} However, if Montaigne leaves open the question of whether or not miracles do occur, he nowhere suggests that they can be successfully interpreted. In fact in I.32, "Qu'il faut sobrement se mesler de juger des ordonnances divines," after the passage cited above, Montaigne ironically remarks:

> Et qui voudroit rendre raison de ce que Arrius et Leon son Pape, chefs principaux de cette heresie, moururent en divers temps de mors si pareilles et estranges (car retirés de la dispute par douleur de ventre à la garderobe, tous deux y rendirent subitement l'ame), et exagerer cette vengeance divine par la circonstance du lieu, y pourroit bien encore adjouster la mort de Heliogabalus, qui fut

In a /c/ addition which follows, Montaigne adds a more serious charge: interpretation of miracles as rewards or chastisements is blasphemous, because it attributes too great an importance to the things of this world.

Dieu, nous voulant apprendre que les bons ont autre chose à esperer, et les mauvais autre chose à craindre que les fortunes ou infortunes de ce monde, il les manie et applique selon sa disposition occulte, et nousoste le moyen d'en faire sottement nostre profit.  

God obviously exists for Montaigne, but He remains impenetrable. An important aspect of religious reverence seems to be agreeing to remain ignorant of the deity's workings.

This distance thus maintained between man and God fulfills another purpose: it enlarges the sphere of man's activity and affords him more liberty to act and to think. Liberty is an important notion in the Essais. Montaigne describes his upbringing as "conduicte d'une façon molle et libre." He retires from public life to devote himself "à sa liberté, à sa tranquillité, à ses loisirs." In his writing he is well aware of his "liberté . . . si libre," and he hopes to communicate his own healthy freedom to his readers: "Dieu veuille que cet exces de ma licence attire nos hommes jusques à la liberté." This is not a complete freedom since it is granted by God ("Dieu veuille. . ."), but nevertheless it demands considerable space and much of the Essais are devoted to a description of its acquisition (in for example "De l'institution des enfans" and "De la praesumption"), its practice ("De
mesnager sa volonté"), and its reconciliation with the demands of society ("De l'utile et de l'honneste").

Like the essayist himself, the actors in Montaigne's scenes from history choose for themselves how they will act. The first essay of Book I, "Par divers moyens on arrive à pareille fin," is the story of men and women who refuse to be overcome by adversity and who assert their freedom in defiance of the enemy, with differing results. In "Divers evenemens de mesme conseil" Montaigne dwells at some length on Augustus Caesar deciding how to react to the conspiracy of Cinna and others. In "Des coches" human motives of greed cause the Europeans' cruelty towards the Peruvians and the Mexicans, while the oppressed groups assert their freedom by their refusal to submit. Indeed the many accounts of torture in the Essais almost always show the victim asserting his inner freedom and refusing to be overcome.

Like Bodin, then, who declared that "l'histoire humaine découle principalement de la volonté des hommes," Montaigne selects from history people whose actions are chosen by themselves, not inevitable or controlled in any way by an outside force. His causes are efficient, not final, causes, and human motivation is separated from the deity's will, in practice if not always in theory.

The secular motivations of human action are perhaps most striking when Montaigne considers the actions of Christians. In I.14, he describes attempts made by the kings of Castille and Portugal to force the Jews living on their territory to convert to Christianity. He retells, from Osorius, a sordid tale of one type of coercion after another. The Christians mistreat the Jews in the name of religion.
But the story is retold in secular not religious terms. Neither side is described as having the "right" religious views. And that the Jews who survived have probably retained their religious beliefs one hundred years later is described as neither right nor wrong in Christian terms—it is seen as the result of simple human tenacity.

In III.6, "Des coches," Christian motivation is again shown as human at its worst—greed and cruelty are the motivating factors in the mistreatment of the Mexicans and the Peruvians.

In 11.19, "De la liberté de conscience," Montaigne defends the fourth-century Roman Emperor Julian the Apostate, against the criticisms leveled by the Christian historians Marcellinus and Eutropius. Julian is seen not as the embodiment of evil, despite the fact that he abjured the Christian religion. Rather, he is depicted as a politician manipulating religion for his own ends.

Montaigne uses secular motivation for action and selects people from history whose actions are chosen by themselves. But by the same token that he refuses determinism by Providence or destiny, he also realizes that events can never be controlled by man:

C'est une genereuse envie de vouloir mourir mesme, utilement et virilement; mais l'effect n'en gist pas tant en nostre bonne resolution qu'en nostre bonne fortune. Mille ont proposé de vaincre ou de mourir en combattant, qui ont failly à l'un et à l'autre.

By limiting both the sphere of Providence or destiny and the sphere of human effectiveness, Montaigne leaves a large space for the action of fortune, that is to say of pure chance, in human affairs.

In a purely rationalistic sense, "chance," within any given system of explanations, is an event whose cause is outside the scope of
the system in question. (Thus an earthquake is a result of chance for
the historian because the chains of cause and effect he deals with
take no account of seismology.) When Jean Bodin drew up his categories
for classifying historical facts, he left no space for the action of
chance:

Quant aux événements fortuits (pour employer le
langage courant, car en réalité rien n'est dû au
hasard), qui se rapportent aux hommes, tout en
paraissant conduits soit par la divinité, soit par
la nature, il sera plus commode de les rattacher aux
vicissitudes de l'histoire humaine: soit par exemple ce
que Tacite rapporte des habitants de Fidènes qui
périrent au nombre de cinquante mille sous les ruines
d'un théâtre: nous noterons le fait sous la rubrique
réservée à la mort. Et nous opérerons de même
lorsqu'il s'agira de dommages, de naufrages, ou de
tous autres accidents.29

It is here that we come to one of the limits of Montaigne's his-
torical rationalism, for chance is posited in the Essais as a cause
within the chain of historical cause and effect. Thus in "Divers
evenemens de mesme conseil" the Duc de Guise and Augustus Caesar both
use the same remedy against a conspiracy. They confront the traitor,
and then pardon him. The fact that no more conspiracies were made
against Augustus, whereas the Duc de Guise was assassinated just a few
months later, is ascribed to the action of fortune: "au travers de tous
nos projets, de nos conseils et precautions, la fortune maintient
tousjours la possession des evenemens."30 Montaigne ignores all the
other causes that might explain the differing outcome of these two
similar plans and substitutes instead the idea that each was the result
of pure chance. Free from any determinism as he chooses, man exer-
cises his free will and selects the way he will act. But the outcome
of those actions is seen as random.

A passage in II.29, "De la vertu," appears to sum up Montaigne's views on chance, determinism and providence. Montaigne first reviews one of the arguments for predestination:

Parmy nos autres disputes, celle du Fatum s'y est mélée; et, pour attacher les choses advenir et nostre volonté mesme à certaine et inevitable nécessité, on est encore sur cet argument du temps passé: "Puis que Dieu prevoit toutes choses devoir ainsi advenir, comme il faict sans doubt, il faut donc qu'elles adviennent ainsi."

The counter-argument is given at length. Thus, although Montaigne simply presents both arguments and declares no preference, the reader finds himself in agreement with the response:

nos maistres respondent que le voir que quelque chose advienne, comme nous faisons, et Dieu de mesmes (car, tout luy estant present, il voit plustost qu'il ne prevoit), ce n'est pas la forcer d'advenir; voire, nous voyons à cause que les choses adviennent, et les choses n'advienissent pas à cause que nous voyons. L'advenement fait la science, non la science l'advenement. Ce que nous voyons advenir, advient; mais il pouvait autrement advenir.

Outside the temporal and spatial dimensions of events, omniscient and prescient, but not intervening, stands the deity:

Dieu, au registre des causes des advenements qu'il a en sa prescience, y a aussi celles qu'on appelle fortuites, et les volontaires, qui dependent de la liberté qu'il a donné à nostre arbitrage, et sçait que nous faudrons par ce que nous aurons voulu faillir.31

In this passage, "les causes ... qu'on appelle fortuites" and "les causes volontaires" coexist in the area provided for them by the deity. Within this space events create their own pattern, which is knowable by man only after the fact: "l'advenement faict la science, non la science
l'advenement." The idea of an omniscient God can thus be combined with a denial of determinism.

However, in his effort at humiliating man's capacities, Montaigne often personifies chance as the capricious pagan goddess Fortuna, and thus brings the notion of predestination in through the back door. Thus, writing of this goddess in I.34, "La fortune se rencontre souvent au train de la raison," Montaigne remarks:

Quelque fois il luy plait envier sur nos miracles. Nous tenons que le Roy Clovis, assiégant Angoulesme, les murailles cheurent d'elles mesmes par faveur divine: et Bouchet emprunte de quelqu'autheur que le Roy Robert, assiégant une ville, et s'estant desrobé du siege . . . les murailles de la ville assiégée s'en allerent sans aucune effort en ruine. Elle fit tout à contrepoil en nos guerres de Milan. Car le capitaine Rense assiégant pour nous la ville d'Eronne, et ayant fait mettre la mine soubs un grand pan de mur, et le mur en estant brusquement enlevé hors de terre, recheut toutes-fois tout empanné, si droit dans son fondement que les assiégés n'en vausirent pas moins.32

Here Montaigne attributes to Fortune exactly the sort of event which, as we saw on page 107 above, Bodin insisted should have a historical classification.

Thus when we look at Montaigne's principles of historical causality, we find that he attempts to avoid any predestination. His rationalism goes far enough to place history in the human plane, but not far enough to embrace determinism. On the other hand, in his efforts to belittle man's powers, he accords a wide range of influence to "la fortune." The line between capricious fortune and implacable fate is not always clearly drawn, and the notion of pure chance merges at times with the notion of a destiny that thwarts human wishes.
In "De la vanité" Montaigne personifies chance as "the gods":

Les dieux s'esbatent de nous à la pelote, et nous agitent à toutes mains:

Enimvero Dii nos homines quasi pilas habent.

Les estres ont fatalement destiné l'estat de Rome pour exemplaire de ce qu'ils peuvent en ce genre.33

Here, as sometimes happens when fortune becomes "la Fortune," the line between chance and destiny is thin indeed. However, this is the exception rather than the rule.

In keeping with Montaigne's view of the causes of individual events, his view of the patterns these events follow in the past also tends to avoid determinism. In an article written in 1945, Herbert Weisinger identifies the six main patterns which were attributed to history during the Renaissance.34 These patterns were as follows: the theory of decline which supposes sometimes merely that man is getting worse, sometimes that the decline followed a lost "golden age"; the theory of cycles, according to which history follows a recurring circular path; the theory of progress which claims that the achievements of the moderns have surpassed those of the ancients; the theory of "steady state" or what Weisinger calls "uniformitarianism," that is to say the theory that human nature never changes and that no historical change takes place at all; the idea of the plenitude of nature and which declares, in opposition to the notion of decline, that nature is not running down and that men were as good as they ever were; and finally the theory that climate and other environmental factors determine the character and thus the history of individual peoples. Lanson's remark that Montaigne "fit le tour des idées de son siècle" is
particularly true here, for all six of these views are considered in the Essais.35

The historical notion that occurs most frequently in the Essais is the notion of decline. Montaigne often declares, and his frequent juxtapositions of the modern and ancient world demonstrate, that man has declined since classical times. One passage chosen from many will suffice to show this:

Le vieux Caton disoit en son temps, qu'autant de valets, autant d'ennemis. Voyez si, selon la distance de la pureté de son siecle au nostre, il ne nous a pas voulu advertir que femme, fils et valet, autant d'ennemis à nous.36

Another notion that occurs quite frequently is the cyclical notion. In Montaigne's thinking, however, this does not imply a pattern of regular and foreseeable cycles; rather it is the notion of man stumbling around in circles, unaware of what he is really doing.

Les hommes mescgoissent la maladie naturelle de leur esprit: il ne fait que fureter et quester, et va sans cesse tournoiant, bastissant et s'empestrant en sa besogne comme nos vers de soye, et s'y estouffe: mus in pice.37

The idea of progress is discussed several times. Usually Montaigne argues against the idea. Thus he argues in the "Apologie" that in spite of all man's pursuit of knowledge,

Je croy qu'il me confessera, s'il parle en conscience, que tout l'aquest qu'il a retiré d'une si longue poursuite, c'est d'avoir apris à reconnoistre sa vilité et sa foiblesse.38

On other occasions he appears to be in grudging agreement that there has been an increase—if not an improvement—in knowledge:
Nos opinions s'entendent les unes sur les autres: la première sert de tige à la seconde, la seconde à la tierce; nous eschelonnons ainsi de degré en degré, et advient de là que le plus haut monté a souvent plus d'honneur et de mérite, car il n'est monté que sur les épaules du penultime.39

These ideas of decline, cycles and progress are the historical patterns which Montaigne uses most. None of these is a programmatic notion, that is to say none describes a movement which man necessarily follows. Mankind is not seen as fated to decline through time—the responsibility is his own. In the quotation given above on decline, the pattern is applied after the fact. The decline from ancient to modern times occurs because men have become worse, and not vice versa. When Montaigne sees history as following a circular pattern, the circularity is not prescribed for men; rather, they trace it for themselves: "Nous n'allons point, nous rodons plutôt, nous nous promenons sur nos pas."40 Similarly the path of progress is one achieved—or not achieved—by men, not any form of predestination. Thus, in these patterns of the past which Montaigne uses most frequently, man, not destiny, creates the pattern.

The steady-state or uniformitarian view of the past also occurs in the Essais. In II.9, "De la vanité," Montaigne describes the condition of France during the civil wars. The fact that society has held together at all has taught him the tenacious longevity of the social organism:

Je vois par nostre exemple que la société des hommes se tient et se coust, à quelque pris que ce soit. En quelque assiette qu'on les couche, ils s'appilient et se rengent en se remuant et s'entassant, comme des corps malunis qu'on empoche sans ordre trouvent d'eux mesme
The individual components of society arrange themselves without the help of any outside agency, "mieux que l'art les eust sceu disposer."

Here again Montaigne seems to take a non-deterministic view.

The idea of the fullness of nature, the optimistic version of the uniformitarian theory, is an important notion in the *Essais*. It is usually expressed in an a-temporal manner. Thus in the "Apologie,"

Montaigne says of men and animals:

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 une fortune pareille. . . Il y a quelque diference, il y a des ordres et des degres; mais c'est soubs le visage d'une mesme nature.

The same idea is expressed historically in a late edition to the "Apologie":

C'est une mesme nature qui roule son cours. Qui en auroit suffisament jugé le present estat, en pourroit seurement conclurre et tout l'advenir et tout le passe.

The idea of a personified nature, "nostre mere nature" or a nature "qui roule son cours," brings in the notion of predestination. Montaigne is aware of this. In a long passage in the "Apologie" he uses a circular argument to descredit the theory of predestination by environment and by natural cycles. His argument is that if man's achievements are determined by something outside himself then he can take no pride in them for himself.

Si par experience nous touchons à la main que la forme de nostre estre depend de l'air, du climat et du terroir ou nous naissions, non seulement le
tainct, la taille, la complexon et les contenances, mais encore les facultés de l'ame, . . . que deviennent toutes ces belles prerogatives dequoy nous nous allons flatant?45

Montaigne is thus aware of the disadvantages of a deterministic theory —human freedom and achievement are negated. He has no illusions about human capacities however. Human freedom in practice usually leads to decline, for which only man is responsible:

Nature nous a mis au monde libre et desliez; nous nous emprisonnons en certain destroits; comme les Roys de Perse qui s'obligeoient de boire jamais autre eau que celle du fleuve de Choaspez.46

This decline, although it pervades his view of the past, is not willed from without, as we have seen. No ideology informs Montaigne's view of history: "l'advenement faict la science, non la science l'advenement."47 The patterns he sees follow his observations of the individual facts in history. Thus the view of decline through time which he holds is not systematically explained but established through countless individual observations.48 Sometimes he compares the modern French to their immediate predecessors or their medieval ancestors; sometimes he compares the French in general to the ancient Romans or the Spartans or the ancient Egyptians; sometimes a pattern of decline is perceived within the history of the ancient world. The fact that he gives precedence to the facts is an important link with the historians of his time who were establishing a historiographical method which appeals to the secular authority of observation and not to the authority of theology or "reason."
Two specific items show that Montaigne tried to keep his view of the past free of ideology. The first of these is the chronology he uses in the *Essais*. Despite the discussions of patterns in the past, Montaigne's chronology is extremely pragmatic. The past falls into four periods: Greek and Roman antiquity, a middle period with not very clearly defined contours, the "temps de nos peres" and finally the period Montaigne himself has lived through. Most strikingly, the coming of Christ does not mark an epoch in the history Montaigne presents to his reader. 49

Not only does Montaigne avoid Christian ideology in his divisions of the past, he is willing to relinquish part of the state's ideology, namely the myth that the French could trace their ancestry back to the Trojans. The "Francus myth," or the "Trojan myth," was in fact one casualty of the new rationalism in historiography. According to this legend, some Trojans had escaped the destruction of their city. Their first king, Francus the son of Hector, was believed to have given his name to the new group—the Franks who later invaded Gaul.

Variations of the myth of Trojan origins were pressed into service by other emerging nation-states besides France. As George Huppert points out:

The adoption of Trojan paternity was a common enough device for the regularization of a new nation's status. The Trojan pedigree was glorious and ancient; it established one's blood relationship with the Romans, and it justified one's title to the possession of parts of the Roman empire. Thus, from the start of its thousand-year-long career, this myth was to be the property of the state as well as a theme for poets.50
At the beginning of the sixteenth century the myth was widely accepted in France as a true historical account of the French past.\(^5\) It was first disproved in 1531 by the German humanist Beatus Rhenanus in his *Rerum Germanicorum libri tres*, in which the Franks are shown to be a Germanic people. French historians were not immediately willing to have a Germanic past thrust on them, and many, including Estienne Pasquier, remained skeptical.\(^5\) But in 1573 François Hotman's *Franco-Gallia*, which expands on Beatus' thesis, convinced Pasquier, as well as other historians including Jean du Tillet, Nicolas Vignier and François de Belle-Forest, that the origins of the French were Germanic and not Trojan.\(^5\)

That the Trojan myth quite quickly changed in status from acceptable historical account to amusing legend demonstrates the authority that had been gained by historical criticism in the later part of the sixteenth century. Attractive, politically useful legend was put aside in favor of demonstrated historical fact. Both Nicolas Vignier, who was historiographer to Henri IV, and his successor Jean de Serres, rejected the Trojan theory in favor of the Germanic origins of the French,\(^5\) although one might have expected otherwise since the myth was such a useful tool of propaganda for a new dynasty. Even in the realm of poetry, Ronsard seems to have been made uncomfortable enough to need to justify his own use of the myth. In the preface to the 1587 edition of the *Franciade* he is careful to distinguish between the demands of poetry and the demands of history.\(^5\)

Montaigne agrees that the Trojan myth is just that—a myth based on Homer's poetic inventions. In II.36, "Des plus excellens hommes,"
the Greek poet is described as one of the most outstanding men who ever lived. The fact that so many nations claim Trojan origins is seen as a tribute to his inventive powers:

Quelle gloire se peut comparer à la sienne? Il n'est rien qui vive en la bouche des hommes comme son nom et ses ouvrages. . . . Non seulement aucunes races particulières, mais la plus part des nations cherchent origine en ses inventions.56

Eastern as well as western nations find it politically helpful to trace their origins back to the fall of Troy:

Mahumet, second de ce nom, Empereur des Turcs, escrivant à nostre Pape Pie second: Je m'estonne, dit-il, comment les Italiens se bandent contre moy, attendu que nous avons nostre origine commune des Troyens, et que j'ay comme eux interest de venger le sang d'Hector sur les Grecs, lesquels ils vont favorisant contre moy.57

For Montaigne such origins are pure fiction. He describes the users of the myth as actors, determined to play out the scenario invented by Homer so long ago. In fact, Homer seems to have turned all the world into a stage:

N'est-ce pas une noble farce de laquelle les Roys, les choses publique et les Empereurs vont jouant leur personnage tant de siecles, et à laquelle tout ce grand univers sert de theatre?58

Montaigne has no difficulty in accepting the evidence that the ancestors of the French were a Germanic people. In II.22, "Des mauvais moyens employés à bonne fin," he makes a comparison between the practice of forcing groups of citizens to emigrate when resources become scarce, and the medical technique of purging the body. The Frankish migrations are chosen as one of the examples: "De cette façon, nos anciens Francons, partis du fons de l'Alemaigne, vindrent se saisir
also referred to in II.19, "De la liberté de conscience," in a passage describing the military power of the Emperor Julian the Apostate:

Quant à sa suffisance militaire, il fut admirable en toutes les parties d'un grand capitaine; aussi fut-il quasi toute sa vie en continuël exercice de guerre, et la pluspart avec nous en France contre les Allemands et Francons. 60

In both passages which mention the Franks, Montaigne is quite happy to associate French, Franks and Germans. Earlier in the century, some theorists, displeased with the suggestion that the Franks were a Germanic in origin, had tried to link the Franks with the Gauls. 61 Thus Bodin appears to suggest that the Franks were originally Gauls who had moved north to settle near the Rhine and then later returned to claim their fatherland. 62 Montaigne seems to need no such suggestions. He refers to "nos anciens Francons" with apparently the same acceptance as when he refers to "nos anciens Gaulois." The Gauls are more frequently referred to however, surely because of Montaigne's fondness for reading Caesar. There are some ten mentions of the Gauls in the Essais as opposed to only two mentions of the Franks.

Montaigne and Historical Process

Montaigne places history in the secular realm. He attempts to avoid the determinism that tempted Bodin. But his introduction of the notion of Fortuna—which Bodin rejected—brings back in a non-Christian determinism on occasion. His position when it comes to the question of historical change is equally difficult to define. Montaigne was certainly aware of the fact that human institutions are constantly changing.
character, transforming themselves into something different. But he also shares in the Christian view of change—the mutability of the things of the world—and the classical view of the world as flux. These two views see change as regrettable human instability and as something to be overcome. They differ thus from the modern view of historical change which sees change as a formative process. Montaigne, writing at a time when all three views were held in various combinations by various thinkers, partakes of all three. His reflections are colored also by his observation of the religious wars and the dislike of change he acquired therefrom.

When Montaigne concerns himself with mutability, he deals with the mutability of his own character, or of that of others, or of human institutions. All of these allow him to infer the mutability of man in general. It is the last, however, mutability of human institutions, which most concerns us here, for it is here that Montaigne expresses his ideas of historical change.

As Donald R. Kelley points out in his Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship, the influence of legal studies revolutionized the theory of history in the sixteenth-century France. Andrea Alciato began teaching the historical investigation of Roman law in 1529, at Bourges. The existence in France of two legal systems—written law, derived from Roman law, in the South and uncodified customary law in the North—stimulated interest in this new comparative and historical approach to legal texts. By the second third of the century, many historians had been students of jurisprudence, and they brought their comparative studies into the wider field of investigation of other
human institutions. Law, however, remains one of the areas in which historians were most aware of the process of development within the past. 64

The most forceful and influential statement on the historical nature of laws is found in François Hotman's Anti-Tribonian of 1567. Laws are seen as constantly changing, and at any given moment in their development they reflect the society they serve. 65 Estienne Pasquier repeats this observation in his Recherches de la France. 66

Montaigne is aware of the historical nature of law. There are several passages in the Essais where the point is made. In the "Apologie" Montaigne expresses the idea by comparing the historical development of the law to the growth of a river from its source—a powerful image which, however, being borrowed from an awesome force of nature, does not convey the idea of the arbitrary nature of law as do other passages in the Essais.

Les loix prennent leur autorité de la possession et de l'usage; il est dangereux de les ramener à leur naissance: elles grossissent et s'ennoblissent en roulant, comme nos rivières: suivez les contremont jusques à leur source, ce n'est qu'un petit surion d'eau à peine reconnaissable, qui s'enorgueillit ainsin et se fortifie en vieillissant.

Despite the power of a law, its origin may have little ethical basis:

Voyez ces anciens considerations qui ont donné le premier branle à ce fameux torrent, plein de dignité, d'horreur et de reverence: vous les trouverez si legeres et si delicates, que ces gens icy qui poisent tout et le ramenent à la raison, et qui ne reçoivent rien par autorité et à credit, il n'est pas merveille s'ils ont leur jugemens souvent tres-esloigné des jugemens publiques. 67
In III.9. "De la vanité," Montaigne returns to this idea, with the additional notion that the laws may not simply be without an ethical basis but can in fact be harmful:

La nécessité compose les hommes et les assemble. Cette couture fortuite se forme après en loix; car il est d'aussi farouches qu'aucune opinion humaine puisse enfanter, qui toutesfois ont maintenu leurs corps avec autant de santé et longueur de vie que celles de Platon et Aristote sçauroyent faire.68

In "De l'expérience" Montaigne goes even further and declares that laws are usually wrongly conceived: "Il n'est rien si lourdement et largement fautier que les loiz, ni si ordinairement." Laws are retained because people respect their form rather than their justice:

Les loix se maintiennent en credit, non par ce qu'elles sont justes, mais par ce qu'elles sont loix. C'est le fondement mystique de leur autorité; elles n'en ont point d'autre. Qui bien leur sert. Elles sont souvent faictes par des sots, plus souvent par des gens qui, en haine d'equalité, ont faute d'équité, mais tousjours par des hommes, auteurs vains et irresolus.69

In this series of reflections on the laws of man's devising, Montaigne is obviously aware of their ethical frailty and of the fact that they maintain themselves through time for reasons other than the moral principles they ought to embody. In I.23,"De la coustume," he claims that he once investigated the history of a local custom, and, as with the law, he found its origins were very shaky:

Autrefois, ayant à faire valoir quelqu'une de nos observations, et receue avec authorité bien loing autant de nous, et ne voulant point, comme il se faict, l'establir seulement par la force des loix et des exemples, mais questant tousjours jusques à son origine, j'y trouvai le fondement si foible, qu'à peine que je ne m'en degoustasse, moy qui avois à la confirmé en autrui.70
Montaigne shares with his contemporaries a developmental view of law and custom. However he puts this view to a different use. He does not try to derive from it a description of the society whose law is in question. Instead he makes explicit the ethical problem of the potential and sometimes real divergence of law and justice that the developmental process produces.

Montaigne also knows that ideas of justice change through time:

Les loix de la conscience, que nous disons naistre de nature, naissent de la coutume: chacun ayant en veneration interne les opinions et les meurs approuvées et receus autour de luy, ne s'en peut desprendre sans remors, ny s'y appliquer sans applaudissement.  

He knows that even the most apparently natural laws of conscience owe more to their utility than to their natural justice:

De vrai, la pudicité est une belle vertu, et de laquelle l'utilité est assez connue: mais de la traitter et faire valoir selon nature, il est autant malayse, comme il est aisé de la faire valoir selon l'usage, les loix et les preceptes. Les premieres et universelles raisons sont de difficile perscrutation.

As society develops, the laws change. Montaigne has seen that the development of a fourth estate—the men of the robe, that is to say the magistrature—has led to the establishment of a legal code which contradicts the moral code of the nobles d'épée, the aristocracy:

Qu'est-il de plus farouche que de voir une nation, où par legitime coutume la charge de juger se vende... et aye cette marchandise si grand credit, qu'il se face en une police un quatriesme estât, de gens maniant les proces, pour le joindre aux trois anciens, de l'Eglise, de la Noblesse et du Peuple; lequel estât, ayant la charge des lois et souveraine autorité des biens et des vies, face un corps à part de celuy de la noblesse: d'où il avienne qu'il y ayt doubles loix, celles de l'honneur, et celles de la justice, en plusieurs choses fort contraires.
Montaigne is obviously aware of the historical nature of law and society. But his interest is not the explanatory interest of the historian. He is more concerned with the ethical dilemma posed by the development he outlines. Thus the rest of the passage—as long again as the section quoted—is a forceful description of the contradictory moral codes which exist side by side within the same society. This passage is of interest because it shows the two sides of Montaigne's thought which we are interested in here. He is well aware of the developmental nature of society and law. But this awareness does not lead towards the explanatory account of the historian or the relativism that Estienne Pasquier attempted to achieve. The awareness of development is held in equilibrium with the awareness of the moral dimension of history and with the awareness of a decline through time which has led finally to the imperfection of his own period.

The regret for the outcome of historical development, which we have just seen, indicates a belief in the existence at some level—if only that of the imagination—of a code of natural reasonableness. At one point, in the "Apologie," Montaigne indicates that such a code does exist, but that man has lost its use:

Il est croyable qu'il y a des loiz naturelles, comme il se voit ès autres creatures; mais en nous elles sont perdues, cette belle raison humaine s'ingerant partout de maistriser et commander, brouillant et confondant le visage des choses selon sa vanité et inconstance.74

At other points in the Essais, however, there are attempts at seeing laws and customs in terms of this code. In I.28, "De l'amitié," while discussing the nature of true friendship, Montaigne observes that in a true union of souls the question of ownership of property has no
relevance: "Tout estant par effect commun entre eux . . . ils ne se peuvent ny prester ny donner rien." He goes on to argue that it is in imitation of such perfect union that transfer of property is forbidden between man and wife in French law:

Voyla pourquoy les faiseurs de loix, pour honorer le mariage de quelque imaginaire ressemblance de cette divine liaison, defendent les donations entre le mary et la femme, voulant inferer par là que tout doit estre à chacun d'eux et qu'ils n'ont rien à diviser et partir ensemble.75

Here, then, a law is seen as an attempt at embodying a timeless, reasonable idea, rather than as the end-product of a development through time.

In II.8, "De l'affection des peres aux enfans," a similar notion occurs. Montaigne believes that women should not have power over men:

"il me semble, je ne sçay comment, qu'en toutes facons la maistrise n'est aucunement duee aux femmes sur les hommes, sauf la maternelle et naturelle." He believes that the reasonableness of this idea is the basis for acceptance of the Salic law, by which no woman could succeed to the monarchy:

C'est l'apparence de cette consideration qui nous a fait forger et donner pied si volontiers à cette loy, que nul ne veit onques, qui prive les femmes de la succession de cette couronne; et n'est guiere seigneurie au monde où elle ne s'allege, comme icy, par une vraysemblance de raison qui l'autorise; mais la fortune luy a donne plus de credit en certains lieux qu'aux autres.76

Here, as in the previous example, law is seen as having its basis in reason rather than in history. But this view is not without its nuances. The law in question is not quite a universal law: "n'est guiere seigneurie au monde où elle ne s'allege." And its reasonableness may have more to do with appearance than with truth: "par une
vray-semblance de raison." But these are nuances which just hint at
the law's possible relativity. A historian might have indicated the
different ways the law developed in different societies. But Montaigne
does not go into the historical processes by which the Salic law became
established or which prevented its establishment. These processes are
summed up and dismissed as chance: "la fortune luy a donné plus de
credit en certains lieux qu'aux autres."

When Estienne Pasquier writes about the Salic law, in Chapter 18
of the second book of his Recherches de la France, he simply reports
that it has been the intention of several societies that their
sovereignty should not "tomber en quenouille." He is not concerned
with whether the law is right or wrong or "natural." Instead the law
is explained historically. It is probably of Germanic origin, he says,

non seulement les François, mais aussi la plus part des
peuples qui sortirent du profond de la Germanie, eurent
cette loy affectée, & en recommandation sur toutes
autres: bien est vray que sous diverses modifications. 77

He notes also that the Salic law is not accepted everywhere. Even in
France the duchés and the comtés do not all observe it. One result of
this situation has often been that foreign rulers have acquired French
lands. Henry II of England's acquisition of the duché of Acquitaine
and the comté of Poitou by his marriage with Eleanor of Acquitaine is
one of Pasquier's examples here. 78

Pasquier is thus more interested in the sources and the historical
consequences of the law than Montaigne. He takes a developmental view.
Montaigne, on the other hand, when writing about law seems to hold
both a developmental view (saying that laws are simply the product of their own past), and a static view (that laws are the working-out of some timeless idea).

There is another limitation to Montaigne's developmental view of law and custom. The developments are referred to, but they are not made explicit. Although he says he traced the origin of a local tradition, he does not tell us what it was or what its stages of growth were. And although he tells the reader that laws gather strength from their growth rather than from their worth, he gives no specific examples.

If we look at his attitude towards historical change in general, we find similar limitations there too. Taking account of the continuity of events was one aim of sixteenth-century historians. The goal was a *historia integra*—a history that would be all-inclusive in time and space. Nicolas Vignier's *Bibliothèque historiale* is a work which tries to achieve this goal. History is seen therein as long-term chains of cause and effect. Historical change is a continual formative process. ("The disintegration of one thing is the generation of another, and vice versa," as Vignier puts it.\(^7\)) Louis Le Roy's *De la vicissitude*, with its interest in the growth of civilization and in the succession of civilizations, is another work in the same spirit. Montaigne also ranges from civilization to civilization—Spartans, Athenians, Romans, Egyptians, Muslims, Indians, Amerindians, Chinese, all these and others are in the *Essais*. But he is not interested in the sequence of these civilizations. Within different periods of history too, Montaigne shows little interest in long-term chains of cause and effect. There are some examples in the *Essais*, however. In I.14
there is the history of the ill-treatment of the Jews by the kings of Portugal and Castille. In III.6 there is the account of the destruction of the civilizations of Mexico and Peru. In II.37 there is a long account of the history of medicine, taken from Pliny. In these passages Montaigne recounts a "history" in the sense of a series of events which have a cause-and-effect relationship. But these "histories" are not recounted simply as chains of cause and effect. They are there for a purpose beyond the historical account. Like the observations about the formation of laws, these accounts make a moral point—the inhumanity of the Europeans and the tenacity of victims under duress in the first and second, and the unreliable changeability of medical science in the third.

But these accounts are exceptions, for Montaigne does not usually deal with long periods of history. He is not concerned with individual events as part of a longer process or as contributing to that process. For example, in I.24, "Divers evenemens de mesme conseil," he is not interested in the historical effects of Augustus's decision to pardon Cinna, or with the effect of the similar action of the Duc de Guise. In other essays, descriptions of battles, as in I.45 and near the end of I.41, go no further than the outcome of the battle. The meaning of the event is ultimately not historical but moral—an ethical decision is to be preferred, the conduct of a battle allows Montaigne to muse on the character of the commander. Human action is thus usually set in a moral and not a historical context. It is not inconceivable, of course, that both historical and moral meanings could be considered within the confines of the essay. Thus the forgiveness of Cinna by
by Augustus could have been described as an ethical choice which was also an important factor in the peace which accompanied his rule thereafter (as it is in Corneille's Cinna\(^\text{84}\)). But the historical consequences of the action are put to one side—put to one side as history, that is to say, for as I pointed out earlier, fortune takes the place of history in this account. The outcome of battles, too, could be both morally commentable and historically important. But Montaigne mixes historical and moral reflections only to a certain degree. Once the moral question is reached, history per se seems to lose its interest. Thus we must agree here with Villey, that Montaigne certainly approaches history from the point of view of a moraliste, although we disagreed with him earlier about the amount of historical criticism Montaigne is willing to undertake.

As we have seen so far, when Montaigne does give an account of historical events, he does not stop at the events' historical meaning, but goes on to place them in a moral context. We saw this in the case of the accounts in I.14, III.6 and III.13. On the whole, though, he tends to disregard historical chains of cause and effect.

However, as so often with Montaigne, one must note an exception. Although he usually simplifies historical process (as he does when he calls it "la fortune" in I.24), when the process is regrettable he may dwell on the effects of long-term change in order to demonstrate a decline. Thus he merely tells us that he traced back a local tradition only to find its origins weak, but without going into details. But in III.5, "Sur des vers de Virgil," he notices the slow decline of a custom. In this case the stages are given. He thinks that he has
seen in his own time some vestiges of the ancient Romans' worship of the god Priapus. The cod-pieces that his father's generation used and that the Swiss still use are signs of this, and his own generation still uses a modified version of the same garment. The slow decline of a custom is sketched out. The healthy sexuality of the Romans has given way to the hypocrisy of his own times when boastful garments co-exist with prudish customs. 85

Thus when history progresses—in the simple sense of going forward in time—Montaigne often puts historical process to one side, but when the process is regrettable—a custom declining through time, the rules of medicine always changing—he may dwell on it to show the harmful results of the change in question.

Another limitation to Montaigne's view of historical process is that the process is often indicated, but the intermediate stages are not filled in. In I.36, "De l'usage de se vestir," he argues that by wearing clothes, man became unable to do without them. But this development is not traced. Only two stages are posited: man without clothes and man with clothes. Many examples are given, all with this simple contrast. Chapter I.31, "Des cannibales," shows a similar pattern. Civilized man is compared with "unspoilt" man, but the gap is not bridged with a historical account. The distance between art and nature is not the distance of development, as it is in Le Roy's De la viscissitude, 86 but the distance of contrast.

On the whole in the Essais historical change over long periods of time is simplified. It is either regarded as "la fortune," or it is reduced to a simple process of adaptation as in the case of western
man who became accustomed to wearing clothes, or (in "De la coustume")
the peasant-woman who is jokingly claimed to have carried a calf even
when it grew into an ox. These processes have no historical reper-
cussions. They exist, as it were, independently of history, and they
allow Montaigne to concentrate on the type of change which interests
him most—not long-term historical change, but short-term change which
can be related to the individual and to individual responsibility or
weakness.

We saw in Chapter I that Stierle finds Montaigne's chief concern
is the moment when the individual's psychological state changes. This,
it seems, is very often true. In II.1, "De l'inconstance de nos
actions," for example, Montaigne concentrates on this type of change in
many anecdotes. One of the pivotal points of I.24 is the change from
vengefulness to clemency in Augustus Caesar's attitude. And this pin-
pointing of the moment of difference takes the place of description of
historical development in "Des cannibales" and "De l'usage de se
vestir," as we have seen. When the concern is not movement from one
moment to another then it is often the meaningful psychological trait
as revealed by the person's actions, which holds Montaigne's interest.
In I.41, "De ne communiquer sa gloire," King Edward of England choses
not to intervene in the battle of Crecy, thus revealing a concern for
his son's fame that Montaigne finds unusual. The long-term effects
of the battle, however, are not of interest. In II.29, "De la liberté
de conscience," the character of Julian the Apostate, as revealed by
his actions, rather than the historical consequences of his actions
(of which Montaigne is also aware), are the central concern.
As we have seen, Montaigne's acceptance of historical process has three limitations. First, he combines an interest in the past, and, as we have seen in this chapter, in the patterns that the past has followed, with a lack of interest in the historian's need to make explicit the sequence of steps which make up that history or that pattern within history. Second, isolated incidents from the past are set in a moral rather than a historical pattern. Third, matters which a modern reader would think of as historical are expressed in terms of the individual's time-scale and psychology.

In the *Essais*, one might say, man has a past, but no history. But of course this is an exaggeration. There is an awareness of development, more pronounced in some passages than in others, and mixed, in perhaps an ultimately inextricable manner, with Christian and classical notions of change. Montaigne thus shares only partially in the view of historical process that was being elaborated by the professional historians who were his contemporaries. But, as we saw in the first part of this chapter, he does put history into secular, not religious terms, as they do, and by the same token, attempts to avoid determinism.
NOTES


4. Ibid., p. 282.

5. Ibid.


7. Dubois, pp. 156-57.


9. Ibid., Ch. 9.

10. Ibid., pp. 171-75.


14. Ibid.


21. Ibid.

22. Essais, II.17: VS, 643.

24 Essais, III.5: VS, 845.

25 Essais, I.14: VS, 53-54.


27 Essais, II.21: VS, 677.


29 Bodin, Methodus, p. 292.

30 Essais, I.24: VS, 127.

31 Essais, II.29: VS, 708-709.

32 Essais, I.34: VS, 221.

33 Essais, III.9: VS, 960. Friedrich's view of fortune in the Essais admits of no contact between this notion and any form of causality. See his Montaigne, pp. 334-36.


36 Essais, II.8: VS, 394.

37 Essais, III.13: VS, 1068.

38 Essais, II.12: VS, 580.


40 Essais, III.6: VS, 907.

41 Essais, III.9: VS, 956.


43 Essais, II.12: VS, 467.
The development of this view of decline in the *Essais* is discussed below, in Chapters IV and V.

The beginning of I.11, "Des prognostications," in which Montaigne notices that oracles had begun to lose their authority, "bonne piece avant la venue de Jesus Christ," might be seen as an exception.


Huppert, p. 75.


Huppert, pp. 83-84.


Huppert, pp. 83-84.

*Essais*, II.36: VS, 753.

Ibid. In the *Fredegarius* two groups are described as escaping from the sack of Troy. One was headed by Francus, founder of the Frankish nation. The second group was led by one Torquatus. The story of this second group gave rise to the myth of the Trojan origin of the Turks, to which Montaigne appears to refer in the passage cited. On

58. Essais, II.36: VS, 753.


60. Essais, II.19: VS, 670.

61. Huppert, p. 79.


63. See, for example, Sayce, The Essays of Montaigne, p. 109, and Friedrich, Montaigne, pp. 77 and 151-52.


71. Ibid., p. 115.

72. Ibid., p. 117.

73. Ibid.

74. Essais, II.12: VS, 580.

75. Essais, I.28: VS, 190.

76. Essais, II.8: VS, 398.

78 Ibid., p. 148.


80 Essais, I.14: VS, 53-54.

81 Essais, III.6: VS, 908-915.

82 Essais, II.37: VS, 771.

83 Essais, I.41: VS, 256.

84 See the last speech made by Auguste's wife Livie, in Act V, Scene 3.

85 Essais, III.5: VS, 859.


Montaigne was not, of course, a historian, despite his interest in history and despite the similarities between his views and those of the historians described here in Chapters II and III. At the end of I:21, in a /c/ addition, he describes how he has sometimes been asked to write a history of his own times:

Aucuns me convient d'escrire les affaires de mon temps, estimans que je les voy d'une veue moins blessée de passion qu'un autre, et de plus pres, pour l'accès que fortune m'a donné aux chefs de divers partis.1

His reasons for not undertaking such a task are threefold. First, he says, it is too onerous for a dilettante like himself: "pour la gloire de Salluste, je n'en prendroys pas le peine; ennemy juré d'obligation, d'assiduité, de constance." His second reason is a stylistic one: short episodes are more congenial to his manner of writing than a long narration would be:

. . . il n'est rien si contraire à mon stile qu'une narration estendu: je me recoupe si souvent à faute d'haleine, je n'ay ny composition, ny explication qui vaille, ignorant au dela d'un enfant des frases et vocables qui servent aux choses plus communes.

The third reason for not writing history is prudence: "ma liberté, estant si libre, j'eusse publié des jugemens, à mon gré mesme et selon raison, illegitimes et punissables."
The passage in which these views are stated dates from the latest period of composition—post-1588. Its tone is lightly self-deprecating, and, as in many other such passages, the negative comments Montaigne makes about himself are, in fact, knowing and coquettish admissions of his strengths and achievements. The passage has the advantage of hindsight, and, as is often the case, the reader must concur with Montaigne's own judgment of his work. His comment that a history would be too laborious an undertaking is in keeping with other comments about his incapacity for sustained scholarly effort. The stylistic argument that he writes best in short bursts is certainly borne out by the form of the essays in general, by the short entries in the Journal de voyage, and by his letters. Short narrations abound in the Essais, and of course there is the long letter to his father recounting the death of La Boétie; but there is no sustained narrative account in Montaigne's work. Finally, the textual evidence also points to agreement with the statement that he speaks quite freely. The quiet refusal to change the passages in the Essais which were criticized by the Vatican during his visit to Rome, is a case in point.

With hindsight Montaigne—as well as his reader—knows that he was not suited to writing a history of France. But as he began the Essais the problem of how and what to write remained open. Indeed, although the essay form did not lack antecedents, Montaigne was essentially creating a new genre as he wrote.

Like all linguistic activity, the act of writing is (among other things) the act of making specific, that is, of rendering distinctive or unique, or, to use one of Montaigne's own terms, the act of
distinguishing. But in the act of specifying, one also assigns to a species or type; in other words one generalizes, if only by implication. The first edition of the *Essais* reveals Montaigne caught in the tension (and perhaps not always enjoying the tension) between these two complementary activities, and searching for an area in which to balance them. The progression of the text reveals a search for what to write about, what to generalize about, in short a search for what can be truthfully affirmed.

Montaigne's sources of subject-matter are chiefly history and his own past. History was not only his own favorite reading matter, but was the favored reading-matter of his social class, the rising class of educated lawyers and parlementarians, the *robins*. It was thus a common ground between himself and potential readers. And one problem that occupies the early version of the *Essais* is how to make use of this shared knowledge.

Throughout the *Essais*, this body of knowledge that Montaigne shares with the *robins* usually appears in the form of historical examples. An example is literally something that is taken out from a larger whole (from the Latin *eximere* < *ex* + *emere*, "to take" or "to buy"). It is thus both concrete and typical and can satisfy both the need for specificity and the need for generalization. As a rhetorical device it can be used to provide an instance of a larger truth already described, or to suggest a generalization that will be proffered later, or simply to suggest the existence of an argument not supplied in the text. In this last case the example becomes an excellent means of implying correction or modification of an argument and thus
circumventing the need for a developed counter-argument. Thus one question this chapter will answer is, how does Montaigne make use of the historical examples at his disposal?

The second area of enquiry will be the type of historical generalization Montaigne is prepared to make. Underlying this part of my discussion is the hypothesis that Montaigne uses, in all, six types of historical generalization and that these can be described as following a gradation from the very broadly descriptive (generalizations about global patterns in history) down to the most "applied" and prescriptive (using patterns of cause and effect to draw up lessons of conduct for the future). The first of these generalizations, and the broadest in scope, is the attribution to history of an overall pattern, such as decline, cycles, progress and the like; the second is characterization of certain historical periods that fall within the pattern; the third, the determination of the origin of various situations; fourth, establishment of a chronology of individual events; fifth, the finding, within this chronology, of patterns of cause and effect; and sixth, the extrapolation, from such patterns, of practical lessons for the future.

During this study of Montaigne's historical generalizations and his use of the historical example, a third question will emerge, namely, which overall pattern or patterns of history does Montaigne most often use? At the end of this chapter, which deals with the 1580 text, and at the end of the following chapter, which deals with the 1588 and final texts, I attempt to answer this question also. For the moment I shall leave aside the first chapter of Book I, which, as Villey points
out, was written in the period 1578-80. By the time he wrote this chapter, Montaigne had an overview of the general direction of the Essais, and Chapter 1 was fitted in after the fact, as it were. Leaving out Chapter 1, then, I shall begin with the rest of the early chapters, which were all composed at some time during the years 1572-74.

The Early Essays (1572-74): History as seen in Chapters 2-15 of Book I

The temptations of historical generalization first surface in the fifth chapter of Book I, "Si le chef d'une place assiégée doit sortir pour parlementer." The chapter opens with an example from ancient history: Lucius Marcius used a peace treaty as a stalling tactic in the war against Perseus, King of Macedonia. This enabled him to defeat the king; but the Roman Senate, "a qui le seul avantage de la vertu sembloit moyen juste pour acquérir la victoire, trouva ceste practique laide et des-honneste."  

We do not stay long in the moral sphere of the Roman Republic. In the Essais' first comparison of ancient and modern values, Montaigne points out that such probity in war is unheard of by his contemporaries. To them winning is all-important. Consequently, in peace talks, "C'est une reigle en la bouche de tous les hommes de guerre de nostre temps qu'il ne faut jamais que le gouverneur d'une place assiégée sorte luy mesmes pour parlementer." An example from recent history of a commander who did go out to parley and was believed to have acted wrongly, is cited.
But this general practical rule, derived from the unworthy practices of modern history, does not always hold true. Following the modern reasoning that he who wins is right, a commander who goes out to parley, is attacked and yet defeats the besiegers, was right to go out himself. Montaigne cites the example of Count Guy de Rangon who refused to go far from the besieged town, thus bringing the besiegers close enough to put him at an advantage when the fighting broke out.

There is another exception to the general rule: sometimes it turns out to be to the advantage of the besieged forces to trust the besieger and come out for talks. In this way, Henri de Vaux found out the weakness of his army's position and surrendered, thus avoiding further harm.

Thus Montaigne shows that a basic premise of modern warfare (winning is everything) both generates a principle (the commander should never go forth) and undermines the principle (if the commander goes forth and is successful, then his action was right). If another writer might have chosen to demonstrate that the end justifies the means in modern warfare, which would have synthesized these two apparently different viewpoints and criticized modern morality at the same time. Instead Montaigne prefers both to criticize modern morality and to find a fallacy in modern military thinking. He prefers to distinguish rather than to synthesize.

History is shown to belie the view of "tous les hommes de guerre de nostre temps," but it supports Montaigne as he argues against them to show that their rule can be broken to advantage. This essay shows a very self-confident use of the historical example to demonstrate that
simple rules for action, derived from history, are not universally applicable. Thus the most prescriptive area of historical generalization, the drawing up of lessons for the future, is refused. The comparison of ancient and modern virtues, however, remains intact: the moderns suffer throughout the essay from the background presence of the Roman Senate and its highminded virtue.

This comparison of ancient and modern values continues in the following chapter, I:6, "L'heure des parlemens dangereuse." This chapter begins with an example from the recent past: French forces had taken an enemy stronghold during peace negotiations. The enemy considered this to be treachery. Montaigne comments that their complaint was "chose qui eust heu à l'adventure apparence en un autre siecle." But, he continues, "comme je viens de dire, nos façons sont entierement esloignées de ces regles."9

There then follows an example, from ancient history, of treachery similar to that perpetrated by the French.

Cleomenes . . . ayant faict treve avec les Argiens pour sept jours, la troisiesme nuit aprés il les alla charger tous endormis, et les defict, alleguant qu'en sa treve il n'avoit pas este parlé des nuict.10

In this reference to Cleomenes (one of the kings of Sparta), Montaigne seems to be limiting his earlier assertion that complaints about treachery in war "eussent heu à l'adventure apparence en un autre siecle." The "autre siecle" (saeculum, century or period of time) does not include the Sparta of the third century B.C. (although the Spartans will later be observed to have admirable traits of courage and endurance, for example in I:24).
After the example of Cleomenes there follow four examples, from recent history, of attacks made during negotiations: two by the French, one by the Spanish, and one by the Holy Roman Emperor. Despite the semi-subversive use of the reference to Cleomenes, which casts some doubt on the initial observation that the past was better, the observation is upheld by these four unquestioned examples of modern treachery.

After these examples, ironic verses by Ariosto are quoted:

\[
\text{Fu il vincere sempre mai laudable costo}
\text{Vincasi per fortune, o per ingegno.}
\]

The quotation is followed by the observation that the Stoic philosopher Chrysippus would not have agreed that winning is always praiseworthy even when the means are, as Ariosto says, good luck or stealth.

Like the chapter that precedes it, I:6 is characterized by a confident argument criticizing modern warfare. Montaigne finds ample support in history for his assertion that modern man is treacherous. A generalization is made about the unworthiness of recent times, and no counter-arguments are offered.

I:11, "Des prognostications," is the next chapter in which Montaigne considers historical generalization. Here there is an attempt at establishing a certain chronology of events. Belief in occult ways of foretelling the future has slowly declined since ancient times, he observes. This decline is presented as having happened in three stages. First, by the time of Cicero, well before Christ, oracles had begun to lose their authority.

\[
\text{Quand aux oracles, il est certain que, bonne piece}
\text{avant la venue de Jesus Christ, ils avoient commencé}
\]
a perdre leur credit; car nous voyons que Cicero se
met en peine de trouver la cause de leur defaillance.

But if oracles had begun to be less believed well before the establish-
ment of Christianity, it was indeed the Christians who abolished the
other forms of divination of the future that the ancients had used.

... quant aux autres prognosticques, qui se
tiroyent de l'anatomie des bestes aux sacrifices,
du trepillement des poulets, du vol des oyeaux
et autres, sur lesquels l'ancieneté appoioit la
plus part des entreprinses, tant publique que
privées, nostre religion les a abolies.

Since then, future-telling has declined even further.

Et encore qu'il reste entre nous quelques moyens
de divination es astres, es esprits, es figures
du corps, es songes et ailleurs ... si est-ce
qu'elle est de beaucoup moindre en auctorité,12

The generalization is thus elaborated that belief in the occult has
slowly declined down to modern times. One might now expect a support-
ing example. Instead the historical generalization is implicitly con-
tradicted by a long example of an exception to the rule: the Marquis
of Sallusse who allowed himself to be so swayed by improbable fore-
casts of Charles V's victory in Italy that he broke his allegiance with
the French. Although Montaigne claims that this example is interesting
because it is so different from the rule, its very existence—and its
length—serve to put the generalization into question.

Chapter 12, "De la constance," returns to the question we have
seen posed in chapters 5 and 6, of how to act in a dangerous wartime
situation. Some people draw from past experience the lesson that
chance makes avoiding gunshot by ducking unlikely to succeed and
therefore "messeant."13 This is the generalization. But history shows
that there have also been instances of successful avoidance of gunshot—with the help of chance. Two examples are given: the Marquis of Guast escaping the shot of a culverine at Arles, and Lorenzo de Medici avoiding the shot of a similar weapon at Mondolfo. These examples would seem to support the opinion that one should try to avoid gunshot. But Montaigne's conclusion is that, the results being purely fortuitous, any action is as good as any other action. Again, using history as a source of advice on how to act is shown not to work satisfactorily.

The dangers of battle are also the scene of chapter 15, "On est puny pour s'opiniaster à une place sans raison." Again Montaigne is concerned with the practical lessons that can be learnt by observing the past. But this is not the only possible generalization investigated in this chapter; here Montaigne is also concerned with the question of origins.

He begins by stating that the practice of putting to death those of the enemy who obstinately defend an undefendable place is derived from the consideration that extremes of valor are unreasonable to the point of bordering on madness, and are thus to be avoided. The examples illustrate the fact that it is indeed the practice to kill all the members of small groups who try to stop the progress of a stronger army. There is no example to support the statement on the origin of this military practice, but the statement is not contradicted. It thus stands as a historical generalization.

On the other hand the objectivity of the rule is questioned. One cannot decide beforehand what will turn out to be an untenable military
position, Montaigne points out, for each commander has a different idea
of the strength of his own forces. Thus while Montaigne lets stand his
suggestion as to the origin of this military practice, he does indicate
that the practice is not consistent enough to be a basis for action,
thus once again refusing to see history as a source of lessons for the
future.

Pausing now to re-examine the five chapters discussed so far, we
can see that Montaigne has attempted four of the six types of general­
ization referred to on page 140. Beginning with the most descriptive
category, we find that he has twice attempted to characterize periods
of history. In I:5, modern war practices are unfavorably compared to
the Roman Republic's stern reliance on its own strength. In I:6, a
similar comparison is made. One reference has been made to origins, in
Chapter 15. One attempt at establishing a chronology has been made—and
questioned by implication—in Chapter 11. The fourth type of general­
ization, establishment of patterns of cause and effect, has not yet
occurred (in fact it is rare, occurring only twice in Book I). On the
other hand, three discussions have been undertaken (in Chapters 5, 12
and 15) on whether or not one can draw lessons for the future from the
past. In each case it has been found that no specific action can be
prescribed based on the lessons of history.

These first chapters were all composed in the earliest period,
1572-74. Insofar as historical generalization is concerned they are
typical of the chapters written in this period. The most common attempts
at historical generalization undertaken in the forty or so short essays
written during these years are attempts at seeing whether one can draw
practical lessons from history, that is to say whether history can be, as in the Ciceronian formula, a magistra vitae. I find nine of these discussions in the chapters dating from 1572-74, only one of which concludes that specific lessons can usefully be drawn from the past. The category of generalization that I have termed "finding patterns of cause and effect" occurs only twice in the chapters written between 1572 and 1574. Similarly I find only two attempts at establishing a chronology of events. Assigning origins is more interesting to Montaigne: there are four of this type of generalization. Finally, characterization of periods of history, the least prescriptive of the categories, shows five instances.

We can make the preliminary statement, then, that Montaigne seems to be intrigued by the idea that one might extract practical lessons from history, since he returns to this the most in the early period. But as I shall show, by the end of the early chapters he finds himself in full agreement with the idea only once. The types of observation which I have chosen to call less prescriptive (the establishment of patterns of cause and effect, and the establishment of chronology) attract his interest and receive some confirmation. But overall in the essays dating from 1572-74 he is most satisfied by the more purely descriptive observations: assigning origins and characterizing periods.

The 1572-74 Texts: History as a Guide to the Future

After Chapters 5, 12 and 15 of Book I, Montaigne returns to the question of history as a guide to the future in Chapters 23, 24, 34, 45 and 47, and in Chapter 4 of Book II.
In I:23, "De la coutume et de ne changer aisément une loi receue," Montaigne begins with the attempt to draw up a lesson in political conduct, supported by four examples from history. The lesson, a tentative one, is that "Il y a grand doute, s'il se peut trouver si evident profit au changement d'une loy receue, telle qu'elle soit, qu'il y a de mal a la remuer." The four examples which follow do not describe the evils of changing accepted laws, as one might expect in the case of such a precautionary suggestion, but are simply examples of the belief that changing such a law holds more risks than potential for good. The first example comes from the law of Thurii, a Greek city of Southern Italy:

Le législateur des Thuriens ordonna que quiconque voudroit, ou abolir une des vielles loix, ou en establir une nouvelle, se presenteroit au peuple la corde au col; affin que, si la nouvelleté n' estoit aprouvée d'un chacun, il fut incontinent estranglé.

The second and third examples come from the law of the Spartans:

Et le législateur de Lacedemone employa sa vie pour tirer de ses citoyens une promesse asseurée de n'enfreindre aucune de ses ordonnances.

The third example follows immediately:

L'ephore qui coupa si rudement les deux cordes que Phrinys avoit ajusté à la musique ne s'esmaie pas si elle en vaut mieux, ou si les accords en sont mieux remplis; il luy suffit, pour les condamner, que ce soit une alteration de la vieille façon.

The law of Marseilles also abhorred change from the old ways:

C'est ce que signifioit ceste vieille espée rouillée de Marseille. But the general rule, that it is more risky than useful to change the old laws, has its exceptions, for, "la fortune, reservant toujours
son autorité au dessus de nos discours, nous présente aucune fois la
nécèsité si urgente qu'il est besoin que les loix luy facent place."

Seven examples illustrate this. Ironically, two are taken from Spartan
history, just as two examples supporting the generalization were from
Spartan history. Again history has failed to provide an inviolable
rule of practical action.

Chapter 1:24, "Divers evenements de mesme conseil," tells how the
Duc de Guise and Augustus Caesar each dealt with conspirators whose
plans they discovered. Each revealed his knowledge of the plans to the
conspirator, then let him go free. For Augustus this was a successful
strategy: the conspirator, Cinna, became his friend and heir. But the
French prince fell victim to a similar conspiracy soon afterwards. And
Montaigne observes:

Tant c'est chose vaine et frivole que l'humaine prudence et
au travers de tous nos projets, de nos conseils et precau­
tions, la fortune maintient tousjours la possession des
evenemens.\(^\text{19}\)

No human plan for the future can be sure of working.

Later in the essay, following other reflections on the part played
by fortune in human affairs, Montaigne remarks, "Quant aux entreprinses
militaires, chacun void comment la fortune y a bonne part." At this
point he does not only reject the possibility of drawing up plans
based on the past, he doubts whether military commanders ever in fact
make the slightest attempt to formulate such plans.

Et, quand je me prens garde de prez aus plus glorieus
exploitz de la guerre, je voy, ce me semble, que ceux
qui les conduisent n'y emploient la deliberation et le
conseil que par acquit, et que, la pluspart de l'entreprinse,
ils l'abandonnent a la fortune, et, sur la fiance qu'ilz
But the failure to provide practical rules that can guarantee the outcome of an event does not result in a stalemate. Rather, the field is left open for ethical decisions untainted by pragmatism, decisions which have an aesthetic quality making them worthy of remembrance regardless of their practical success or failure. The example given is that of Julius Caesar, who tried to win his enemies over by clemency and forestalled plots against his life by simply announcing his knowledge of them. Apart from these precautions he abandoned himself "à la garde des Dieux et de la fortune." Montaigne approves of such an attitude in the face of danger: "La voye qu'y tint Julius Caesar, je trouve qu c'est la plus belle qu'on y puisse prendre." 

In I:34, "Que la fortune se rencontre au train de la raison," Montaigne lists outrageous coincidences, eight in all, which show the unpredictable hand of fortune in human affairs. In each case human expectations are contradicted by a quirk of fate. The essay leaves no doubt about the futility of trusting that the future will comply with man's planning.

In I:45, "De la bataille des Dreux," Montaigne refers to the way in which the Duc de Guise was criticized for standing aside while the enemy attacked part of his army. Instead of coming to the aid of the troops under attack, he held back until the enemy was sufficiently weakened by the fighting for him to overcome them. Montaigne argues that he should not be criticized for this, although he lost men thereby, since the aim of every commander is overall victory. In support
he quotes the example of Philopoemen who held back in a similar manner while the Spartan enemy soldiers attacked part of his army. When the Spartans had worn themselves out in the pursuit, he was able to attack and defeat them. In this chapter an ancient example supports the modern action. The two actions are found to be similar. This is the closest Montaigne comes in Book I to agreeing that the past can be put to practical use as a pattern for the future.

Chapter 47, "De l'incertitude de nostre jugement," is the last chapter in Book I in which Montaigne considers the question of history as a magistra vitae. Here he comes to a quite different conclusion from that suggested in 1:45. The chapter is a developed statement against finding in history conclusive patterns that can guide man in his actions. Six points of military strategy are proposed and questioned. In each case Montaigne shows that history provides both examples that support the strategy and examples of its failure.

The first strategic question is, should a commander pursue his advantage over the enemy once the battle appears won, or should he allow the enemy to flee? In support of following up the advantage, Montaigne reminds his reader that Pompey, by not pursuing Caesar's fleeing army, lost what had at first seemed a victory. But, on the other hand, Montaigne continues, enemy forces who are defeated and pushed to the point of despair are at their most dangerous. And he cites three examples of commanders who pursued the defeated enemy only to come to grief themselves.

The other five questions are dealt with in a similar way. Should common soldiers have splendid armor? Should the enemy be taunted with
insults? Should the leader be conspicuous in battle? Should one wait for the enemy to attack, or should one take the offensive? Should one fight on home ground or on the enemy's territory? In every instance a case can be made for both sides of the question, and examples supporting each view are found in history. Montaigne's comment about the question of whether one should fight on home or enemy ground is applicable to each of the six points discussed: "Et n'avoit pas faute d'exemples pour l'un et l'autre party."22 History cannot provide clear directives for action, because pure chance intervenes so often in human affairs. In this essay Montaigne clearly demonstrates the impasse.

In Chapter 4 of Book II, "A demain les affaires," which is also from the early period, Montaigne returns to the topic of finding lessons in history. He cites, from a passage in Plutarch on the subject of curiosity, the example of the Roman Rusticus who waited until the end of a lecture he was giving before opening a communication from the emperor. Montaigne finds that Rusticus was, as Plutarch claims, commendable for his patience, but that the delay in opening the letter was hardly prudent. He then counters Plutarch with three examples of similar delays (two taken from Plutarch himself) in which postponing the opening of a letter meant missing vitally important news. The conclusion is that:

Un sage homme peut, a mon opinion, pour l'interest d'autrui, comme pour ne rompre indecmment compagnie, ainsi que Rusticus, ou pour ne descontinuer un autre affair d'importance, remettre a entendre ce qu'on luy apporte de nouveau. Mais, pour son interest ou plaisir particulier, mesmes s'il est homme alant charge publique, pour ne rompre son disner, voire ny son sommeil, il est inexcusable de le faire.23
This conclusion is backed up by the example of the consular seat in ancient Roman etiquette—a place of honor because most accessible to messengers from outside.

Here, then, Montaigne does draw a lesson from the past, rather than assuming that fortune will make any lesson moot. It should be noted, however, that the lesson is precisely that one should be cautious and thus circumvent as many unforeseeable events as possible. Moreover, the chapter ends with the following observation:

Mais, quand tout est dit, il est malaisé es actions humaines de donner reigle si juste, par discours de raison, que la fortune n'y maintienne son droict.24

The lesson Montaigne draws is circumscribed by the sphere of action he continues to attribute to the unpredictable.

The 1572-74 Texts: Historical Patterns of Cause and Effect

As I indicated on page 148, the question of cause and effect in history is posed twice in the chapters written in the period 1572-74.

In Chapter 32, "Qu'il faut sobrement se mesler des ordonnances divines," Montaigne considers the question of divine intervention in human affairs. As in the chapters in which he broaches the question of history as a magistra vitae, he shows that the historical examples both support and refute belief in divine intervention in specific events. On one hand,

ceux [the protestants] qui eurent l'advantage au rencontre de Rochelabelle, fais[aient] grande feste de cest accident, et se serv[aient] de cete fortune pour certaine approbation de leur party.

On the other hand,
ils viennent après a excuser leurs defortunes de Montcontour et de Jarnac sur ce que ce sont verges et chastimens paternels. . .

The contradiction is obvious, and must be evident to the protestant rank and file as well as to the leaders, who,

s'ils n'ont un peuple du tout a leur merci . . . luy font assez aisément sentir que c'est prendre d'un sac deux moulures, et de mesme bouche souffler le chaud et le froid. 25

However, this discussion differs from those of the previous category. Montaigne is not leading his reader through the discussion, making an apparently neutral presentation first of one set of examples then of the other. This is more intently persuasive writing. Rather than first suggesting possible belief in the argument that God helped the protestants at Rochelabeille, he calls the occurrence "cet accident" and "cête fortune." That God does not intervene in human affairs is presented as a conviction, not as a topic for the essaying of his and the reader's judgment. It is not an open question for him and perhaps because of this it does not hold the same interest as the question of whether history can be a guide to the future; whatever the reason he does not return to the topic in Book I.

Of course the refusal to believe in a God who is willing to help out individual political parties is far from indicating any lack of Christian belief. Just as, in the "Apologie," Montaigne expresses belief in a transcendent God whose existence is manifested by a Nature which surpasses human understanding (not the carefully explained, man-centered Nature of Sebond), so here he states:
A transcendent God and secular explanations of history are quite compatible.

When Montaigne again takes up the question of cause and effect in history, he proffers only secular explanations. This discussion takes place in Chapter 51, "De la vanité des paroles." The topic of this chapter is rhetoric, which, in its sense of unsupported yet persuasive discourse ("un'art piperesse et mensongere") is distasteful to Montaigne throughout the Essais.

Since it is so often used to sway the judgment of the masses, the art of rhetoric is of little use in a well-ordered state:

Les republiques qui se sont maintenues en un estât réglé et bien policé, comme la Cretense ou la Lacedemonienne, elles n'ont pas fait grand conte d'orateurs.

But when order breaks down, it is needed:

c'est un util inventé pour manier et agiter une tourbe et une commune desreiglée et util qui ne s'emploie qu'aus estats malades, comme la medecine.

Examples of such states follow:

En ceus où le peuple, ou les ignorans, ou tous ont tout peu, comme celuy d'Athènes, de Rhodes et de Rome, et où les choses ont esté en perpetuelle tempeste, la ont foisonné les orateurs.

These examples are backed up by examples of the orators themselves who have thus prospered. (The list of names begins with the best-known and deteriorates into a list of similar-sounding syllables, evoking
the empty words Montaigne imputes to the orators in question.)

Pompeius, Caesar, Crassus, Lucullus, Lentulus, Metellus ont pris de... leur [eloquence] plus grand appui a se monter a cette grandeur d'autorité ou ils sont enfin arrivéz, et s'en sont aydez plus que les armes.

An increase in political instability causes an increase in the amount of rhetoric heard:

On remarque... que l'art d'eloquence a fleuri le plus, lors que les affaires ont esté en plus mauvais estat, et que l'orage des guerres civiles les a agitez.

Monarchies produce fewer orators than republics, where the government is in the hands of the people:

car la bestise et facilité qui se trouve en la commune, et qui la rend subiecte a estre maniée et contournée par les oreilles au dous son de cête harmonie, sans venir a poiser et connoitre la vérité des choses par la force de la raison, cête défaillance ne se trouve pas aisément en un seul, et est plus aisé de le garentir par bon conseil de l'impression de cête poison.

Examples follow to support this statement:

On n'a pas veu sortir de Macedoine, ny de Perse, nul orateur de renom.27

Thus Montaigne shows that varying political conditions are the cause of the power rhetoric gains at various moments in history.

As in the previously-discussed passage on divine intervention in human affairs, Montaigne here presents his views as a conviction. Rather than lead the reader through an argument, he simply presents what he sees as being the facts, giving examples to support his case. Ironically, his method here (in a passage that criticizes rhetoric) is closer to his own negative interpretation of rhetoric than in the
passages on history as a guide to the future, where he gently obliges the reader to take part in his process of reasoning.

The 1572-74 Texts: Establishment of Chronology

In Chapter 16, "De la punition de la couardise," Montaigne attempts, as he had in I:11, to establish a chronology. The Greek Charondas, he notes, was said to have been the first to use humiliation as a punishment for cowardice. Ancient Roman laws, on the other hand, appear to have condemned cowards to death. One example quoted appears to show this: Ammianus Marcellinus tells that the Emperor Julian had ten of his soldiers executed for cowardice and that he did this "suivant les loix antiennes." But Montaigne then mentions another example of the Emperor Julian's practice in which other offenders were not executed. Again, by quoting conflicting examples, by distinguishing, Montaigne puts the historical generalization into question.

The 1572-74 Texts: Establishment of Origins

As I mentioned earlier, Montaigne is quite interested in the question of origins. In the passage treated above, we see that he is interested in the fact that Charondas might have been the first to use a certain type of punishment. We find a recurrence of this interest in origins in I:28, and I:36 (as well as in Chapter I:15, discussed above on page 146).

In I:28, "De l'amitié," Montaigne discusses origins in the sense not merely of who or what came first, but in the sense of what was the reason for the beginning of a certain practice. Here the question is,
"pourquoy les faiseurs de loix . . . defendent les donations entre le mary et la femme." Such a prohibition originated, he believes, in the desire to equate marriage with the "divine liaison" of souls that is the idea of true friendship.

In I:36, "De l'usage de se vestir," the question is asked, si la façon d'aller tout nud de ces nations dernièrement trouvées est une façon forcée par la chaude temperature de l'air, comme nous disons des Indiens et des Mores, ou si c'est l'originele des hommes.

Montaigne reasons that:

tout estant exactement fourny ailleurs de filet et d'equille pour se maintenir son estre, il est a la vérité mecreable que nous soions seuls produits en estat defectueus et indigent, et en estat qui ne se puisse maintenir sans secours estranger.

And he concludes:

Ainsi je tiens que, comme les plantes, arbres, animaux et tout ce qui vit se trouve naturelement equipé de suffisante couverture pour se defendre de l'injure du temps . . . aussi estions nous.

If clothing is now a necessity for people of this climate, it is because,

comme ceux qui esteignent par artificielle lumiere cele du jour, nous avons esteint et estouffé nos propres moyens par les moyens empruntez et estrangers. Et est aisé a voir que c'est la coustume qui nous faict impossible ce qui ne l'est pas.

Custom, as so often in the Essais, is seen as a cause of deterioration. (I return to this topic later, in Chapter V.) Moreover, as we saw in the discussion of I:32 and I:51, the reasoning is purely secular. The accepted Christian explanation for the wearing of clothes was, of
course, that they covered man's shame. Here, Montaigne gives a purely areligious, historical explanation.

The 1572-74 Texts: Characterization of Historical Periods

There are four discussions of origins in the early Essais. As I mentioned earlier, there are five substantial characterizations of periods of history. The first two take place in Chapters 5 and 6 of Book I, the others in Chapters 49 and 52 of Book I and in Chapter 2 of Book II. In Chapters 5 and 6 of the first book, ancient Roman and modern practices are characterized contrastively. In Chapter 49, "Des coutumes anciennes," Montaigne describes a heterogeneous selection of the customs of the ancients, partly for their intrinsic interest and partly for the way they contrast instructively with modern customs. Montaigne finds the moderns seriously lacking in strength and strength of character:

... en toute sorte de magnificence, de desbauche et d'inventions voluptueuses, de mollesse et de sumptuosité, nous y faisons, a la vérité, ce que nous pouvons pour les égaler: car nostre volonté est bien aussi gastée que la leur, mais la suffisance ne les peut égaler. Nos forces ne sont non plus capables de les joindre en ces parties la vitieuses qu'aux vertueuses: car les unes et les autres partent d'une vigueur d'esprit qui estoit, sans comparaison, plus grande en eus qu'en nous; et les ames, a mesure qu'elles sont moins fortes, elles ont d'autant moins de moyen de faire ny fort bien, ny fort mal.32

In Chapter 52, "De la parsimonie des anciens," Montaigne lists six examples of the simple, unextravagant ways of some of the great figures of the ancient past. Attilius Regulus and Cato the Elder provide the two lengthiest examples.
In Book II the second chapter, "De l'yvrognerie," establishes the fact that the ancients had a much more lenient attitude towards drunkenness than the moderns. Inebriation, Montaigne observes, is a stupid vice, but not a maliciously-intended one. Even the vices of the ancients are moderate, pointing to their lack of evil compared to Montaigne's contemporaries.

The Essays of 1578-80

In the chapters written in the later period, Montaigne's historical reflections take a different turn. The most prescriptive generalization, the attempt to draw up lessons for the future, which was the most commonly considered in the early chapters, disappears—with the exception of the first chapter of Book I. On the other hand, the number of instances of the most broadly descriptive generalization found in the 1572-74 texts, the attempt to see patterns in the past, increases from one in the early chapters to nine in the later ones. Similarly, the attempts at establishing chronology cease and only one investigation of patterns of cause and effect is made, while the categories I have called "characterization of historical periods" and "assignment of origins," both of which I see as more descriptive types of generalization, become larger.

The 1578-80 Texts: History as a Guide to the Future

In the discussion of the first book we saw that on nine occasions Montaigne considered the question of whether lessons of conduct for the future could be predicated on the past, and that in I:47 he seemed
to come to the conclusion that they could not. Chapter I:47, as we saw, is a fairly lengthy statement that, because of the large element of unpredictability in human affairs, no clear-cut rules can be drawn up; in fact equally good arguments can be made in support of conflicting rules.

In the period 1578-80 Montaigne composed the first essay of Book I, "Par divers moyens on arrive a pareille fin." The chapter begins with a brief observation about a particular type of wartime situation.

La plus commune façon d'amollir les coeurs de ceux qu'on a offensé, lors qu'ayant vengeance en main, ils nous tiennent a leur mercy, c'est de les émouvoir a commiseration et a pitié.

Demonstrating immediately a trait he will put into words in a /c/ passage—"Distingo est le plus universel membre de ma logique"—Montaigne makes another suggestion:

 toutes-fois la braverie, la constance et la résolution, moyens tous contraires, ont quelque fois servi a ce mesme effet.

There follow three examples of courage that elicited the mercy of the oppressor. Edward, Prince of Wales, putting down an uprising in Limoges, was moved to pity when he saw three French noblemen fighting bravely against the whole of his own army. Scanderbach, Prince of Epire, intending to kill one of his own soldiers, was moved by the man's courage and spared his life. The Emperor Conrad III would only allow that the women of a besieged town take with them what they could carry on their own shoulders. But when these women took their children, husbands and their commander on their shoulders, he was so moved by their courage that he treated his captives humanely. Each of these
examples shows the oppressor initially indifferent to pleas for mercy but moved by a display of courage to "se rendre a la seule reverence et respect de la sainte image de la vertu."

After this observation another distinction is made. The commanders described in each of the examples were each possessed of "une ame forte et imployable, ayant en affection et en honneur une vertu vive masle et obstinée." More ordinary people, the "ames moins geneureuses," have a different psychological makeup and can be swayed simply by "estonnement et admiration."34 The example demonstrating this distinction comes from Plutarch. Pelopidas and Epaminondas, on trial for illegally extending their length of time in office, defended themselves in different ways. Pelopidas begged for mercy, whereas Epaminondas boasted of his past achievements and reproached the people for their charge against him. The result was that Pelopidas was freed, but only just, whereas in Epaminondas' case the citizens did not even vote but dispersed spontaneously, "louant grandement la hautesse du courage de ce personnage."35

There then follows one of Montaigne's best-known observations: "Certes c'est un subject merveilleusement vain, divers et ondoyant que l'homme. Il est malaisé d'y fonder nul jugement constant et uniforme."36 These two sentences sum up what precedes and introduce the last two examples: Pompey pardoned a town because of one citizen who courageously demanded to take all the penalty upon himself; but Sylla was unmoved by a similar show of courage.

Again Montaigne has come to the conclusion that the past does not provide easy lessons for the future. In doing so he makes the reader
take part in the movement towards the conclusion: the first three examples seem to indicate that there are patterns in the past; then a difference (between the superior man and the common people) is pointed out; following this, the final two examples show the same conduct eliciting different responses. Despite appearances to the contrary, man's conduct cannot be predicted.

The 1578–80 Texts: Historical Patterns of Cause and Effect

In the next category, patterns of cause and effect, there is only one passage. This is in Chapter 15 of the second book, "Que nostre desir s'accroit par la malaisance." The chapter dates from the period 1575–76, that is to say earlier than most of the essays in Book II, but the passage I am interested in here is part of a long development added in the 1582 edition. Here, to the despair of the reader who would render Montaigne's Christianity down to a tedious coherence, the statement is made (in contradiction to the passage in I:32 where divine intervention in history is denied\textsuperscript{37}) that the religious wars are the result of divine providence's intention to stir the faithful to action:

C'est un effect de la providence divine de permettre sa saincte eglise estre agitée, comme nous la voyons, de tant de troubles et d'orages, pour esveiller par ce contraste les ames pies, et les ravoir de l'oisiveté et du sommeil où les avoit plongez une si longue tranquillité.\textsuperscript{38}

This brief passage is the closest Montaigne comes in the second book to considering patterns of cause and effect; and, as we saw, the passage dates from later than the composition of the rest of Book II.
The 1578-80 Texts: Establishment of Origins

As I stated earlier (page 161 above), there are no attempts at establishing a chronology in these later chapters, so we must now move on to consider the category of origins. Montaigne continues to be quite interested in this aspect of history: we find five reflections on origins in the chapters in question.

In I:31, "Des cannibales," he discusses whether the New World was originally the Atlantis mentioned by Plato, or perhaps the fertile island mentioned by the Carthaginians. But he finds that neither description corresponds to what is known of the New World.

In II:7, "Des recompenses d'honneur," he attempts to explain why the Frenchmen of his time consider physical courage ("la vaillance") to be the primary virtue. There are two speculations as to why this might be. The first is that "la vaillance" was probably the quality which first gave some men power over others. The second is that the Romans, and later the French, each being a warlike people, prized their own most characteristic quality the most highly:

Il est vray semblable que la premiere vertu qui se soit faite paroistre entre les hommes, et qui a donné avantage aux uns sur les autres, ça esté cete cy, par laquelle les plus forts et courageus se sont rendus maistres des plus foibles, et ont aquis reng et reputation particuliere: d'ou luy est demeuré cet honneur et dignité de langage; ou bien que ces nations, estant tres-belliqueuses, ont donné le pris a celle des vertus qui leur estoit la plus familiere, et le plus digne tiltre. 39

In this passage at the end of "Des recompenses d'honneur," the explanation of origins is offered as a speculation. The reader is left to consider and perhaps chose for himself. In the following chapter
"De l'affection des peres aus enfans," however, Montaigne considers the origins of the Salic law, and states his explanation quite firmly. He believes that women should not normally have power over men, and finds that it is the reasonableness of this idea which allowed the establishment of the law excluding women from monarchic power:

il me semble, je ne sçay comment, qu'en toutes façons la maistrise n'est aucunement due aux femmes sur les hommes, sauf la maternelle et naturelle. . . . C'est l'apparence de cette consideration qui nous a fait forger et donner pied si volontiers a cette loy que nul ne veid onques, qui prive les femmes de la succession de cette Couronne, et n'est guere seigneurie au monde ou elle ne s'allegue, comme icy, par une vray-semblance de raison qui l'authorise. . . .

Later in Chapter 8 Montaigne considers origins simply in the sense of "what came first." He notes that a certain Labienus of Rome was the first man to suffer the penalty of having his books publicly burned.

In Chapter 17, "De la praesumption," Montaigne returns to the subject of origins in a speculation which contradicts the suggestions we have just seen made in "Des recompenses d'honneur" that physical courage was the first source of one man's power over another:

La premiere distinction qui aie esté entre les hommes et la premiere consideration qui donna des preeminences aux uns sur les autres, il est vray-semblable que ce fut l'avantage de la beauté.

Thus Montaigne's interest in origins remains about the same in both of the main periods of composition of the 1580 edition. Four passages in the early chapters and five in the later chapters deal with this category. We have seen that Montaigne seems at first fascinated with the most prescriptive historical generalizations, and subsequently loses interest in them. At the same time he loses what interest he had
in the less prescriptive categories of establishing cause and effect relationships and of establishing chronology. Establishment of origins, however, I see as a more descriptive type of generalization, and, while his observations on this subject increase only slightly in number in the later chapters, Montaigne continues to offer his observations on origins without any of the subsequent contradictions or implied doubts that he used in writing of the more prescriptive categories. Reflection on origins is a category of historical generalization with which Montaigne seems to have been comfortable, and this does not change from the early to the later period.

The 1578-80 Texts: Characterization of Historical Periods

On moving one more step along the scale from prescriptive to descriptive types of generalization, to the category of generalization that I call "characterization of periods," we find that Montaigne now includes another period in addition to "l'ancienneté." The addition is the period constituted by the generation immediately preceding his own, the "temps de nos peres." The most frequent type of generalization is, however, the description of the ancients, and, as in Book I, most of these descriptions are also comparisons, explicitly or implicitly made, with the moderns.

This comparison is made, with modern man as the starting point, in Chapter 11, "De la cruauté." The extreme barbarism of modern man is described, and Montaigne observes that he can find nothing comparable in ancient history.
In Chapter 17, "De la praesumption," the ancients are thought of as having embodied perfection—modern man can equal them in no area of endeavor:

Je connoy des hommes assez qui ont diverses parties belles: qui l'esprit, qui le coeur, qui l'adresse, qui la conscience, qui le langage, qui une science, qui un'autre: mais de grand homme en general, non pas parfait, mais encore ayant tant de belles pieces ensemble qu'on s'en doive estonner, ou le comparer a ceux que nous connoissons du temps passé, ma fortune ne m'en a fait voir nul (emphasis added).

Only La Boetie, in recent times, attained an admirable degree of virtue:

Et le plus grand que j'ay connu, je dy des parties naturelles de l'ame, et le mieux né, c'estoit Estienne de La Boetie: c'estoit vrayement un'ame pleine, et qui monstroit un beau visage a tout sens. C'estoit proprement un'ame a la vieille merque, et qui eust produit de grans effetz, si sa fortune l'eust voulu. . . (emphasis added).

At the end of Chapter 18, "Du dementir," Montaigne again compares levels of violence in modern and ancient times, as he had in "De la cruauté." Why, he wonders, do men nowadays attach so much importance to insults, which are, in fact, only words:

Quant aus divers usages de nos dementiz, et les loix de nostre honneur en cela, et les changemens qu'elles ont receus, ie remets a une autrefois d'en dire dire ce que j'en pense; et apprendray cependant, si je puis, en quel temps print commencement cete coustume de si exactement poiser et mesurer les parolles, et d'y attacher nostre honneur.

This was not the practice of the ancient Greeks or Romans:

... il est aisé a juger qu'elle [this practice] n'estoit anciennement entre les Romains et les Grecs; et m'a semblé souvent nouveau et estrange de les voir se dementir et s'injurier, sans entrer pourtant en querelle. Les lois de leur devoir prenoient quelque autre trein que les nostres. On appelle Caesar
tantost voleur, tantost yvrogne, a sa barbe. Nous voyons la liberté des invectives qu'ils font les uns contre les autres (je dy les plus grands chefs de guerre de l'une et l'autre nation), ou les parolles se revengent seulement par les parolles, et ne se tirent a autre consequence.43

In II:29, "De la vertu," the ancients are again seen as embodying perfection, as in "De la praesumption." Montaigne refers to "ces heros du temps passe" and compares them to "[nous autres] avortons d'hommes."44

However, as I noted above, the ancient world is not the only period Montaigne characterizes. Another period described in Book II is that of the immediately preceding generation, the "temps de nos peres." During this period, Montaigne observes in Chapter 27, "Couardise mere de la cruauté," men were moderate in their vengeance:

Noz peres se contentaient de revancher une injure par un dementi, un dementi par un coup de baton, et ainsi, par ordre: ils estoient assez valeureus pour ne craindre pas leur ennemi vivant et outragé.

The men of Montaigne's generation, on the other hand, are afraid of any enemy and are consequently much more barbaric in their actions:

Nous tremblons de frayeur tant que nous le voyons en pieds. Et qu'il soit ainsi, nostre belle pratique d'aujourd'huy port'elle pas de poursuivre a mort, aussi bien celuy que nous mesmes avons offencé, que celui qui nous a offencés?45

A similar comparison is made between Rome under the Republic and Rome under the Empire. There are two instances of this comparison, both in the "Apologie." In both cases the progression from simplicity and ignorance to learning and refinement has been accompanied by an increase in vice:
Qui contera les hommes par leurs actions et deportemens, il s'en trouvera plus grand nombre d'excellens entre les ignorans qu'entre les sçavans: je dis, en toute sorte de vertu. La vieille Rome me semble avoir bien porté des hommes de plus grande valeur, et pour la paix, et pour la guerre, que ceste Rome plus sçavante qui se ruina soy-mesmes. Quand le demeurant seroit tout pareil, aumoins la preud'hommie et l'innocence demeureroit du costé de l'ancienne: car elle loge singulierement bien avec la simplicité.46

A few pages further on one finds a very similar observation:

C'estoit ce que disoit un Senateur Romain des derniers siecles, que leurs predecesseurs avoient l'alaine puante a l'ail, et l'estomac musqué de bonne conscience; et qu'au rebours ceux de son temps ne sentoient au dehors que le parfum, puans au dedans a toute sorte de vices: c'est a dire, comme je pense, qu'ilz avoient beaucoup de sçavoir et de suffisance, et grand faute de preudhomme. L'incivilité, l'ignorance, la simplesse, la rudesse, s'accompaignent volontiers de l'innocence. La curiosité, le sçavoir, la subtilité trainent la malice a leur suite.47

Thus in the two groupings of periods that Montaigne makes (Rome of the Republic and the Rome of the Empire; the previous generation of Frenchmen and his own generation) decline is the only form of progression he sees.48 On three occasions in Book II these two groupings of periods are juxtaposed.

In Chapter 9, "Des armes des Parthes," Montaigne compares the moderns' ways of wearing armor with the ways of the previous generation ("nos peres") and with the ways of the ancients. In this threefold comparison, the ways of the moderns are found to be the worst.

In Chapter 33, "L'histoire de Spurina," Montaigne tells of "un prince" who decided, on a whim, to wear his father's hair shirt. "Mais, quelque devotion qu'il eust . . . il ne sceut avoir la patience d'atendre la nuit pour se despouiller, et en fut long temps malade."49

It seems that the younger generation does not have the mental and
physical fortitude of its predecessors. Then follows an example from
the ancient period which eclipses both the more recent examples:

Xenocrates y proceda plus rigoureusement; car ses
disciples, luy ayant fourré dans son lict Lais, cete
belle et fameuse courtisane, toute nue, sauf les armes
de sa beauté et de ses mignardises et folastrez apastz,
sentant qu'en despit de ses discours et de ses regles,
le corps revesche et mutin commençoit a se rendre, il se
fit brusler les membres qui avoient presté l'oreille a
cete rebellion.

Although in other passages in which similar self-destructive actions
are described Montaigne will show his distaste, here there seems to be
no overtone of disapproval. The ancient figure of Xenocrates seems
simply to be viewed as much more stalwart than the two moderns.

In the following chapter, "Observations sur les moyens de faire
la guerre de Julius Caesar," we find another threefold comparison.
Caesar was not as virtuous as the earlier Romans, but he easily sur-
passes the men of Montaigne's time.

In Chapter 18, "Du dementir," there is another variation of the
comparison between periods of history. Here the French of ancient
times are compared with Montaigne's contemporaries. Not surprisingly,
the more recent period is found wanting. In ancient times Salvianus
Massiliensis observed that lying was a vice peculiar to the French.
Today, observes Montaigne, the situation has become even worse: the
French have degenerated to the point that they consider dissimulation
to be a virtue.

As we have seen, Montaigne's historical reflections change in
character in the later Essais of the 1580 edition. The most "prescrip-
tive" generalization, the attempt at extrapolating lessons from history,
almost disappears, while the number of the most broadly descriptive generalizations found in the earlier chapters, the characterization of historical periods, increases. Montaigne's interest in origins remains about the same, but he loses interest in both the establishment of chronology and establishing patterns of cause and effect.

The 1578-80 Texts: Overall Patterns in History

In addition to the changes in Montaigne's historical thought which I enumerate above, a category of generalization even less prescriptive than characterization of periods is introduced in 1578-80: consideration of overall patterns of history.51 Turning now to this broadest of descriptive categories, in which a judgment is made of the whole of the human past, we see that the first instances in Book II are found in the skeptical center of the book, the "Apologie de Raimond Sebond." In the five instances of this type of generalization I find in the "Apologie," the pattern of history considered is the progressive pattern. The underlying question is: do human affairs improve slowly through time, and the answer, given in various ways is, no.

The first occurrence of this topic in the "Apologie" owes much to Biblical and classical notions of a lost paradise (the latter coming, in this case, from Montaigne's knowledge of Lucretius) and to the literature on the discoveries made in the New World. Montaigne notes that some men believe they have less natural strength and protection than animals. They should not make such statements, he believes, for "il y a en la police du monde une esgalité plus grande et une relation plus uniforme." Nature has provided sufficiently for all her children,
witness the recently discovered natives of the New World:

Indeed, he goes on to suggest, man's technology may have made nature less, rather than more, bountiful: "nostre mere nature nous avoit munis a planté de tout ce qu'il nous falloit; voire, comme il est vraissemblable, plus pleinement et plus richement qu'elle ne faict a present que nous y avons meslé nostre artifice."^53

Man's "artifice," his techne, is seen as leading to deterioration rather than to the intended improvement. Montaigne does not question the fact that knowledge of one sort or another accumulates; his questions are, rather, is this accumulation in any way a force for good, and has it managed to improve man's lot? The answer from Lucretius (who is quoted immediately following the passage discussed) is negative on at least the second concern, while the Christian position taken in the "Apologie" is, of course, negative on both counts.

In the second occurrence of this topic in the "Apologie," Montaigne introduces the pagan Cicero and his proud belief in learning—the very antithesis of the Christian position:

Il n'est rien, diet Cicero, si dous que l'occupation des lettres: de ces lettres, dis-je, par le moyen desquelles l'infini des choses, l'immense grandeur de nature, les cleus en ce monde mesme, et les terres et les mers, nous sont découvertes; ce sont elles qui nous ont appris la religion, la moderation, la grandeur de courage, et qui ont arraché nostre ame des tenebres, pour luy faire voir toutes choses hautes, basses, premières, dernières et
moyennes. . . . Ce sont elles qui nous fournissent de quoy bien et heureusement vivre, et nous guident à passer nostre aage sans desplaisir et sans offence.\footnote{54}

This passage contains some of the self-satisfaction that annoyed Montaigne in the writings of Sebond himself. The assumption that everything has been revealed to man through man's own efforts prompts him to puncture this overweening pride: "Cetuy cy ne semble il pas parler de la condition de Dieu tout-vivant et tout-puissant?" Then, discussing Cicero's second claim that the study of letters has had a moral impact, he applies the criterion which is elaborated at length in "Du pedantisme" and "De l'institution des enfans": has the claimed learning contributed to the individual learner's moral improvement? In this case he finds that it has not, for even women—how humiliating—have led better lives than Cicero, despite all his learning: "mille femmelettes ont vescu au village une vie plus equable, plus douce et plus constant que la sienne."\footnote{55} The force for improvement which Cicero claims for letters is denied on both the scientific and the moral level, with the help of two \textit{ad hominem} arguments.

A few pages further on in the "Apologie," Montaigne returns to the question in a different form, asking, what does man really know with certainty after so many centuries of accumulated learning?

Si me faut il voir en fin s'il est en la puissance de l'homme de trouver ce qu'il cherche; et si ceste queste, qu'il y a employé depuis tant de siecles, l'a enrichi de quelque nouvelle force et de quelque verité solide.\footnote{56}

In spite of all his attempts, Montaigne concludes, man has reached no certainty: "Je croy qu'il me confessera, s'il parle en conscience, que tout l'aquest qu'il a retiré d'une si longue poursuite, c'est d'avoir
apris a reconnoistre sa vilité et sa foiblesse." There follows a description of the change in attitude of those who spend their time acquiring knowledge:

Il est advenu aux gens veritablement sçavans ce qui advient aux espies de bled: ils vont s'eslevant et se haussant la teste droite et fiere tant qu'ils sont vuides, mais quand ils sont pleins et grossis de grain en leur maturité, ils commencent a s'humilier et a baisser les cornes.

This change within the individual is paralleled in history:

Pareillement les hommes, ayant tout essayé et tout sondé, n'ayant trouvé, en tout cet amas de science et provision de tant de choses diverses, rien de massif et de ferme, et rien que vanité, ilz ont renoncé a leur presomption et reconnu leur condition naturelle.

The background of the "Apologie" is continually the disapproval of human pride that is seen in both the passages referred to here. Consequently Montaigne's next consideration of progress is somewhat surprising. Immediately following a passage which ridicules some of the silliness that passes for knowledge—"il ne faut que savoir que le lieu de Mars loge au milieu du triangle de la main; celuy de Venus, au pouce. .."—there is a long section describing and apparently celebrating man's continual passion for discovery and the possibilities for collective accumulation of knowledge that are thus made available:

il est malaisé de donner bornes a nostre esprit: il est curieux et avide, et n'a nulle occasion de s'arrester plus tost a mile pas qu'a cinquante. Ayant essayé, par experience, que ce a quoy l'un s'estoit failly, l'autre y est arrivé, et que ce qui estoit inconnu a un siecle, le siecle, suivant l'a esclaircy, et que les sciences et les arts ne se jettent pas en moule, ains se forment et figurent peu a peu, en les maniant et polissant a
Plusieurs fois, comme les ours façonnent leurs petitz, en les lechant et formant à loisir: ce que ma force ne peut découvrir, je ne laisse pas de le sonder et essayer; et en retastant et pestrisant cette nouvelle matière, la remuant et l'eschaufant, j'ouvre à celuy qui me suit quelque facilité pour en jouir plus a son ayse, et la lui rendz plus souple et plus maniable. . . .

Autant en fera le segond au tiers, qui fait que la difficulté ne me doit pas desesperer, ny aussi peu mon impuissance, car ce n'est que la mienn.e.

Is this an example of Montaigne "trembling on the verge of the idea of progress"? Sayce, for example, suggests that it is, and certainly by the end of the passage, Montaigne seems to be carried away by the force of his idea. But the passage contains no affirmation of moral gain to be acquired from an increase in knowledge. The forward movement is only progress if it is viewed in a positive light, and Montaigne's context, if not the apparent implication of these sentences, is negative. The mind presses onward because it is "curieus et avide." The search for knowledge, as Montaigne sees it, is an extreme state, a state of feverish activity, and he contrasts it with the measured opinion of Aristotle's disciple Theophrastus that:

l'humaine cognoissance acheminée par les sens pouvoit juger des causes des choses jusques a certaine mesure, mais . . . estant arrivée aux causes extremes et premieres, il falloit qu'elle s'arrestat, et qu'elle rebouchat, a cause ou de sa foyblesse ou de la difficulté des choses.

Montaigne approves of this view but finds that it is not supported by the facts:

C'est une opinion moyenne et douce que nostre suffizance nous peut conduire jusques a la cognoissance d'aucunes choses, et qu'elle a certaines mesures de puissance, outre lesquelles c'est temerité de l'employer. Cette opinion est plausible et introduite par gens de composition, mais il est malaisé de donner bornes a nostre esprit . . .
The brief, almost lyrical, outburst that follows contrasts strangely not only with the passages that precede it, but also with the statement immediately following. Here Montaigne asserts that men can claim no knowledge since they cannot even agree about the composition of their own souls or about the working of their own bodies.

This refusal to admit that man has any certain knowledge—a refusal in which both Christian and skeptical elements are present in varying degrees at different points—brings Montaigne back to the subject of the progression of knowledge through time, a few pages further on. Here the skeptical element, keeping happy company with Montaigne's scorn for "nouvelleté," is more in evidence than the Christian constituent of his thought.

He leads in to the subject by noting his own credibility:

Les escrits des anciens, je dis les bons escrits, pleins et solides, ilz me persuadent et me remuent comme ils veulent: celuy que je voy me semble tousjours le plus roide. Je les trouve avoir raison chacun a son tour, quoy qu'ilz maintiennent des propositions contraires.

Then he makes one of the leaps into disbelief that, as we noted in the previous chapter (page 102), are typical of extreme skepticism. From the observations that all ancient writings can convince him in their turn, and that these writings contradict each other, the extreme conclusion is drawn that all should be considered false:

Cette aysance que les bons espritz ont de rendre ce qu'ils veulent vraisemblable, et qu'il n'est rien si estrange a quoy ilz n'entreprendent de donner assez de couleur pour tromper une simplicité pareille a la mienne, cela monstre la faiblesse de leur preuve.

This personal experience is then transferred to the historical plane: no system of knowledge is entirely convincing, and change is not
Progression of knowledge is not seen as progress, because the validity of each step is questioned. Even the fact that the theory works ("Copernicus . . . s'en sert tres-reglement a toutes les consequences astrologiennes"), which the scientific mind would consider to be adequate demonstration of its validity, is disregarded in this extremely skeptical passage.

Sayce claims that Montaigne "took the theories of Copernicus more seriously than the brief account in the 'Apologie' might lead one to suppose," and suggests that his concept of "le branle," expressed so forcibly at the beginning of "Du repentir," might derive in part from his awareness of Copernicus' confirmation that the earth itself was in movement. In this passage in the "Apologie," however, any scientific adhesion to the theory is put aside in favor of the skeptical argument that there is no certainty and therefore no progress in human knowledge.

In II:23, "Des mauvais moyens employes a bonne fin," Montaigne suggests a parallel between the life of the human body and the life of the state:

Les maladies et conditions de nos corps se voyent aussi aux estats et polices; les royaumes, les republiques naissent, fleurissent et fanissent de vieillesse comme nous. Nous
sommes sujets à une repletion d'humeurs inutile et
nuisible; soit de bonnes humeurs, ... soit repletion de
mauvaises humeurs, qui est l'ordinaire cause des maladies.
De semblable repletion se voient les estats souvent malades;
et a l'on accoustumé d'user de diverses sortes de purga-
tion.65

This comparison includes a cyclical view of history ("les royaumes, les
republiques naissent, fleurissent et fânissent comme nous") which is
not necessarily incompatible with the non-progressieve view found in the
"Apologie." Cycles of birth and decline could easily be conceived of as
taking place within an overall pattern of decline.

In II.36, "Des plus excellents hommes," the non-progressieve view
is again found. Homer is described as having brought perfection to
poetry and other forms of knowledge from the very beginning: "L'enfance
de la poesie et de plusieurs autres sciences, il l'a rendue meure,
parfaicte et accomplie."66

The final generalization about patterns of history comes at the
end of the last chapter of the second book, "De la resemblance des enfans
aus peres." If this final chapter is in any way a summing up of the
themes of Book II, then perhaps the non-progressieve view of history is
the one Montaigne "really" expresses in the second book. In this chap-
ter, during his discussion of the uses of medecine, he declares: "Il
n'est nation qui n'ait esté plusieurs siecles sans la medecine, et les
premiers siecles, c'est a dire les meilleurs et les plus heureus"67
(emphasis added). The observation is later exemplified by the conte
(this is the term Montaigne uses) telling the history of the Lahontan
region which had enjoyed stability, prosperity and good health, "de
toute l'ancienneté," until the introduction quite recently ("de la
mémoire de leurs peres") of first the legal profession and then the medical profession. It is interesting to note that the vocabulary denotes the same scale of values as was found in Montaigne's discussion of the characteristics of different historical periods. "L'ancienneté" is the superior moment in time, the fairly recent past is a moment of decline, and the present period is worst of all.68

As we can see from this discussion of the most descriptive generalizations about history, there is no overall, systematic view in the later chapters of the 1580 edition. But there is a greater readiness to indulge in such tentative speculation than in the earliest chapters, and, if we take into account the preference for antiquity found in the characterizations of historical periods, there is a definite preference for the notion of decline.
NOTES

1 Essais, I.21: VS, 106.
2 TR, 1347-60.
3 See Sayce, The Essays of Montaigne, pp. 206-208, for a discussion of Montaigne's attitude towards the corrections suggested by the papal censor.
6 VS, 97.
7 Essais, I.5: DB i, 13.
8 Ibid., 14.
9 Essais, I.6: DB i, 15.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid., 16.
13 Essais, I.12: DB i, 28.
14 Cicero, De oratore II. ix. 36.
15 This discussion includes only the lengthy references to historical periods.
16 Essais, I.23: DB i, 78-80.
17 Ibid., 80.
18 Ibid. It seems to me that this passage is one example of the merging of the ideas of fortune and fate which sometimes occurs in the Essais. See Chapter III above, pp.109-10. For a thematic and linguistic study of "la fortune" in the Essais see Daniel Martin, Montaigne et la fortune (Paris: Champion, 1977). Friedrich has two clear and succinct pages on this topic in his Montaigne, pp. 334-36.

Essais, I.1: DB i, 3.

For interesting discussions of this essay from a perspective somewhat different from mine, see Anthony Wilden, "Par divers moyens on arrive a pareille fin: A Reading of Montaigne," Modern Language Notes 83 (1968), 577-97; Friedrich, Montaigne, pp. 158-63; and Hélène-Hédy Ehrlich, Montaigne, la critique et le langage (Paris: Klincksieck, 1972), pp. 31-37.

Essais, II.15: DB ii, 197.
There are one or two examples in which the ancients are equalled by the moderns. For example in II.32, "Defense de Seneque et de Plutarque," the endurance of "nos argolets" during the civil wars is found worthy of comparison with "la vertu spartaine" (VS, p. 724). But the moderns are never better.

For a listing of the various patterns that Renaissance thinkers saw in history, see Herbert Weisinger, "Ideas of History during the Renaissance," Journal of the History of Ideas 6 (1945), 415-35; for a discussion of the use made of these patterns by the poets of the period, see Antoinette Roublchou-Stretz, La Vision de l'histoire dans l'oeuvre de la Pléiade (Paris: Nizet, 1973); for the deterministic content of some of these patterns in the Essais, see Chapter III above, pp. 109-14.

Essais, II.12: DB ii, 139.

Ibid., 151.

C. Warren Hollister, in an article entitled "Greek Astronomy and Modern Science: The Universe as Illusion" (History 4 [1961], 52-71), points out that until Copernicus, the astronomical theories were regarded not as descriptions of the real universe, but as mental models which described the appearances and predicted astronomical movement. Such a positivist or skeptical viewpoint may well be Montaigne's in this passage.

Sayce, The Essays of Montaigne, p. 79.


Essais, II.37: DB ii, 332.

Ibid., 337.

Ibid., 353-54.
CHAPTER V

MONTAIGNE'S HISTORICAL DISCOURSE

The 1588 Edition

When one turns from the original version of Books I and II of the *Essais* to Book III in its original form, the differences in the use of history as subject-matter are quite striking. First, the historical example has ceased to be a medium to be worked through in an attempt at reading the truth. On pages 144 and 145 above, for example, I show how in the 1580 edition, Montaigne juxtaposes historical references which qualify one another. In Book III the procedure is much less tentative. Historical material is no longer something to be explored; rather it is continually adduced to support generalizations already formulated. This use of the historical example can be found in the 1580 edition too, especially in the "Apologie" with its strong arguments. But the absence of what Stierle called the "exemple problematisé" is striking in Book III.

Montaigne often quotes a historical example in support of his argument. At the beginning of III:1, "De l'utile et de l'honneste," which is devoted to the balance between political and private morality, he argues against political trickery, making ironic use of the Roman emperor Tiberius as an *exemplum* of public morality:

> A qui ne doit estre la perfidie detestable, puis que Tybere la refusa à si grand interest? On luy manda
d'Allemaigne que, s'il le trouvait bon, on le deferroit d'Arminius par poison: c'estoit le plus puissant ennemy que les Romains eussent, qui les avoit si vilainement traitez sous Varus, et qui seul empeschoit l'accroisement de sa domination en ces contrées la. Il fit responce que "le peuple romain avoit accoustumé de se venger de ses ennemis par voye ouverte, les armes en main, non par fraude et en cachette": il quitta l'utile pour l'honneste. 3

At other times only the words of the historical figure are reported.

For example, again in III.1, Montaigne declares that he avoids letting the powerful importune him with their confidences:

Car Philippides respondit sagement, à mon gré, au roy Lyzimachus, qui luy disoit: "Que veux-tu que je te communique de mes biens? — Ce que tu voudras, pourveu que ce ne soit tes secrets." 4

As this latter way of using historical examples shows, the reference to the past now often equates Montaigne himself with one of the Ancients. (This second difference has quite often been pointed out, for example by Donald Frame in Montaigne's Discovery of Man. 5) In one of many instances of this use of the example from history, the essayist disapproves of tricking suspected criminals into confession, even though such a method has Plato's approval:

Il serviroit bien à la justice, et à Platon mesmes qui favorise cet usage, de me fournir d'autres moyens plus selon moy. C'est une justice malitieuse et ne l'estime pas moins blessée par soy-mesme que par autrui. 6

At another point he says he would like to see his property saved from the general ruin, if this can be done without compromise:

Fut-ce pas Atticus, lequel se tenant au juste party et au party qui perdit, se sauva par sa moderation en cet universel naufrage du monde, parmy tant de mutations et diversités? 7

Clearly, in the eight years which have elapsed between the first edition of the Essais and the augmented 1588 edition, Montaigne has
gathered considerable confidence in his own moral judgment. He has changed much in attitude since the early chapter I.37, "Du jeune Caton," in which he wrote: "Rampant au limon de la terre, je ne laisse pas de remarquer, jusques dans les nues, la hauteur d'aucunes ames heroiques."§

The third difference between the use of history in the 1580 edition and the 1588 edition is that the three most prescriptive or "applied" types of historical generalization (drawing lessons from the past to predict the future, finding patterns of cause and effect in the past, and establishing chronology) have ceased to be used. There is, as I show below, one example of establishing the origins of a given state of affairs, but the two types of generalization which dominate are now characterization of periods and consideration of global patterns in the past.

The 1588 Edition: Establishment of Origins

The one example of establishment of origins occurs at the beginning of III:9, "De la vanité." Here Montaigne passes from fairly humorous claims about the frivolity of his writings to indignant statements about the sorry state of France during the civil wars. The un-serious business of writing is seen as both an effect and a cause of France's troubles. It is an effect in that, "l'escrivailerie semble estre quelque simptome d'un siecle desbordé: quand escrivimes nous tant que depuis que nous sommes en trouble?"§ For some reason the unruliness of the times results in more and more scribbling. That this is indeed an effect of the times is supported by circumstantial
evidence from the ancient world: when did the Romans write so much as in the last days of their civilization? But writing is also a cause—almost, it seems here, the main cause of France's troubles. Two reasons are given. First, an improvement in learning usually is accompanied by a degeneration in morality: "l'affinement des esprits, ce n'est pas l'assagissement en une police." Second, anyone who writes is, by definition, taking time away from more useful pursuits such as service to the state: "cet embesoinement oisif naist de ce que chacun se prent laschement à l'office de sa vacation et s'en desbauche." Thus writing is roundly condemned: it originates in the troubled historical situation, but it is also seen, in the optique of this curious passage, as being one of the originating conditions of France's disorder.

In keeping with so much of the controlled, self-confident argumentation of Book III, this statement is not contradicted, although its denunciatory strength is somewhat attenuated when Montaigne brings himself back into the discussion, declaring that his own contribution to "la corruption du siecle" has been of the passive kind:

En un temps où le mechamment faire est si commun, de ne faire que inutilement est comme louable. Je me console que je seray des derniers sur qui il faudra mettre la main.12

Turning now to the types of historical generalization most in evidence in Book III, one finds that when Montaigne characterizes historical periods he appears interested only in Antiquity and his own times. There is no reference to "le temps de nos peres" or to the "French" of ancient times, the Gauls, and only occasional references to
the varying periods within Roman history. (Montaigne's earlier commentary on these periods is outlined in the preceding chapter, pp. 168-171.)

The 1588 Edition: Characterization of Historical Periods

Montaigne's commentary on the characteristics of different periods begins in III:8, "De l'art de conferer." Near the beginning of the chapter he comments on his own tendency to learn from negative rather than positive examples: "Il en peut estre aucuns de ma complexion, qui m'instruis mieux par contrariété que par exemple, et par fuite que par suite."13 Two examples from Antiquity confirm Montaigne's reasonableness in having this tendency. Then the reader learns that cruelty, bad horse-riding, poor use of language and stupid facial expressions are all human attributes which have a more corrective effect on him than their opposites. Last and most important in this strange list is, however, the modern period itself.

Ce temps est propre à nous amender à reculons, par disconvenance plutost que par accord, par difference que par similitude.14

Good examples are rare in Montaigne's time, but he has been able to correct his behaviour by observation of the common examples of evil:

Estant peu apprins par les bons exemples, je me sers des mauvais, desquels la leçon est ordinaire: la vue ordinaire de la volerie, de la perfidie, a reiglé mes meurs et contenu.15

In the passage immediately following these quotations Montaigne again characterizes his own times. He states that conversation is one of the best ways of exercising the mind: "le plus fructueux et naturel
exercice de nostre esprit, c'est à mon gré la conference." Again modern France is found to be inferior, for conversation is little practised there, in comparison with ancient Athens and Rome and with modern Italy:

Les Atheniens et encore les Romains conservoient en grand honneur cet exercice en leurs academies. De nostre temps, les Italiens en retiennent quelques vestiges, à leur grand profict, comme il se voit par la comparaison de nos entendemens aux leurs.16

Later in the chapter, another mention of the inferiority of Montaigne's times is made. After showing, with the aid of an example from ancient history, that the best way to conceal one's ignorance about a matter is to say nothing, Montaigne remarks, "A combien de sottes ames, en mon temps, a servy une mine froide et taciturne de tiltre de prudence et de capacité."17

In chapter 9, "De la vanité," Montaigne characterizes both his own period and antiquity. The first such characterization is brief. He wishes that he could find a son-in-law, "qui sceust appaster commodément mes vieux ans et les endormir, entre les mains de qui je deposasse en toute souveraineté la conduite et l'usage de mes biens . . ." But the reverie is broken as he reminds himself of the nature of his times: "Mais quoy! nous vivons en un monde où la loyauté des propres enfans est inconnue."18

A little further on in the chapter, Montaigne declares that one reason he enjoys traveling is that the moral condition of his own country displeases him. A quotation from Juvenal describing the time as "pejora saecula ferri/temporibus" follows, and is in turn followed by the observation that things are so bad, it is marvellous that the
state holds together at all. This observation leads Montaigne to remark that human society always seems to stumble along somehow, whatever the conditions. He then returns to his description of the state of France:

Je vois non une action, ou trois, ou cent, mais des mœurs en usage commun et receu si monstrueuses, en inhumanité sur tout et desloyauté, qui est pour moi la pire espece des vices, que je n'ay point le courage de les concevoir sans horreur.19

One might expect total disapproval of his times in this passage, but Montaigne adds:

... et les admire autant que je les deteste. L'exercice de ces meschancetez insignes porte marque de vigueur et force d'ame autant que d'erreur et desreglement.20

The reader is left to speculate that it is perhaps this vigor and strength which, however despicably put to use, ensure the continuity of the state which he has just observed.

In the passage just discussed, Montaigne singles out his own times for comment; in the next characterization of periods in "De la vanité," modern times and antiquity are compared. In modern times even the best men are stained with vice:

J'aperçois, en ces desmembremens de la France et divisions où nous sommes tombez, chacun se travailler à defendre sa cause, mais, jusques aux meilleurs, avec desguisement et mensonge. ... Le plus juste party, si est-ce encore le membre d'un corps verroulu et vereux.21

And yet, Montaigne observes, the general corruption confers a certain value on those who manage to be somewhat less evil, since human behaviour can be judged only by relative, not absolute, standards:

... d'un tel corps le membre moins malade s'appelle sain et à bon droit, d'autant que nos qualités n'ont titre qu'en
But then, after having apparently absolved some of the men of his time, Montaigne immediately undoes his work by referring to an example of great probity, from Antiquity. The Spartan king Agesilaus let a former enemy cross his territory, without taking the opportunity to harm him. Yet in his description of this event, Xenophon merely took the action for granted and saw no reason to praise Agesilaus for outstanding probity. In Montaigne's commentary we see an echo of the attitude I describe on p. 179 of Chapter IV: morality has descended from a high point in ancient times, through an undefined middle period, to an all-time low point in his own period:

> A ces humeurs là [de Xénophon et al.], ce ne seroit rien dire; ailleurs et en autre temps, il se fera compte de la franchise et magnanimité d'une telle action: ces babouyns capettes s'en fussent moquez, si peu retire l'innocence spartaine à la françoise (emphasis added).

After this, Montaigne restates his belief in the relative moral goodness of some of his contemporaries: "Nous ne laissons pas d'avoir des hommes vertueux, mais c'est selon nous." Following the comparison with Antiquity, however, the statement appears much more negative than its predecessor half a page before.

In Chapter 10, "De mesnager sa volonté," Montaigne returns to the question of probity, this time on the level of personal rather than political interaction. Again he finds his contemporaries lacking:

> La pluspart des accords de nos querelles du jour'hui sont honteux et menteurs: nous ne cherchons qu'à sauver les apparences, et trahissons cependant et desadoumons nos vrayes intentions. Nous plastrons le fait: nous scavons comment nous l'avons dict et en quel sens, et les assistans le scavent, et nos amis à qui nous avons voulu
faire sentir nostre avantage. C'est au depens de nostre franchise et de l'honneur de nostre courage que nous desadvouons nostre pensee et cherchons des conillieres en la faucetê pour nous accorder. Nous nous desmentons nous mesmes, pour sauver un desmentir que nous avons donne å un autre. ... Les excuses et reparations que je voy faire tous les jours pour purger l'indiscretion me semblent plus laides que l'indiscretion mesme.25

Later in the same chapter, during a description of his own conduct as mayor of Bordeaux, Montaigne again briefly characterizes his own times. After declaring a preference for benevolent acts undertaken for their own sake rather than for the praise they might elicit, Montaigne points out that his own tasks as mayor were of necessity of a similar nature: "Je n'avois qu'à conserver et durer, qui sont effects sourds et insensibles." Striking innovative action was ruled out during his tenure, given the political unrest and the fact that innovation, especially in religion, is currently the enemy:

L'innovation est de grand lustre, mais elle est interdicte en ce temps, où nous sommes pressés et n'avons à nous defendre que de la nouvelleté.26

One is not surprised to read that the need for conservative action suited Montaigne's character: "En somme, les occasions en cette charge ont suivy ma complexion, dequoy je leur sçay tresbon gré."27

There appear to be no substantial characterizations of periods in Chapter 11, "Des boyteux." Perhaps Montaigne is more concerned there with arguing against other beliefs than with expounding his own. But he returns to the subject in Chapter 12, "De la physiognomie." The first discussion compares Antiquity with his own times. The chapter begins with a criticism of the latter.

Quasi toutes les opinions que nous avons sont prines par authorite et å credit. Il n'y a point de mal:
Montaigne's contemporaries praise Socrates' speeches, not because they really appreciate their beauties, but because they are expected to like them:

Cette image des discours de Socrates que ses amys nous ont laissée, nous ne l'approvons que pour la reverance de l'approbation publique: ce n'est pas par nostre connoissance; ils ne sont pas selon nostre goust et usage.

In fact the tastes of Montaigne's contemporaries are totally unsuited to appreciation of such material: "S'il naissoit à cette heure quelque chose de pareil, il est peu d'hommes qui le prisassent." Sublime simplicity seems naive to a public accustomed to artifice:

Nous n'apercevons les graces que pointues, bouffies et enflées d'artifice. Celles qui coulent sous la naïveté et la simplicité eschappent aysément à une veue grossière comme est la nostre; elles ont une beauté delicate et cachée; il faut la veue nette et bien purgée pour descouvrir cette secrette lumiere. Est pas la naïveté, selon nous, germeine à la sottise, et qualité de reproche et d'injure? . . . Sous une si vile forme, nous n'eussions jamais choisi la noblesse et splendeur de ses conceptions admirables, nous qui n'apercevons la richesse qu'en montre et pompe.

Once again Montaigne has found his own times lacking in an appreciation of the natural, the straightforward, that is to say of the truly valuable.

The last characterization of periods of history occurs in Chapter 13, "De l'experience." The modern period is again the one under discussion. Two criticisms of Montaigne's contemporaries are combined in this passage: their lack of regard for the truth and their ability to complicate matters until natural and simple attitudes are lost.
The law, Montaigne observes, often leads to injustice rather than justice. He then juxtaposes two fairly lengthy examples of the law going awry. In the first example, from modern times, men judged guilty of murder were hanged, even though, after the verdict was passed, the real murderers confessed. Thus the letter of the law was observed, at the expense of justice. In the example from Antiquity, Philippus ("ou quelque autre" as Montaigne says) found that a man he had fined heavily was in fact innocent. Unlike his modern counterparts, Philippus tried to satisfy justice as well as the forms of the law: "il satisfict aucunement à toutes les deux, laissant en son estat la sentence et recompensant de sa bourse l'interest du condamné." Once again the ancient example is superior to the modern one: the moderns forgot about the truth of the matter and let legal formulae, a product of man's techne, take precedence.

Thus Montaigne characterizes historical periods at some length ten times in the 1588 edition of Book III. As we have seen, he characterizes his own period six times, and contrasts his own period and Antiquity four times.

The 1588 Edition: Overall Patterns in History

The passages in which overall patterns of history are observed begin in III:1, "De l'utile et de l'honneste." In this chapter Montaigne makes a comparison between ancient and modern times which indicates decline. Service to the state sometimes requires a sacrifice of personal morality:
... en toute police, il y a des offices nécessaires non seulement abjects, mais encore vitieux: les vices y trouvent leur rang et s'employent à la couture de nostre liaison, comme les venins à la conservation de nostre santé.32

But what is necessary to the state is not always found desirable by its more upright citizens.

Si les vices deviennent excusables, d'autant qu'ils nous font besoing et que la nécessité commune efface leur vraie qualité, il faut laisser jouer cette partie aux citoyens plus vigoureux et moins craintifs qui sacrifient leur honneur et leur conscience, comme ces autres antiens sacrifierent leur vie pour le salut de leur pays.33

Sacrificing one's honor for one's country is a service appropriate for modern times; the standards of Antiquity were different: then the citizens gave not his honor but his life. In this passage Montaigne concisely sums up his attitude that the present is morally inferior to the ancient past.

At the end of the chapter, Montaigne restates one of its main themes as its conclusion:

... que l'interest commun ne doit pas tout requérir de tous contre l'interest privé ... et que toutes choses ne sont pas loisibles à un homme de bien pour le service de la cause générale et des loix.34

In support of this position, two examples of the opposite barbarous view, which would sacrifice friendship and family ties to the needs of the state, are given. The first example is in the form of words attributed by Lucan to Julius Caesar, who encourages his soldiers to kill even their fathers in the service of the state. The second reference implicitly compares the Rome of the Republic with Imperial Rome. During the final years of the Republic: "En une rencontre de la
guerre civile contre Cynna, un soldat de Pompeius, ayant tué sans y
penser son frère qui estoit au party contraire, se tua sur le champ soy
mesme de honte et de regret." But later, during the Empire, "en une autre
guerre civile de ce mesme peuple, un soldat, pour avoir tué son frère,
demanda recompense à ses capitaines." As in the other examples we
have seen, the movement from Republican to Imperial Rome is one of
decline, and this decline is somewhat generalized here by the sentence
which introduces the references, "Combien peut le temps et l'exemple!" 35

In III:5, "Sur des vers de Virgil," the pattern of decline is
again revealed. This time the periods distinguished are "de mon temps"
and "à présent." The subject here is love, or rather, sexual conquest.
Montaigne finds that in his day men were much more discreet about the
favors granted to them by the ladies: "De mon temps, le plaisir d'en
compter (plaisir qui ne doit guere en douceur à celuy mesme de
l'effect) n'estoit permis qu'à ceux qui avoient quelque amy fidelle et
unique." In present times, however, he finds much less discretion:

à présent les entretiens ordinaires des assemblées et des
tables, ce sont les vanteries des faveurs recuees et
liberalité secrete des dames. Vrayement c'est trop
d'abjection et de bassesse de coeur de laisser ainsi
fierement persecuter, pestrir et fourrager ces divines
graces à des personnes ingrates, indiscrettes et si
volages. 36

Patterns in history have an important part in the following
chapter, III:6, "Des coches." After a description of the extravagant
spectacles enjoyed by the Romans, Montaigne observes: "En ces vanitez
mesme nous descouvrons combien ces siecles estoyent fertiles d'autres
esprits que ne sont les nostres." 37 Neither the vigor of the Ancients
nor pettiness of modern man is denied in this passage. But neither
tells the whole story, for the dominant idea here is the plenitude of nature: the world has always been larger than man has known. On the one hand one cannot conclude that there is a general decline by observing the present sorry state of affairs: "... vainement nous concluons aujourdhuy l'inclination et la decrepitude du monde par les argumens que nous tirons de nostre propre faiblesses et decadence."38 On the other hand the Ancients too had a limited view and Lucretius was wrong to assume that the world was young then:

. . . ainsi vainement concluait cet autre [l]a naissance et jeunesse [du monde], par la vigueur qu'il voyoit aus esprits de son temps, abondans en nouvelletê et inventions de divers arts.39

Montaigne's conception of history is here imbued with a sense of the fullness of nature, a sense that becomes more pronounced as the third book progresses. Temporally and spatially, he observes, the world surpasses man's understanding:

Je crains que nostre cognoissance soit foible en tous sens, nous ne voyons ni gueres loin ny gueres arriere; elle embrasse peu et vit peu, courte en estendue de temps et en estendue de matiere. . . . Quand tout ce qui est venu du passê jusques à nous seroit vray et seroit sceu par quelqu'un, ce seroit moins que rien au pris de ce qui est ignorê. . . . Si nous voyions autant de monde comme nous n'en voyons pas, nous apercevrions, comme il est à croire, une perpetuelle vicissitude de formes.40

Since man has only a limited knowledge of his surroundings he cannot put himself into a correct historical context. The historical truth, Montaigne observes here, is probably not that we are declining or progressing, but that we are going round unknowingly in circles: "il est vray-semblable que nous n'allons ny en avant ny à reculons, mais roulant plusostost, tournoiant et changeant."41 This idea must have
continued to appeal to Montaigne, for during his final additions to the *Essais* he changed the passage to read more decisively: "nous n'allons point, nous rodons plutôt et tournevrons çà et là; nous nous promenons sur nos pas."^42

This is not a theory of cycles, at least not of regular recurring cycles. Nature is seen as surpassing man's understanding in this passage, so one cannot expect Montaigne to postulate such a limiting theory of history here. Rather, he suggests random, untidy repetitions of which man is unaware.

Near the end of the chapter Montaigne outlines the cyclical historical theories of the Mexicans, as he found them in Lopez de Gomara's *Histoire générale des Indes*. This is a sympathetic account, given to show the developed speculative mind of the Mexicans. At the end of the account, to show that the Mexicans' theories have as much probability as those of others, Montaigne points out that their calculation of the fourth cycle of their history "rencontre à cette grande conjonction des astres qui produisit, il y a huit cent tant d'ans, selon que les astrologues estiment, plusieurs grandes alterations et nouvelletez au monde."^43 This does not prevent him remarking, when he recounts the belief that during the fourth cycle of history men were changed into baboons: "quelles impressions ne souffrent la lascheté de l'humaine creance."^44 But here the Mexicans are not singled out for ridicule; they simply share the foolishness of humanity. In fact, their foolishness is part of their humanity—a humanity which underlines the shame Europeans should feel at their destruction.
In Chapter 9, "De la vanité," Montaigne speculates about patterns of history on several occasions. The first occasion is a reflection on the question of progress in history. Montaigne finds that improvement is not part of the historical process: "le monde est inepte à se guarir."\(^{45}\) He uses the conservative argument that the cure of immediate ills may be had at too great a price: "[Le monde] est si impatient de ce qui le presse qu'il ne vise qu'à s'en defaire, sans regarder à quel pris."\(^{46}\) Then, using the medical metaphors of illness and cure, Montaigne argues that change is change for the better only if an overall improvement takes place: "La descharge du mal present n'est pas guarison, s'il n'y a en general amendement de condition."\(^{47}\) This is a conservative passage in which the contention that progress is not part of the scheme of things is used as an argument against innovation and for the status quo.

After establishing that progress does not take place, Montaigne moves on to consideration of another historical pattern: decline and the belief that the end of the world is approaching. The movement of the argument is similar to that described above on page 198: the human mind does not possess all the evidence; thus it would be presumptuous to assume from present troubles that the end of the world is close.

Pour nous voir bien piteusement agitez, car que n'avons nous faict? . . . je ne vay pas soudain me resolvant:

_Ipsa si velit Salus,
Servare prorsus non potest hanc familiam:_

Nous ne sommes pas pourtant, à l'avanture, à nostre dernier periode. La conservation des estats est chose qui vray-sesemblablement surpasse nostre intelligence.\(^{48}\)
The next pattern Montaigne considers is one of complete chaos:

"Les dieux se jouent de nous à la pelote et nous agitent à toutes mains: Enimvero dii nos homines quasi pilas habent."49

He then returns to consider the question of the decline and end of the state. This time the history of Rome is adduced as a counter-argument:

[l'Estat de Rome] comprend en soy toutes les formes et aventures qui touchent un Estât, tout ce que l'ordre y peut, et le trouble, et l'heur, et le malheur. Qui se doit desesperer de sa condition, voyant les secousses et mouvemens dequoy celuy-la fut agité et qu'il supporta?50

The beginnings of Roman history were violent and chaotic, but the state managed to survive:

A peine reconnoit-on l'image d'aucune police soubs les premiers empereurs: c'est la plus horrible et espesse confusion qu'on puisse concevoir. Toutesfois il la supporta et y dura, conservant non pas une monarchie resserré en ses limites, mais tant de nations si diverses, si esloignées, si mal affectionnées, si desordonnément commandées et injustement conquises. . . . 51

Given the longevity of the Roman state, Montaigne is able to conclude about both Rome and his own country: "Tout ce qui branle ne tombe pas."52

A little further on in the chapter, Montaigne returns to the medical terminology he used earlier and suggests a cyclical theory of health and illness of the state:

Qui sçait si Dieu voudra qu'il en advienne comme des corps, qui se purgent et remettent en meilleur estat par longues et griefves maladies, lesquelles leur donnent une santé plus entiere que celle qu'elles leur avoient osté?53

In the final consideration of patterns of history in Chapter 9, Montaigne refers without other comment to the quotation from Juvenal
to which I referred on page 190 above. This quotation is an allusion to the legend of the four ages of civilization (gold, silver, bronze and iron), and suggests that another baser metal is needed to represent the present time. Montaigne thus concurs here in the suggestion that the present is the worst of times when he says:

Je disois donc tantost qu'estant planté en la plus profonde miniere de ce nouveau metal, non seulement je suis privé de grande familiarité avec gens d'autre humeur et opinion des miennes ... mais encore je ne suis pas sans hazard parmy ceux à qui tout est également loisible. ...

Montaigne next considers patterns of history in Chapter 12, "De la physiognomie." He has just described the reaction of the peasants of his region to the recent outbreak of the plague in which so many had died. The peasants met death in what Montaigne regards as the most natural and dignified way: with calm acceptance. This attitude is so different from the usual way of acting of Montaigne's more sophisticated contemporaries that he is prompted into undertaking some general speculation on the decline of mankind: "Nous avons abandonné nature et luy voulons apprendre sa leçon, elle qui nous menoit si heureusement et si seurement." Within this pattern of decline only the simplest have retained traces of Nature's instruction. Montaigne then castigates the learned: despite their knowledge they must turn to the humblest men or to animals for lessons in true virtue. At this point Montaigne turns away from the peasants and concentrates on comparing man's sophistication with animals' behaviour. While the transition from peasants to animals might seem a little brusque to the modern sensibility, the point is, of course, the same, simply that man has declined from his natural state:
In the last chapter of Book III, "De l'experience," Montaigne returns to the idea that man has declined from an original natural state. After pointing out the injustice of many laws he goes on to say:

Nature nous les donne tousjours plus heureuses que ne sont celles que nous nous donnons, tesmoing la peinture de l'aage doré des poetes et l'estat où nous voyons vivre les nations qui n'en ont point d'autres.57

The idea of a golden age at the beginning of things is given more credence here than in the passage referred to on page 198 above, in which Montaigne said that Lucretius was wrong to conclude the youth of the world from its vigor. But here Montaigne is not interested in putting historical speculations into the larger context of the plenitude of nature as he was in the earlier passage. The concept of a general decline is sufficient for his purposes here.

A little further on in the chapter, Montaigne returns to a topic I have already discussed (on page 195 above): the endlessly inventive capacity of the human mind. Books are written about other books, laws are made to clarify already existing laws. But endless proliferation is not improvement:

Trouvons nous pourtant quelque fin au besoin d'interpreter? S'y voit-il quelque progres et advancement vers la tranquillite? Nous faut-il moins d'advocats et de juges que lors que cette masse de droit estoit encore en sa premiere enfance? Au rebours, nous
The general pattern seen in this passage is one of decline. But Montaigne then goes on to another observation very similar to the one in "Des coches" which is discussed above on page 198. There Montaigne suggested that history was not patterned as decline or progress, but aimless circles ("Il est vray-ssemblable que nous n'allons ny en avant ny a reculons, mais roulant plustot, tournoyant et changeant."). Here a similar opinion is offered:

Les hommes mescognoissent la maladie naturelle de leur esprit: il ne faict que fureter et quester, et va sans cesse tournoiant, bastissant et s'empestrant en sa besongne comme nos vers de soye, et s'y estouffe: mus in pice.

The image of closeness and suffocation is then replaced by descriptions of the search for knowledge as a quest, a much more attractive image. And Montaigne seems to be inspired by this image of free open movement to change his attitude towards learning. The passage which follows seems to be an argument for a progressive view of human achievements:

Ce n'est rien que foiblesse particuliere qui nous faict contenter de ce que d'autres ou que nous-mesmes avons trouvé en cette chasse de connoissance; un plus habile ne s'en contentera pas. Il y a toujours place pour un suyvant et route par ailleurs. Il n'y a point fin en nos inquisitions: nostre fin est en l'autre monde.

The search after knowledge is presented as an unending but exhilarating quest: "Les poursuites de l'esprit humain sont sans terme." But then Montaigne adds: "et sans forme," and this marks the transition to another passage in which the forward motion again becomes an aimless or at best a circular one.
Les poursuites de l'esprit humain sont sans terme et sans forme; son aliment c'est doute et ambiguïté: ce que déclarait Apollo, parlant toujours à nous doublement, obscurément et obliquement, ne nous repaissant pas, mais nous amusant et embesognant. C'est un mouvement perpetuel, sans arrest et sans but.61

Thus, in this last passage in Book III in which Montaigne considers the patterns the past follows, he seems to espouse in turn decline, aimless circling, progress and then aimlessness again. No final conclusion is drawn.

The Final Additions to Book III: Characterization of Historical Periods

The additions Montaigne made to Book III between 1588 and his death in 1592 show no basic changes in his historical thought. I discern five characterizations of periods and five commentaries on patterns in the past in these texts.

The first characterization of a historical period—in this case Montaigne's own times—occurs in III.2, "Du repentir." After noting, in the 1588 text, that popular opinion is not a good basis for judging virtuous action ("De fonder la recompense des actions vertueuses sur l'approbation d'autrui, c'est prendre un trop incertain et trouble fondement."62), in the /c/ addition which follows Montaigne singles out his own period as a time when this is especially true:

Signamment en un siecle corrompu et ignorant comme cettuy cy: la bonne estime du peuple est injurieuse; à qui vous fiez vous de veoir ce qui est louable? Dieu me garde d'estre homme de bien selon la description que je voy faire tous les jours par honneur à chacun de soy.63

Montaigne has another criticism for his own times in an addition to Chapter 8 of Book III, "De l'art de conferer." He notes, in the
1588 text and in the addition, that he is personally very willing to accept suggestions on how to correct his own behaviour, "pourveu qu'on n'y procède d'une troigne trop magistrale." Most men of his own time, are, however, characterized by their inability to accept correction. Dissimulation is the characteristic of the period, Montaigne claims here, so neither the offer nor the acceptance of criticism, each of which requires a basic honesty, is undertaken by his contemporaries:

... je prends plaisir à estre reprins; et m'accommode aux accusateurs. ... Toutesfois il est malaisé d'y attirer les hommes de mon temps. Ils n'ont pas le courage de corriger, par ce qu'ils n'ont pas le courage de souffrir à l'estre, et parlent toujours avec dissimulation en presence les uns des autres.

Montaigne's own period and Antiquity are compared in an addition to III.10, "De mensager sa volonté." Not surprisingly, Antiquity shows the superior characteristics. Montaigne has just remarked that in the civil wars, "Je veux quel'avantage soit pour nous; mais je ne forcente point s'il ne l'est." In the long addition which follows he states his distaste for the exaggerated criticisms which are sometimes made of the opposite side:

J'accuse merveilleusement cette vitieuse forme d'opiner: 'Il est de la Ligue, car il admire la grace de monsieur de Guyse. L'activité du roy de Navarre l'estonne, il est Huguenot. Il trouve cecy à dire aux moeurs du roy, il est seditieux en son coeur!... N'oserions nous dire d'un voleur qu'il a belle greve? Faut-il, si elle est putaine, qu'elle soit aussi punaise?

The implication, of course, is that only too many people of his time think in just this way. An example from Antiquity is chosen to show that then there was a better sense of proportion. Marcus Manlius was given the title Capitolínus for his services to the state. But when,
five years later, he was charged with treason and condemned to death, his former title was not revoked.

Aux siecles plus sages révoqua on le superbe titlre de Capitolinus qu'on avoit auparavant donné à Marcus Manlius, comme conservateur de la religion et liberté publique? Estouffa-on la memoire de sa liberalité et de ses faicts d'armes et recompenses militaires ottroyées à sa vertu, par ce qu'il affecta depuis la royauté au prejudice des lois de son pays?68

Once again the modern period has been compared to Antiquity and certain of its characteristics have been found inferior.

In III.12, "De la physiognomie," Montaigne characterizes two periods of history, the thirty years of religious war he has known, and the period immediately preceding the wars. He finds certain grim consolations as he surveys the damage done to France over the past thirty years. There is the relief to be had when one escapes the general destruction: "Il y a de la consolation à eschever tantost l'un tantost l'autre des maux qui nous guignent de suite et assenent ailleurs autour de nous."69 Then, the troubles are so widespread he finds he cannot feel them all so keenly:

... aussi, qu'en matiere d'interests publiques, à mesure que mon affection est plus universellement espandue, elle en est plus foible; joinct qu'il est vrai à demy 'tantum ex publicis malis sentimus quantum ad privatias res pertinent.'70

Another perverse consolation is that, even before the war began, France was not in perfect political or social health:

... la santé d'où nous partimes estoit telle qu'elle soulage elle mesme le regret que nous devrions avoir. C'estoit santé, mais non qu'à la comparaison de la maladie qui l'a suivie. Nous ne sommes cheus de gueres haut.71
Thus Montaigne has characterized in a general way both his own times and those immediately preceding. France's condition is very bad now, but it was far from perfect before.

The final instance of characterization of periods in the /c/ additions occurs in Chapter 13, "De l'expérience." Montaigne has just stated some personal preferences in eating and drinking. After a meal he likes to rest: "j'ayme à me reposer long temps après et ouyr conter, pourveu que je ne m'y mesle point: car je me lasse et me blesse de parler l'estomac plein." This very personal observation is followed by a reference to Antiquity, in the form of a /c/ addition:

Les anciens Grecs et Romains avoyent meilleure raison que nous, assignans à la nourriture, qui est une action principale de la vie, si autre occupation ne les en divertissoit, plusieurs heures et la meilleure partie de la nuit, mangeans et beuvans moins hastivement que nous qui passons en poste toutes nos actions, et estandans ce plaisir naturel à plus de loisir et d'usage, y entresemans divers offices de conversation utiles et agréables.

Again Antiquity is seen as superior to the present time. The Ancients sensibly cultivated a natural pleasure which Montaigne's contemporaries, it is suggested, have forgotten how to enjoy.

The Final Additions to Book III: Overall Patterns in History

The first reflection made on patterns in the past in the /c/ additions to Book III is found in Chapter V, "Sur des vers de Virgil." In the 1588 text Montaigne describes customs of various times and places, all of which show a healthy regard for human sexuality. The male sexual organ was celebrated in ancient Rome without any false shame:
Les plus sages matrones, à Romme, estoient honnorées d'offrir des fleurs et des couronnes au dieu Priapus; et sur ses parties moins honnestes faisoit-on soir les vierges au temps de leurs nopces.74

This custom may have lasted down to his own day: "Encore ne sçay-je si j'ay veu en mes jours quelque air de pareille devotion." This reflection prompts Montaigne to remark on the cod-pieces his father's contemporaries wore: "Que vouloit dire cette ridicule piece de la chaussure de nos peres, qui se voit encore en nos Souysses?" A vestige of this fashion is still used in Montaigne's own time:

A quoy faire la monstre que nous faisons à cette heure de nos pieces en forme soubs nos gregues, et souvent, qui pis est, outre leur grandeur naturelle, par fauceté et imposture?75

In the /c/ addition which follows, Montaigne expands these reflections:

Il me prend envie de croire que cette sorte de vestement fut inventée aux meilleurs et plus conscientieux siecles pour ne piper le monde, pour que chacun rendist en publiq compte de son faict. Les nations plus simples l'ont encore aucunement rapportant au vray. Lors on instruisit la science de l'ouvrier, comme il se faict de la mesure du bras ou du pied.76

The /b/ and /c/ passages, when considered together, sketch a theory of decline, from a time of honesty to the present when dissimulation prevails.

In Chapter 9, "De la vanité," Montaigne briefly espouses an extreme form of the theory of decline, and speculates that the end of the world may be near:

Il semble que les astres mesmes ordonnent que nous avons assez duré, et outre les termes ordinaires; et cecy aussi me poise, que le plus voisin mal qui nous menace, ce n'est pas alteration en la masse entiere et solide, mais sa dissipation et divulsion, l'extreme de nos craintes.77
Chapter 12, "De la physiognomie," shows another reflection on the theory of decline. Here the subject is the behaviour of soldiers at war. In the 1588 text Montaigne observes:

Nos armées ne se lient et se tiennent plus que par simant estranger: des Français on ne scait plus faire un corps d'armée constante et réglé. Quelle honte! il n'y a qu'autant de discipline que nous en font voir des soldats empruntez.78

In the /c/ addition the French army is compared, not to its counterparts in other countries as it is in the 1588 text, but to the past:

Qu'est devenu cet ancien precepte: Que les soldats ont plus à craindre leur chef que l'ennemy? et ce merveilleuz exemple: Qu'un prommier s'estant trouvé enfermé dans le pourpris du camp de l'armée romaine, elle fut veue l'endemain en desloger, laissant au possesseur le comte entier de ses pommes, meures et delicieuses?79

Again the /c/ text gives the definite suggestion of decline through time, down to the corruption of the present day.

In Chapter 13, "De l'experience," shortly after the long passage discussed above on pages 204 and 205 in which three different patterns of history are juxtaposed, Montaigne again takes up the question of historical patterns in a /c/ addition. The pattern in question here is the progressive pattern. In this passage Montaigne's imagery does not encourage him to give a favorable account of the progression of human knowledge. The image used is first one of grafting one branch onto another: "Nos opinions s'entent les unes sur les autres."80 This is not quite as attractive as the image of the journey towards the truth which Montaigne used in the /b/ text discussed earlier, and one can speculate that it contains the suggestion of interfering with nature. Whatever the explanation, Montaigne is not tempted into giving an
approving account of the accumulation of human knowledge:

Nos opinions s'entendent les unes sur les autres: la première sert de tige à la seconde, la seconde à la tierce; nous eschelons ainsi de degré en degré, et advient de là que le plus haut monté a souvent plus d'honneur que de mérite, car il n'est monté que sur les épaules du penultime.

The Final Additions to the Essais
The Additions to Books I and II:
Characterization of Historical Periods

In the additions to Books I and II which Montaigne made in the 1588 and final texts, he appears to follow the same pattern of attitudes as in Book III. Additions are made, of course, to the passages in which the more prescriptive types of generalization were undertaken in the 1580 edition, but I find no new attempts at seeing patterns in the past applicable to the future, or at establishing patterns of cause and effect, chronology or origins. On the other hand Montaigne does continue to characterize different periods of history and to comment on overall patterns in the past.

The characterizations of periods which Montaigne undertakes in these texts are similar to those we have already seen. In Roman history the Republic is found to be more stalwart than the Empire: "Je trouve Rome plus vaillante avant qu'elle ne fust scéavante." Antiquity taken as a whole, is, however, superior to the modern period. Thus ancient philosophers were criticized by humorists for being above ordinary life, not for being incapable of any practicality like their present-day counterparts. In fact, in Montaigne's time, the name philosopher is given to men who do not really deserve it at all. In integrity too, modern men are inferior to their ancient forebears:
Modern men would never have the taste or courage to recognize poor
workmanship in art and react against it as Dionysus' subjects did.86
Compared with his own times, indeed, Montaigne feels he has some
stature, just as compared to Antiquity he feels "pygmée et
populaire."

Antiquity comes in for some criticism in these texts, however.
In /b/ and /c/ additions to the "Apologie," Montaigne ridicules the
extraordinary religious credulity of the Ancients.88

In comparison with recent modern history, as with Antiquity,
Montaigne's own times are seen as inferior. In 1.48, "Des destries,"
Montaigne observes that during the wars with the English the French
fought mainly on foot, relying only on their own valor. But
Montaigne's contemporaries rely on their horses, with the result that
they can easily be routed and the battles are less well contested than
in the past.89 And then, when Montaigne was young, the nobles regarded
it as an insult to be called good swordsmen since that was a tribute
merely to their skill and not to their courage—the implication being
that this is no longer true at the time Montaigne is writing.90

The Additions to Books I and II:
Overall Patterns in History

When Montaigne reflects on patterns of history, in the /b/ and
/c/ additions to the first two books of the Essais, the pattern of
decline is discussed four times.
In the "Apologie," in a 1588 addition, Montaigne quotes from Lucretius to the effect that it was a god who gave man learning, thus bringing to him the light of the mind. This may seem as if Montaigne is giving approval to the theory of progress, but in fact Lucretius is quoted ironically, for Montaigne adds immediately that, by a love potion, Lucretius' own mind was easily reduced to the state of those who lived before the introduction of learning. This passage is similar in tone to those discussed above in Chapter IV (pages 173-174 above), in which Montaigne criticized, with the help of similar ad hominem arguments, Cicero's claims that learning is the equivalent of advancement in human affairs.

Further on in the "Apologie," Montaigne claims that the meddling of human reason has caused man to decline from his original natural--and thus good--state:

Il est croyable qu'il y a des lois naturelles, comme il se voit 'es autres creatures; mais en nous elles sont perdues, cette belle raison humaine s'ingerant partout de maistriser et commander, brouillant et confondant le visage des choses selon sa vanité et inconstance.

In II.27 "Couardise mere de la cruauté," Montaigne observes a movement of decline within his own times: duels used to be fought only between the challenger and the person challenged; but in his times, he claims, the seconds and others join in, and the duel has degenerated into a battle.

In II.2, "De l'ivrognerie," in a /c/ addition, Montaigne discerns what might seem to be an improvement in the behaviour of recent times: there seems to be less drinking now than in his father's day:
Seroit ce qu'en quelque chose nous allassions vers l'amendement? Vrayement non. Mais c'est que nous nous sommes beaucoup plus jettez à la paillardise que nos peres.94

Since Montaigne's contemporaries are more interested in lechery than in drink—and since "Ce sont deux occupations qui s'entrempechent en leur vigueur"—they drink less, not because of virtue, but out of necessity!

While there are four suggestions that man declines through time, in these texts, there is one passage which indicates that perhaps no significant historical change takes place. In the "Apologie," Montaigne replaces part of a 1580 passage on the strangeness of things we usually take for granted (he has in mind animal behaviour), with a passage which suggests that no change takes place through time at all:

C'est une mesme nature qui roule son cours. Qui en auroit suffisament jugé le present estat, en pourroit seurement conclurre et tout l'advenir et tout le passé.95

As we saw in the discussion of Book III, considerable attention is given, in the 1588 texts, to a cyclical idea of history in which man is part of a process of which he remains unaware. This idea is a humbling one for human pride, and it finds its way into the "Apologie" in an addition made in 1582:

Si nature enserre dans les termes de son progres ordinaire, comme toutes autres choses, aussi les crenances, les jugemens et opinions des hommes; si elles ont leur revolution, leur saison, leur naissance, leur mort, comme les chous; si le ciel les agite et les roule à sa poste, quelle magistrale authorité et permanente leur allons nous attribuant?96

In the 1588 and final texts Montaigne develops this idea at length. If geographical factors such as climate determine man's intelligence and activities, there is no basis for pride in human achievements.
Similarly, if nature acts in cycles, of which man is unaware, then man's pride is humbled again:

Si nous voyons tantost fleurir un art, une opinion, tantost une autre, par quelque influence celeste; tel siecle produire telles natures et incliner l'humain genre à tel ou tel ply; les espris des hommes tantost gaillars, tantost maigres, comme nos chams; que deviennent toutes ces belles prerogatives dequoy nous nous allons flatant?

Immediately following this sentence, Montaigne changes his line of attack against man's faith in his achievements. Since we are all prone to error, he argues, how do we know we are ever right?

Puis qu'un homme sage se peut mesconter, et cent hommes, et plusieurs nations, voire et l'humaine nature selon nous se mesconte plusieurs siecles en cecy ou en cela, quelle seurté avons nous que par fois elle cesse de se mesconter...

A final addition pinpoints Montaigne's own times for special humiliation: perhaps the whole period is nothing more than a historical aberration, unrecognized as such by those living through it: "Et [quelle sureté avons nous] qu'en ce siecle [l'humaine nature] ne soit en mesconte?"
NOTES

1 Montaigne published the third book of the Essais in its first version in 1588. For all references to the 1588 version of the Essais and to the additions made to this version in the final texts I use the seven-volume edition prepared by H. Motheau and D. Jouaust which was published in Paris in the years 1886-89.

2 See above, Chapter 1, pp. 35-37.


4 Ibid., 173.


7 Ibid., 170.

8 Essais, I.37: VS, 229.


10 Ibid., 120.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Essais, III.8: MJ, vi, 81.

14 Ibid., 82.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., 99.


19 Ibid., 137.

20 Ibid., 138.

21 Ibid., 201.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid., 202.
Ibid., 248.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid., 268-69.
Ibid.
Ibid., 187.
Ibid., 188.
**Essais**, III.5: MJ v, 284.
Ibid., 58.
Ibid., 59.
Ibid., 57-58.
Ibid., 57.
**Essais**, III.6: VS, 907.
Ibid., 70.
Ibid.
47 Ibid., 140-41.
48 Ibid., 141-42.
49 Ibid., 143.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid., 144.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid., 145.
54 Ibid., 152.
56 Ibid., 289.
58 Ibid., 7.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid., 7-8.
61 Ibid., 8.
63 Ibid.
64 Essais, III.8: MJ vi, 86.
65 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
69 Essais, III.12: MJ vi, 284.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
"Nous vivons, et eux et nous, sous même tect et humons un même air; il y a, sauf le plus et le moins, entre nous une perpetuelle
resemblance." In the 1588 edition this expression of geographical similarity was replaced with a historical notion.

96 Ibid., 575.
97 Ibid., 575–76.
98 Ibid., 576.
99 Ibid.
Montaigne shared an interest in history with many of his contemporaries, at a time when modern historical thinking—its methods, its secularity and its consciousness of process—was beginning to take shape. As we have seen, the essayist shares some of the characteristics of his contemporaries' thinking.

In Chapter I, I attempted to see the extent and the limitations of Montaigne's historical criticism. By comparing his thinking first to that of the extremely skeptical Cornelius Agrippa and Francesco Patrizzi, I found that the skepticism which assumes that no truth is to be found in history is foreign to Montaigne's thought. Montaigne does apply such thinking to other areas of human endeavor, especially in the "Apologie," but the ability of history to tell the truth is not included in such criticism. Melchor Cano and François Baudouin represent a second stage in the development of sixteenth-century historical criticism, a stage in which the ultimate uncertainty of historical knowledge is accepted and in which the criterion for belief is the competence of the historian to whom one refers. This attitude, which leaves unanswered the question of how to judge the competence of the historian, is shown by Montaigne in the earliest essays of the 1580 edition. But by the time Montaigne writes the later essays of that edition he is making use of a skepticism very similar to that of the historical theoretician Jean Bodin. Bodin's method combines the use of a moderate skepticism
to verify the historian's veracity with the realization that ultimate certainty cannot be asked from history. Montaigne, as we saw in investigations of several chapters in the *Essais*, makes use of just such a method in his commentary on Tacitus, Dion, Froissart, Commines, Guicciardini, the Du Bellays and others.

But Montaigne does not go as far as Bodin in envisaging a historian who will compare the accounts of past historians in an attempt at reaching a definitive account. He does undertake this type of investigation himself in certain chapters—II.29. "De la liberté de conscience," for example—but he does not state that he expects such work from the historians he reads. In Montaigne's thinking, the historian writes of his own experience and describes the events of his own time. In fact the distinction—adumbrated in Bodin's writings—between the historian as an original authority (Montaigne's view) and the historian as a derivative authority relying on the accounts of others, "became common patrimony of historical research only in the late seventeenth century," as A. D. Momigliano points out.¹

It is hardly surprising, then, that Montaigne does not state such a view of the secondary historian's task. What is surprising is that the essayist who declares, at the end of "De la force de l'imagination," that "les histoires que j'emprunte je les renvoys sur la conscience de ceux de qui je les prens,"² should demonstrate the concern for historical criticism which we have seen. The passage in question, in which Montaigne seems to wish to declaim responsibility for the truth of his accounts, is indeed problematic when compared with the examples of historical criticism discussed in Chapter II. As we saw in the first
chapter, Lanson, believing in Montaigne's tendency to doubt, believes that this is an early passage, superseded by later, more skeptical statements. Villey, believing in Montaigne's general tendency towards credulity, sees the passage as a later one, the result of Montaigne's realization that skepticism in history was too onerous for him to maintain.

In fact, as Chapter II has shown, Montaigne's historical thought can be characterized neither by "doubt" nor by "credulity." It is, rather, the same kind of tempered skepticism which Bodin advocates in his Methodus. Montaigne the reader approaches the historian warily, as it were, assessing his integrity and the extent to which he can be believed in the various areas he writes about.

The truth for Montaigne is, however, ultimately a matter of ethics, not erudition. We saw this in Chapter III, on the occasions at which Montaigne's interest in history stops short once the ethical problem it implies has been considered. In the passage from "De la force de l'imagination" Montaigne considers the ethical problem of relaying the historical truth. He will leave the problem of the literal truth of what he says to the conscience of his source. Later in the same passage he adds, "ma conscience ne falsifie pas un iota, me science, je ne sçay." Clearly this passage is more concerned with the ethical problem of telling the truth than with the critical problem of finding it.

The question of Montaigne's awareness of historical change also becomes clearer when considered in the light of his ethical concerns. This we have already seen in Chapter III. Montaigne is interested in
the changing history of laws, because their instability poses the prob-
lem of their relation to ultimate truth and the fallibility of their
human inventors. But he is not interested in spelling out for the
reader what the various stages in any law's development actually were.
Sometimes, when considering the ethical basis for a law, Montaigne
finds that it is the embodiment of some timeless reasonable idea rather
than the end-product of a process. This too is, of course, a non-
historical view. In fact, Montaigne's concern for ethical questions
brings him a certain distance towards a historical view of law, but no
further—just as it did in the case of his historical criticism.

Not only in the case of law, but in the case of development from
one civilization to another, Montaigne's interest in historical process
is limited. He is interested in other civilizations, but not from the
point of view of their development. (The inevitable exception is the
Roman civilization. We have seen Montaigne's interest in its various
stages, in both Chapter IV and Chapter V.) He uses instead the tech-
niques of comparison—usually comparison between the French of his own
times and other civilizations, with the former almost always being shown
at a disadvantage. He often compares the French with the Ancients of
Greek and Rome, and indicates that ethical and moral standards have
decayed. But this is, paradoxically, a decay with no process in-
volved. The stages in the decay, in other words, do not interest
Montaigne, but the fact of the decay does. Similarly, we find that
he can consider other patterns on the past—progress or cycles, for
example—without demonstrating the accompanying sense of historical
development that one would expect today.
Compared to his contemporaries, Montaigne's sense of historical development—or rather his expression of such development—is small. Nicolas Vignier claims in the Preface to his *Bibliothèque historiale* that "The disintegration of one thing is the generation of another, and vice versa." When Montaigne says "le profit de l'un est le dommage de l'autre," in the essay of that title (1.22), he is referring not to historical change but to a process of exchange between individuals—the doctor benefitting from his patient's illness, for example. The essay poses a moral question, and the progression from one state to another is there to be regretted, not explained.

However, if Montaigne does not share in the acceptance and expression of historical change that intrigued his contemporaries, he does share their conviction that history consists of the actions of men, not the acts of God. Providential history, as we saw in Chapter II, has a very small place in the *Essais*. Instead of a history intimately guided by the deity, Montaigne envisages an all-powerful but remote God who permits man to act according to his free will.

In keeping with his belief in human freedom, Montaigne is opposed to the idea that there is any deterministic force at work in history. Capricious fortune has a much larger place in the *Essais* than implacable fate (although the two do appear to overlap on some occasions, as we have seen). Montaigne's refusal of determinism is not a monolithic attitude, however. It had its own development during the twenty years in which the *Essais* were composed. This is one of the observations made in Chapters IV and V, in which Montaigne's statements
about history are examined following the chronological order of their composition.

As we saw in Chapter IV, in the earliest essays (those which can be assumed to have been written between 1572 and 1574), Montaigne is tempted by the idea that there is a determinism in history. He tries to apply a prescriptive type of thinking to the past and to see if it is relevant to the future. Chapter IV also shows that in the 1578-80 texts the attempt at finding historical patterns relative to the future is put aside. Montaigne is now much more interested in characterizing periods of history and in tracing overall patterns in man's past—types of generalization about history which are much more descriptive than prescriptive. Chapter V has shown that in the 1588 and later texts this movement towards a more descriptive type of thinking continues. In these texts I find that characterization of periods of history and the description of overall patterns in the past are the generalizations Montaigne uses almost exclusively. Thus, when one looks at the form taken by Montaigne's thought about history, one sees that there is a distinct progression from trying to see if history is deterministic (and Montaigne usually finds that it is not, even at this early stage) towards a much more descriptive type of thinking about history.

Why would the question of determinism in history interest Montaigne during the earliest stage of the composition of the Essais? As I noted at the beginning of Chapter IV, Montaigne confronts the questions of how and what to write, in the years 1572-74. The early essays are a search for form, as Donald Frame points out in Montaigne's Discovery of Man, meaning not just literary form, but a form for the
self as well. One form that tempted Montaigne briefly during the composition of the *Essais*, in this early period when, not yet having found his own form he was still very much influenced by his memory of his dead friend La Boétie, was the rigid mold of the Stoic sage, particularly as described by Seneca in his *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*.

The Stoic ethic is briefly outlined by Sayce in the eighth chapter of *The Essays of Montaigne: A Critical Exploration*:

To summarise, and perhaps to caricature, the sage or wise man of the Stoics tries by intense and deliberate effort to attain a mastery over himself and his passions, to maintain a rigid virtue which separates him from the common herd, to achieve a state of indifference to external things which makes him impervious to every possible misfortune, to poverty, pain, imprisonment, torture, death.  

This narrow, self-oriented ethic had great appeal in the latter half of the sixteenth century. It provided a mental retreat from the devastation wrought by the religious wars, and from the disillusionment of the extravagant hopes of the early humanists. As even the most casual reading of the *Essais* shows, Montaigne was very much aware of both of these conditions. And so it is not surprising that he briefly espoused some of the elements of the Stoic point of view.

One of the essays which shows Montaigne's Stoicism particularly clearly is I.20, "Que philosophe c'est apprendre à mourir." Here Montaigne attempts to come to terms with the inevitability of death. His own natural tendency is to put it out of his mind:

`Qu'importe'il, me direz vous, comme que ce soit, pourveu qu'on ne s'en donne point de peine? Je suis de cet avis, et, en quelque maniére qu'on se puisse mettre à l'abri des coups, fut ce soubz la peau d'un veau, je ne suis pas homme qui y reculsasse. Car il me suffit de passer à mon aise,`
et le meilleur jeu que je me puisse donner je le prens, si peu glorieus au reste et exemplaire que vous voudrez.\(^7\)

But, he observes, those who choose this course of action are taken by surprise by death when it does come:

\[\ldots\text{ quand elle arrive, ou à eux, ou à leurs femmes, enfans et amis, les surprenante en dessoude et à decouvert, quels tourmens, quels cris, quelle rage et quel desespoir les accable? Vites-vous jamais rien si rabaisse, si changé, si confus?}\(^8\)

In order to avoid behaving like the "vulgaire," Montaigne's aim becomes to take the element of surprise out of death. The precept is: "Il est incertain où la mort nous attende, attendons la partout."\(^9\) And, Montaigne claims, his own practice is consonant with this precept:

Quelcun, feuilletant l'autre jour mes tablettes, trouva un memoire de quelque chose que je vouloy estre faite apres ma mort. Je luy di, comme il estoit vray, que, n'iestant qu'à une lieue de ma maison, et sain et gaillard, je m'estoy hasté de l'escrire la, pour ne m'asseurer point d'arriver jusques chez moy.\(^10\)

The Stoic sage claims to despise the attraction of future things and to refuse to fear future reversals of fortune, in an attempt at reaching a stern, hard-won peace of mind. But the very attempt to prepare oneself for death and misfortune is an attempt to make the future manageable and thus to impose one's will upon it. The Stoic sage attempts to do this, and insofar as Montaigne tries to create a Stoic persona for himself in the early Essais, he too is trying to subject his own future to his will. In the chapter which precedes I.20, entitled "Qu'il ne faut juger de nostre heur qu'apres la mort," how Montaigne will act during his last moments—not how he acts now—is seen as being his definition: "Je remets à la mort l'essay du fruict
Montaigne of the early essays tries simply to project himself into the future by confronting a stoic ideal, this 'philosophie qu'il aperçoit comme quelque chose d'idéal et pur pur. . .'.

It is in the context of this search for a form for the self and a search for a way of making the future manageable by the mind that one should look at the early essays in which history is considered. Thus in I.24, in which Montaigne reflects on how the ruler should act if he discovers a plot against his life, comparing the successful action of Augustus Caesar with the similar, but failed, strategy of the Prince de Guise, and concluding that the future cannot be planned, one finds a typical Stoic dilemma: how to react to a future of great danger. Similarly, in the other essays considered in Chapter IV, Montaigne considers the choices of action available to commanders and princes facing great military and political risks. And in each case, as we have seen, he looks at the past to see if it can provide them with lessons for the future.

This stage in Montaigne's thinking, however, does not last very long, spanning, as it does, only the years 1572-74. He found that the natural changeability of the human character could not be accommodated by the rigid Stoic ethic of constancy—which he had tried to assume even though, as the first quotation from I.20 indicates, he knew it was not really suited to his own personality. Similarly, when he considers history, he almost always concludes that the unforeseeable element in
human affairs prevents one from patterning events rigidly enough to
draw conclusions about the future. In both psychology and history he
needed a more descriptive mode of thought to accommodate the changes he
observed in the affairs of the mind and of the world. As Hugo
Friedrich says about Montaigne's psychological views, comparing them to
those of Seneca:

. . . les fins éthiques qu[e Sénèque] poursuivait ne
pouvaient guère que tolérer les individualités; la
sagesse accomplie n'en garderait plus trace. La sagesse
de Montaigne, elle, met les individualités en lumière,
la sienne surtout, avec toutes leurs phases. C'est une
sagesse qui a absorbé la fluctuation au lieu de l'arrêter.14

In the early Essais, however, Montaigne followed Seneca quite
closely. It is not until the 1578-80 texts that he begins to move
definitively towards a more descriptive way of organizing his reflec-
tions on man's past. In these later texts of the 1580 edition,
Montaigne begins to find his own form—he finds himself as legitimate
object of his reflections and he finds a way of thinking more suited to
his own personality. The broader, more descriptive modes of generali-
zation about the past find a larger place in the Essais at this point,
as we have seen, while some of the intermediate types of generaliza-
tion continue to be used.

Just as, in his psychological observations, Montaigne would soon
arrive at "une intelligence de l'individu fondée sur la descrip-
tion"—rather than one based on Senecan prescriptions—so in history,
as we have seen, he would turn to more descriptive generalizations in
the 1578-80 texts and then, in the 1588 and final texts, concentrate
almost wholly on the two types of generalizations which I have
identified as the most broadly descriptive, characterization of periods and the establishment of overall patterns in the past.

As I pointed out above, the early chapters of the Essais constitute a search for a form (in the various senses of the word). However, as Glynn P. Norton has shown of the work as a whole: "The introspective fabric of the Essais is comprised of a series of mutating self-realizations, which, in the later essays and additions, enter fully into [Montaigne's] consciousness."16 In the final additions to the Essais one passage in particular shows that Montaigne has become fully aware of the two levels on which changeability in human affairs—which, as a "Stoic" he had attempted to deny—can operate. An addition to "Du repentir" brings together his acceptance of "la fortune" in history and "la fortune" (today one would probably say the subconscious) at work in the human mind:

La force de tout conseil gist au temps; les occasions et les matières roulent et changent sans cesse. . . . Il y a des parties secrettes aux objects qu'on manie et indivinables, signamment, en la nature des hommes, des conditions muettes, sans montre, incognues par fois du possesseur mesme, qui se produisent et esveillent par des occasions survenantes.17

Montaigne's historical thought thus moves from experiments with the prescriptive mode to a preference for description, a movement which parallels his "flirtation" with Stoicism and his subsequent increased confidence in his own judgment. Another observation we made in Chapters IV and V was that in the Essais there is a movement from an early preference for a pattern of decline in human affairs to the introduction of a pattern of repetitive, circular meanderings, under which the idea of decline, and the rarer idea of progress, could logically be
Montaigne does not stop saying that man has declined from the past generation to his own, or from Antiquity to the present. But in the /b/ and /c/ texts he suggests, in addition, that the overall pattern of the past may be larger than man knows.

As we saw in considering the form of Montaigne's reflections about history, his awareness of past change, and its correlative, the possibility of unforeseen developments in the future, guide him into seeking more descriptive than prescriptive modes of thought. In the "Apologie," in which most of the 1580 edition's reflections on overall patterns of history are found, Montaigne is primarily interested in reducing man's confidence in human reason. The progressive pattern in history, which assumes that the products of man's reason have contributed to the common good, is denounced, and the opposite pattern of decline—resulting from what Montaigne sees as the damage done by human reason—is substituted.

Much of Montaigne's skepticism, as Hugo Friedrich and Françoise Joukovsky among others point out, derives from a heightened awareness of possibility (which in turn derives from an acute sensitivity to the changeability both of phenomena and of the human mind). As Joukovsky puts it:

Contrairement à la pensée moderne, Montaigne ne semble pas admettre qu'il existe des événements probables, auxquels il est le plus raisonnable de s'attendre, et qui vérifient la loi des grands nombres.18

The notion of degrees of possibility—of possibility in a restrictive sense—seems not to exist for Montaigne:
Il fait éclater la notion du possible, et confère une puissance illimitée au hasard, notion prélogique et populaire, qu'il révalorise par défiance envers la raison.  

In the context of this way of thinking, there is every chance that whatever the human mind concludes about the object of its reflections could easily be wrong. And even if it cannot be shown to be wrong, the possibility of its error still remains. Such an attitude underlies the "Apologie" and is expressed therein with great enthusiasm. Thus, in the "Apologie," when Montaigne considers patterns of history he most frequently criticizes man's idea that he has progressed and, by the very strength of his arguments, substitutes a notion of decline which has a rather dogmatic flavor.

The awareness of limitless possibilities inherent in phenomena—minus the negative verve of the "Apologie"—continues in the 1588 text and in the final additions. Montaigne now introduces the view of history which combines the least possible amount of dogmatism with the greatest possible amount of criticism of human reason: a theory of repetitive, circular meanderings which on the one hand does not declare that man is either getting steadily worse or steadily better, and which, on the other hand, includes the notion that, for all man's "outrecuidance" it is a pattern in his actions of which he remains totally unaware; "Nous n'allons point, nous rodons plustost et tournevions ça et là; nous nous promenons sur nos pas."  

Confused circular movement of which man is unaware, unforeseeable change in human affairs, and the humble place of man in relation to the unknowable, are all accepted and described in this view of the past. If we look back at the quotation
from I.20 given above on page 227, we can see that in the early *Essais* these were just the qualities which Montaigne was trying to overcome. At the sudden approach of death those who had not prepared themselves were criticized: "Vites-vous jamais rien si rabaisssé, si changé, si confus?" (emphasis added). Montaigne's later commentary on history clearly shows that he has come full circle from this prescriptive way of thinking to an accepting and descriptive mode of thought.

The third aspect of Montaigne's historical discourse which we considered in Chapters IV and V was the use he makes of the historical example. We found that from being the matter through which Montaigne leads the reader, making him doubt and hesitate as he does himself, the example becomes a simpler referent, quoted in support of generalizations already formulated.

This observation fits in well with the well-known view of a Montaigne who gathers strength—and confidence—as he goes. His early material comes directly from his reading, but as the anxiety of the beginning writer disperses, as his reading of Plutarch endorses him in his interest in psychology and his tendency to digress down interesting pathways of thought, then as his book and his mayoralty turn out to be successful, he gains confidence in the ability of his own mind to find the stuff of its arguments, rather than relying so heavily on the example drawn from history.

The study of history in Montaigne thus allows one to approach him from the point of view of the development of his text and his thought, as we have done in Chapters IV and V, or from the point of view of his similarities—and differences—with his contemporaries, as we have
done in Chapters II and III. This discussion has shown that he shares some, though not all, of the attitudes of the historians of his time, and that the internal development of his historical thought can shed light on important aspects of the development of his thought as a whole.
NOTES


3 See Chapter III above, p. 126.

4 Donald Frame, Montaigne’s Discovery of Man, p. 38.

5 Sayce, The Essays of Montaigne, p. 162.

6 Ibid. On the Neo-Stoic movement in the second half of the sixteenth century, the best work we have is still, despite its age, Léontine Zanta’s La Renaissance du Stoïcisme au XVIe siècle (Paris: Champion, 1914).

7 Essais, I.20: DB i, 57.

8 Ibid., 58.

9 Ibid., 59.

10 Ibid., 60.

11 Essais, I.19: DB i, 53.


13 Discussed in Chapter IV above, pp. 150-51.

14 Friedrich, Montaigne, p. 77.

15 Ibid.

16 Norton, Montaigne and the Introspective Mind, p. 40.

17 Essais, III.2: VS, 814.


19 Ibid.

20 Essais, III.6: VS, 907.
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**Historiography**


Sixteenth-century Background


