

Michele de montaigne on making decisions



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Michel de Montaigne on Making Opinions In his three books of essays, Michel de Montaigne reflects upon his life to uncover some of the stable truths that will help to guide a man's opinions. He claims that man is "miraculously vain, various and wavering. It is difficult to find a judgement [sic] on him which is steady and uniform" meaning that man and his opinions are unstable and fluid. It is possible for a reader of the essays to see how Montaigne employs his theories within his own life as he searches for the truth the natural world can provide. A flaw of humanity, according to Montaigne, is a lack of healthy doubt.

Man takes facts and "ignore[s] the whats and expatiate[s] on the whys." Instead of questioning facts from outside sources, man takes them as being the truth and blindly follows them. Humanity looks to tradition and history -- the way things have always been done -- and assumes them to be correct instead of being skeptical of the fluidity of events. In traditions of old, the "wavering" quality is found in Alexander the Great and causes him to change paths. He was considered "the most generous toward the vanquished" yet, unpredictably, had Betis brutally dismembered.

Montaigne suggests that in order to enter the realm of well-considered judgment, one must first begin to reject commonly accepted traditions and historical ideas and instead look within for the beginnings of truth. Humanity, and everything in life is unstable and changing. Making sound judgments is difficult because the man and what is being judged are constantly in states of flux. Montaigne says to be "suspicious of the things discovered by our minds...of which we have abandoned Nature and her rules..." Through

saying this, Montaigne declares that one needs to be faithful to his unchanging nature in order to find truth.

As an example in his own life, Montaigne relates that he considers his actions as “ ruled by what I am and are in harmony with how I was made. ” Montaigne believes that the first step to good judgment is finding stability in one’s self. Humans believe that experience is the key to understanding things. If one experiences, he can better form opinions. However, according to Montaigne, reasoning and judgment based on experience is just as unstable as reasoning based on thoughts. If experience could uncover the truth, why is it still that doctors all have different opinions?

Years and years of experience do not improve the authority of the doctors because they still cannot come to a common judgment. What Montaigne appears to say is that the path to well-considered opinions comes from the search for truth in all aspects of life. And this search for truth requires man to take a skeptical view on everything and to turn away from the “ truth” found in science and scholarship in favor of the power of nature—to look to what is unchangeable, his own nature, rather than what is constantly in flux.

Not only must man experience things, he must look at them skeptically and reject commonplace ideas and traditions to look within and to nature in order to uncover the truth in all things. Man needs to create an internal model of himself in order to find stability. In order to find certainty, one must discover stable truths, which can only happen through the questioning of everything and the doubting of all things, because this doubt will allow one to be constantly aware of the changing of the world.

In Montaigne's essays, it is possible to see the effects of this "healthy skepticism" in his experiences, especially in his continued reflection on life. Montaigne questions all things that can change in order to make sound judgments. He lives a life of skepticism and reflection because he sees it as a "mighty endeavor and a full one" and this reflection helps him to better consider his opinions. However, it is also possible to see that this search for truth is a lifelong process.

Montaigne says clearly that "I speak as an ignorant questioning man: for solutions I purely and simply abide by the common lawful [Church] beliefs" and he makes no effort to prove that he has succeeded in finding pure stability of ideas in anything but Christian doctrine. Montaigne shows that skepticism must be a way of life in order for one to develop meaningful opinions. Bibliography de Montaigne, Michel, *The Complete Essays*. Translated by M. A. Screech. London, England: Penguin Books Ltd. , 1987. ----- [1].

Michel de Montaigne, "We Reach the Same Ends by Discrepant Means," in *The Complete Essays*, trans. M. A. Screech (London, England: Penguin Books Ltd. , 1987), 5. [2]. Montaigne, "On the Lame," 1161. [3]. Montaigne, "We Reach the Same Ends by Discrepant Means," 5-6. [4]. Montaigne, "On the Resemblance of Children to Their Fathers," 866. [5]. Montaigne, "On Repenting," 916. [6]. Montaigne, "On the Resemblance of Children to Their Fathers," 871. [7]. Montaigne, "On Repenting," 911. [8]. Montaigne, "On Three Kinds of Social Intercourse," 923. [9]. Montaigne, "On Repenting," 909.