

Montaigne's "of cannibals" essay sample



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To be quite truthful, reading Montaigne's "Of Cannibals", was overwhelming, due to the many ideas and how modern his thinking. The main theme or focus of this essay is liberation in the face of ethnocentrism. All in all, this essay could have many different themes but this one stuck out the most. We should be less narrow-minded and more open to diverse settings, not so judgmental. In this essay, Montaigne is well aware of the shortcomings and far from perfection atmosphere where he lives. He isn't trying to put his society on a pedestal. Here in this excerpt, he is saying that we are so narrow-minded that we think everything in our society is perfect, whereas we look to nature and it is far more perfect than anything that we could ever hope to accomplish.

"...for indeed it seems we have no other level of truth and reason than the example and pattern of the opinions and customs of the country we live in. There is always the perfect religion, the perfect government, the perfect and accomplished manners in all things."

"All our efforts cannot even succeed in reproducing the nest of the tiniest little bird, its contexture, its beauty and convenience; or even the web of the puny spider. All things, says Plato, are produced by nature, by fortune, or by art; the greatest and most beautiful by one or the other of the first two, the least and most imperfect by the last."

Montaigne is saying throughout the essay that even though we may not live like certain groups of people, that we should not be quick to judge them or

criticize them in comparison to our way of life. Who is to say that our way of life is better?

“ So we may well call these people barbarians, in respect to the rules of reason, but not in respect to ourselves, who surpasses them in every kind of barbarity.”

“ Each man calls barbarism whatever is not his own practice.” This insight is a continuation on the attack of ethnocentrism. However, it goes beyond just ethnocentrism, this could pertain to a number of things in life.

To place these thoughts and actions into everyday life would be easy, for it is all around us. To base this on race and how people of the minority are treated compared to the majority, there is a difference. I do believe that it has gotten better but it is still hanging in the air. Personal experience, it has happened to me and I have seen it with my own eyes happen to people even when they haven't noticed. My husband and I had to go to the college and have them do some paperwork for my scholarship through the tribe. The lady that was helping me was nice and then as soon as I explained what I needed her to do for me, which wasn't a whole lot, she got short with me. She acted as though she didn't believe me and that I was lying to her. Then when she found out I wasn't lying she remained short. That is the first and only experience that I have had regarding race.

Other instances that this insight can be related to would sex, martial status, intelligence, sexuality, age, etc...