

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

ESSAYS



Book 2 · Chapter 30

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

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

ESSAYS-2-30-20260831-212242

On a Monster Child

This story shall go by itself; for I will leave it to physicians to discourse of. Two days ago I saw a child that two men and a nurse, who said they were the father, the uncle, and the aunt of it, carried about to get money by showing it, by reason it was so strange a creature. It was, as to all the rest, of a common form, and could stand upon its feet; could go and gabble much like other children of the same age; it had never as yet taken any other nourishment but from the nurse's breasts, and what, in my presence, they tried to put into the mouth of it, it only chewed a little and spat it out again without swallowing; the cry of it seemed indeed a little odd and particular, and it was just fourteen months old. Under the breast it was joined to another child, but without a head, and which had the spine of the back without motion, the rest entire; for though it had one arm shorter than the other, it had been broken by accident at their birth; they were joined breast to breast, and as if a lesser child sought to throw its arms about the neck of one something bigger. The juncture and thickness of the place where they were conjoined was not above four fingers, or thereabouts, so that if you thrust up the imperfect child you might see the navel of the other below it, and the joining was betwixt the paps and the navel. The navel of the imperfect child could not be seen, but all the rest of the belly, so that all that was not joined of the imperfect one, as arms, buttocks, thighs, and legs, hung dangling upon the other, and might reach to the mid-leg. The nurse, moreover, told us that it urined at both bodies, and that the members of the other were nourished, sensible, and in the same plight with that she gave suck to, excepting that they were shorter and less.

This double body and several limbs relating to one head might be interpreted a favorable prognostic to the king, of maintaining these various parts of our state under the union of his laws; but lest the event should prove otherwise, 'tis better to let it alone, for in things already past there needs no divination: *Ut quum facts sunt, tum ad conjecturam aliqui interpretatione revocentur*, as 'tis said of Epimenides, that he always prophesied backward.

So as when they are come to pass, they may then by some interpretation be recalled to conjecture, • CIC., DIV., 2.31

I have just seen a herdsman in Medoc, of about thirty years of age, who has no sign of any genital parts; he has three holes by which he incessantly voids his water; he is bearded, has desire, and seeks contact with women.

Those that we call monsters are not so to God, who sees in the immensity of His work the infinite forms that He has comprehended therein; and it is to be believed that this figure which astonishes us has relation to some other figure of the same kind unknown to man. From His all wisdom nothing but good, common; and regular proceeds; but we do not discern the disposition and relation.

Quod crebrò videt, non miratur, etiamsi, cur fiat, nescit. Quod antè non vidit, id, si evenerit, ostentum esse censet.

Whatever falls out contrary to custom we say is contrary to nature, but nothing, whatever it be, is contrary to her. Let, therefore, this universal and natural reason expel the error and astonishment that novelty brings along with it.

What he often sees he does not admire, though he be ignorant how it comes to pass. When a thing happens he never saw before, he thinks that it is a portent. • Cic., Div., 2.22

MONTAIGNE'S SOURCES

Cic., Div.

Cicero, *On Divination*