

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

ESSAYS



Book 2 · Chapter 11

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On Cruelty

I FANCY VIRTUE to be something else, and something more noble, than good nature, and the mere propension to goodness, that we are born into the world withal. Well-disposed and well-descended souls pursue, indeed, the same methods, and represent in their actions the same face that virtue itself does: but the word virtue imports, I know not what, more great and active than merely for a man to suffer himself, by a happy disposition, to be gently and quietly drawn to the rule of reason. He who, by a natural sweetness and facility, should despise injuries received, would doubtless do a very fine and laudable thing; but he who, provoked and nettled to the quick by an offense, should fortify himself with the arms of reason against the furious appetite of revenge, and after a great conflict, master his own passion, would certainly do a great deal more. The first would do well; the latter virtuously: one action might be called goodness, and the other virtue; for methinks, the very name of virtue presupposes difficulty and contention, and cannot be exercised without an opponent. 'Tis for this reason, perhaps, that we call God good, mighty, liberal and just; but we do not call Him virtuous, being that all His operations are natural and without endeavor.

I borrow from the vulgar opinion, which is false, notwithstanding the witty conceit of Arcesilaus in answer to one, who, being reproached that many scholars went from his school to the Epicurean, but never any from thence to his school, said in answer, "I believe it indeed; numbers of capons being made out of cocks, but never any cocks out of capons." For, in truth, the Epicurean sect is not at all inferior to the Stoic in steadiness, and the rigor of opinions and precepts. And a certain Stoic, showing more honesty than those disputants, who, in order to quarrel with Epicurus, and to throw the game into their hands, make him say what he never thought, putting a wrong construction upon his words, clothing his sentences, by the strict rules of grammar, with another meaning, and a different opinion from that which they knew he entertained in his mind and in his morals, the Stoic, I say, declared that he abandoned the Epicurean sect, upon this among other considerations, that he thought their road too lofty and inaccessible; *et ii qui φιλήδονοι vocantur, sunt φιλόκαλοι et φιλοδίκαιοι, omnesque virtutes et colunt et retinent*. These philosophers say that it is not enough to have the soul seated in a good

And those are called lovers of pleasure, being in effect lovers of honor and justice, who cultivate

place, of a good temper, and well disposed to virtue; it is not enough to have our resolutions and our reasoning fixed above all the power of fortune, but that we are, moreover, to seek occasions wherein to put them to the proof: they would seek pain, necessity, and contempt to contend with them and to keep the soul in breath: *multum sibi adjicit virtus lacessita*. 'Tis one of the reasons why Epaminondas, who was yet of a third sect, refused the riches fortune presented to him by very lawful means; because, said he, I am to contend with poverty, in which extreme he maintained himself to the last. Socrates put himself, methinks, upon a ruder trial, keeping for his exercise a confounded scolding wife, which was fighting at sharps. Metellus having, of all the Roman senators, alone attempted, by the power of virtue, to withstand the violence of Saturninus, tribune of the people at Rome, who would, by all means, cause an unjust law to pass in favor of the commons, and, by so doing, having incurred the capital penalties that Saturninus had established against the dissentient, entertained those who, in this extremity, led him to execution with words to this effect: That it was a thing too easy and too base to do ill; and that to do well where there was no danger was a common thing; but that to do well where there was danger was the proper office of a man of virtue. These words of Metellus very clearly represent to us what I would make out, viz., that virtue refuses facility for a companion; and that the easy, smooth, and descending way by which the regular steps of a sweet disposition of nature are conducted is not that of a true virtue; she requires a rough and stormy passage; she will have either exotic difficulties to wrestle with, like that of Metellus, by means whereof fortune delights to interrupt the speed of her career, or internal difficulties, that the inordinate appetites and imperfections of our condition introduce to disturb her.

I am come thus far at my ease; but here it comes into my head that the soul of Socrates, the most perfect that ever came to my knowledge, should by this rule be of very little recommendation; for I cannot conceive in that person any the least motion of a vicious inclination: I cannot imagine there could be any difficulty or constraint in the course of his virtue: I know his reason to be so powerful and sovereign over him that she would never have suffered a vicious appetite so much as to spring in him. To a virtue so elevated as his, I have nothing to oppose. Methinks I see him march, with a victorious and triumphant pace, in pomp and at his ease, without opposition or disturbance. If virtue cannot shine bright, but by the conflict of contrary appetites, shall we then say that she cannot subsist without the assistance of vice, and that it is from her that she derives her reputation and honor? What then, also, would become of that brave and generous Epicurean pleasure, which makes account that it nourishes virtue tenderly in her lap, and there makes it play and wanton, giving it for toys to play withal, shame, fevers, poverty, death, and torments? If I presuppose that a perfect virtue manifests itself in contending, in patient enduring of pain, and undergoing the uttermost extremity of the gout; without being moved in her seat; if I give her troubles and difficulty for her necessary objects: what will become of a virtue elevated to such a degree, as not only to despise pain, but, moreover, to rejoice in it, and to be tickled with the throes of a sharp colic, such as the Epicureans have established, and of which many of them, by their actions, have given most manifest proofs? As have several others, who I find to have surpassed in effects even the very rules of their

and observe all the virtues. • CIC.,
FAM., 15.19.3

Virtue is much strengthened by
combats. • SEN., EP., 13.3

discipline. Witness the younger Cato: When I see him die, and tearing out his own bowels, I am not satisfied simply to believe that he had then his soul totally exempt from all trouble and horror: I cannot think that he only maintained himself in the steadiness that the Stoical rules prescribed him; temperate, without emotion, and imperturbed. There was, methinks, something in the virtue of this man too sprightly and fresh to stop there; I believe that, without doubt, he felt a pleasure and delight in so noble an action, and was more pleased in it than in any other of his life: *Sic abiit a vita, ut causam moriendi nactum se esse gauderet*. I believe it so thoroughly that I question whether he would have been content to have been deprived of the occasion of so brave an exploit; and if the goodness that made him embrace the public concern more than his own, withheld me not, I should easily fall into an opinion that he thought himself obliged to fortune for having put his virtue upon so brave a trial, and for having favored that thief in treading underfoot the ancient liberty of his country. Methinks I read in this action I know not what exaltation in his soul, and an extraordinary and manly emotion of pleasure, when he looked upon the generosity and height of his enterprise:

Deliberate morte ferocior,

not stimulated with any hope of glory, as the popular and effeminate judgments of some have concluded (for that consideration was too mean and low to possess so generous, so haughty, and so determined a heart as his), but for the very beauty of the thing in itself, which he who had the handling of the springs discerned more clearly and in its perfection than we are able to do.

Philosophy has obliged me in determining that so brave an action had been indecently placed in any other life than that of Cato; and that it only appertained to his to end so; notwithstanding, and according to reason, he commanded his son and the senators who accompanied him to take another course in their affairs. *Catonem, quum incredibilem natura tribuisset gravitatem, eamque ipse perpetue constantia roboravisset, semperque in proposito consilio permansisset, moriendum potius, quam tyranni vultus aspiciendus, erat.*

Every death ought to hold proportion with the life before it; we do not become others for dying. I always interpret the death by the life preceding; and if any one tell me of a death strong and constant in appearance, annexed to a feeble life, I conclude it produced by some feeble cause, and suitable to the life before.

The easiness then of his death and the facility of dying he had acquired by the vigor of his soul; shall we say that it ought to abate anything of the lustre of his virtue? And who, that has his brain never so little tinctured with the true philosophy, can be content to imagine Socrates only free from fear and passion in the accident of his prison, fetters, and condemnation? and that will not discover in him not only firmness and constancy (which was his ordinary condition), but, moreover, I know not what new satisfaction, and a frolic cheerfulness in his last words and actions? In the start he gave with the pleasure of scratching his leg when his irons were taken off, does he not discover an equal serenity and joy in his soul for being freed from past inconveniences, and at the same time to enter into the knowledge of the things to come? Cato shall pardon me,

He quitted life rejoicing that a reason for dying had arisen. • CÍC., TUSC., 1.74

The more courageous from the deliberation to die. • HOR., CARM., 1.37

Cato, whom nature had given incredible dignity, which he had fortified by perpetual constancy, ever remaining of his predetermined opinion, preferred to die rather than to look on the countenance of a tyrant. • CÍC., OFF., 1.31

if he please; his death indeed is more tragical and more lingering; but yet this is, I know not how, methinks, finer.

Aristippus, to one that was lamenting this death: "The gods grant me such an one," said he.

A man discerns in the soul of these two great men and their imitators (for I very much doubt whether there were ever their equals) so perfect a habitude to virtue, that it was turned to a complexion. It is no longer a laborious virtue, nor the precepts of reason, to maintain which the soul is so racked, but the very essence of their soul, its natural and ordinary habit; they have rendered it such by a long practice of philosophical precepts having lit upon a rich and fine nature; the vicious passions that spring in us can find no entrance into them; the force and vigor of their soul stifle and extinguish irregular desires, so soon as they begin to move.

Now, that it is not more noble, by a high and divine resolution, to hinder the birth of temptations, and to be so formed to virtue, that the very seeds of vice are rooted out, than to hinder by main force their progress; and, having suffered ourselves to be surprised with the first motions of the passions, to arm ourselves and to stand firm to oppose their progress, and overcome them; and that this second effect is not also much more generous than to be simply endowed with a facile and affable nature, of itself disaffected to debauchery and vice, I do not think can be doubted; for this third and last sort of virtue seems to render a man innocent, but not virtuous; free from doing ill, but not apt enough to do well: considering also, that this condition is so near neighbor to imperfection and cowardice, that I know not very well how to separate the confines and distinguish them: the very names of goodness and innocence are, for this reason, in some sort grown into contempt. I very well know that several virtues, as chastity, sobriety, and temperance, may come to a man through personal defects. Constancy in danger, if it must be so called, the contempt of death, and patience in misfortunes, may oftentimes be found in men for want of well judging of such accidents, and not apprehending them for such as they are. Want of apprehension and stupidity sometimes counterfeit virtuous effects as I have often seen it happen, that men have been commended for what really merited blame.

An Italian lord once said this, in my presence, to the disadvantage of his own nation: that the subtlety of the Italians, and the vivacity of their conceptions were so great, and they foresaw the dangers and accidents that might befall them so far off, that it was not to be thought strange, if they were often, in war, observed to provide for their safety, even before they had discovered the peril; that we French and the Spaniards, who were not so cunning, went on further, and that we must be made to see and feel the danger before we would take the alarm; but that even then we could not stick to it. But the Germans and Swiss, more gross and heavy, had not the sense to look about them, even when the blows were falling about their ears. Peradventure, he only talked so for mirth's sake; and yet it is most certain that in war raw soldiers rush into dangers with more precipitancy than after they have been scalded:

*haud ignarus quantum nova gloria in armis,
Et prædulce decus, primo certamine possit.*

Not ignorant how much power the
fresh glory of arms and sweetest

For this reason it is that, when we judge of a particular action, we are to consider the circumstances, and the whole man by whom it is performed, before we give it a name.

To instance in myself: I have sometimes known my friends call that prudence in me, which was merely fortune; and repute that courage and patience, which was judgment and opinion; and attribute to me one title for another, sometimes to my advantage and sometimes otherwise. As to the rest, I am so far from being arrived at the first and most perfect degree of excellence, where virtue is turned into habit, that even of the second I have made no great proofs. I have not been very solicitous to curb the desires by which I have been importuned. My virtue is a virtue, or rather an innocence, casual and accidental. If I had been born of a more irregular complexion, I am afraid I should have made scurvy work; for I never observed any great stability in my soul to resist passions, if they were never so little vehement: I know not how to nourish quarrels and debates in my own bosom, and, consequently, owe myself no great thanks that I am free from several vices:

*si vitiis mediocribus et mea paucis
Mendosa est natura, alioqui recta, velut si
Egregio inspersos reprehendas corpore naevos,*

I owe it rather to my fortune than my reason. She has caused me to be descended of a race famous for integrity and of a very good father; I know not whether or no he has infused into me part of his humors, or whether domestic examples and the good education of my infancy have insensibly assisted in the work, or, if I was otherwise born so:

*Seu Libra, seu me Scorpius adspicit
Formidolosus, pars violentior
Natalis hors, seu tyrannus
Hesperive Capricornus undæ;*

but so it is, that I have naturally a horror for most vices. The answer of Antisthenes to him who asked him, which was the best apprenticeship "to unlearn evil," seems to point at this. I have them in horror, I say, with a detestation so natural, and so much my own, that the same instinct and impression I brought of them with me from my nurse, I yet retain, and no temptation whatever has had the power to make me alter it. Not so much as my own discourses, which in some things lashing out of the common road might seem easily to license me to actions that my natural inclination makes me hate.

I will say a prodigious thing, but I will say it, however: I find myself in many things more under reputation by my manners than by my opinion, and my concupiscence less debauched than my reason.

Aristippus instituted opinions so bold in favor of pleasure and riches as set all the philosophers against him: but as to his manners, Dionysius the tyrant, having presented three beautiful women before him, to take his choice; he made answer, that he would choose them all, and that Paris got himself into trouble for having preferred one before the other two: but, having taken them home to his house, he sent them back untouched.

honor possess in the first contest. •
VERG., AEN., 11.154

If my nature be disfigured only
with slight and few vices, and is
otherwise just, it is as if you should
blame moles on a fair body. • HOR.,
SAT., 1.6.65

Whether the Balance or dread
Scorpio, more potent over my natal
hour, aspects me, or Capricorn,
supreme over the Hesperian sea. •
HOR., CARM., 2.17

His servant finding himself overladen upon the way, with the money he carried after him, he ordered him to pour out and throw away that which troubled him.

And Epicurus, whose doctrines were so irreligious and effeminate, was in his life very laborious and devout; he wrote to a friend of his that he lived only upon biscuit and water, entreating him to send him a little cheese, to lie by him against he had a mind to make a feast. Must it be true, that to be a perfect good man, we must be so by an occult, natural, and universal propriety, without law, reason, or example?

The debauches wherein I have been engaged, have not been, I thank God, of the worst sort, and I have condemned them in myself, for my judgment was never infected by them; on the contrary, I accuse them more severely in myself than in any other; but that is all, for, as to the rest. I oppose too little resistance and suffer myself to incline too much to the other side of the balance, excepting that I moderate them, and prevent them from mixing with other vices, which for the most part will cling together, if a man have not a care. I have contracted and curtailed mine, to make them as single and as simple as I can:

*nec ultra
Errorem foveo.*

Nor do I cherish error further. •
JUV., 3.8

For as to the opinion of the Stoics, who say, "That the wise man when he works, works by all the virtues together, though one be most apparent, according to the nature of the action;" and herein the similitude of a human body might serve them somewhat, for the action of anger cannot work, unless all the humors assist it, though choler predominate; — if they will thence draw a like consequence, that when the wicked man does wickedly, he does it by all the vices together, I do not believe it to be so, or else I understand them not, for I by effect find the contrary. These are sharp, unsubstantial subtleties, with which philosophy sometimes amuses itself.

I follow some vices, but I fly others as much as a saint would do.

The Peripatetics also disown this indissoluble connection; and Aristotle is of opinion that a prudent and just man may be intemperate and inconsistent.

Socrates confessed to some who had discovered a certain inclination to vice in his physiognomy, that it was, in truth, his natural propension, but that he had by discipline corrected it.

And such as were familiar with the philosopher Stilpo said, that being born with addiction to wine and women, he had by study rendered himself very abstinent both from the one and the other.

What I have in me of good, I have, quite contrary, by the chance of my birth; and hold it not either by law, precept, or any other instruction; the innocence that is in me is a simple one; little vigor and no art. Among other vices, I mortally hate cruelty, both by nature and judgment, as the very extreme of all vices: nay, with so much tenderness that I cannot see

a chicken's neck pulled off without trouble, and cannot without impatience endure the cry of a hare in my dog's teeth, though the chase be a violent pleasure.

Such as have sensuality to encounter, freely make use of this argument, to shew that it is altogether "vicious and unreasonable; that when it is at the height, it masters us to that degree that a man's reason can have no access," and instance our own experience in the act of love,

*cùm iam præsagit gaudia corpus,
Atque in eo est Venus, ut muliebria conserat arva;*

wherein they conceive that the pleasure so transports us, that our reason cannot perform its office, whilst we are in such ecstasy and rapture. I know very well it may be otherwise, and that a man may sometimes, if he will, gain this point over himself to sway his soul, even in the critical moment, to think of something else; but then he must ply it to that bent. I know that a man may triumph over the utmost effort of this pleasure: I have experienced it in myself, and have not found Venus so imperious a goddess, as many, and much more virtuous men than I, declare. I do not consider it a miracle, as the Queen of Navarre does in one of the Tales of her *Heptameron* (which is a very pretty book of its kind), nor for a thing of extreme difficulty, to pass whole nights, where a man has all the convenience and liberty he can desire, with a long-coveted mistress, and yet be true to the pledge first given to satisfy himself with kisses and suchlike endearments, without pressing any further. I conceive that the example of the pleasure of the chase would be more proper; wherein though the pleasure be less, there is the higher excitement of unexpected joy, giving no time for the reason, taken by surprise, to prepare itself for the encounter, when after a long quest the beast starts up on a sudden in a place where, peradventure, we least expected it; the shock and the ardor of the shouts and cries of the hunters so strike us, that it would be hard for those who love this lesser chase, to turn their thoughts upon the instant another way; and the poets make Diana triumph over the torch and shafts of Cupid:

*Quis non malarum, quas amor curas habet,
Haec inter obliviscitur?*

To return to what I was saying before, I am tenderly compassionate of others' afflictions, and should readily cry for company, if, upon any occasion whatever, I could cry at all. Nothing tempts my tears but tears, and not only those that are real and true, but whatever they are, feigned or painted. I do not much lament the dead, and should envy them rather; but I very much lament the dying. The savages do not so much offend me, in roasting and eating the bodies of the dead, as they do who torment and persecute the living. Nay, I cannot look so much as upon the ordinary executions of justice, how reasonable soever, with a steady eye. Some one having to give testimony of Julius Caesar's clemency; "he was," says he, "mild in his revenges. Having compelled the pirates to yield by whom he had before been taken prisoner and put to ransom; forasmuch as he had threatened them with the cross, he indeed condemned them to it, but it was after they had been first strangled. He punished his secretary Philemon, who had attempted to poison him, with no greater

At the moment when the body
foretastes its joy and Venus is on
the point of sowing the woman's
field. • LUCR., 4.1106

Who, among such delights would
not remove out of his thoughts the
anxious cares of love. • HOR.,
EPOD., 2.37

severity than mere death." Without naming that Latin author, who thus dares to allege as a testimony of mercy the killing only of those by whom we have been offended; it is easy to guess that he was struck with the horrid and inhuman examples of cruelty practised by the Roman tyrants.

For my part, even in justice itself, all that exceeds a simple death appears to me pure cruelty; especially in us who ought, having regard to their souls, to dismiss them in a good and calm condition; which cannot be, when we have agitated them by insufferable torments.

Not long since, a soldier who was a prisoner, perceiving from a tower where he was shut up, that the people began to assemble to the place of execution, and that the carpenters were busy erecting a scaffold, he presently concluded that the preparation was for him, and therefore entered into a resolution to kill himself, but could find no instrument to assist him in his design except an old rusty cart-nail that fortune presented to him; with this he first gave himself two great wounds about his throat, but finding these would not do, he presently afterwards gave himself a third in the belly, where he left the nail sticking up to the head. The first of his keepers who came in found him in this condition: yet alive, but sunk down and exhausted by his wounds. To make use of time, therefore, before he should die, they made haste to read his sentence; which having done, and he hearing that he was only condemned to be beheaded, he seemed to take new courage, accepted wine which he had before refused, and thanked his judges for the unhoped-for mildness of their sentence; saying, that he had taken a resolution to despatch himself for fear of a more severe and insupportable death, having entertained an opinion, by the preparations he had seen in the place, that they were resolved to torment him with some horrible execution, and seemed to be delivered from death in having it changed from what he apprehended.

I should advise that those examples of severity by which 'tis designed to retain the people in their duty, might be exercised upon the dead bodies of criminals; for to see them deprived of sepulture, to see them boiled and divided into quarters, would almost work as much upon the vulgar, as the pain they make the living endure; though that in effect be little or nothing, as God himself says, *Qui corpus occidunt, et postea non habent quod faciant*; and the poets singularly dwell upon the horrors of this picture, as something worse than death:

*Heu! reliquias semiustas regis, denudatis ossibus,
Per terram sanie delibutas foede divexarier.*

I happened to come by one day accidentally at Rome, just as they were upon executing Catena, a notorious robber: he was strangled without any emotion of the spectators, but when they came to cut him in quarters, the hangman gave not a blow that the people did not follow with a doleful cry and exclamation, as if every one had lent his sense of feeling to the miserable carcass.

Those inhuman excesses ought to be exercised upon the bark, and not upon the quick. Artaxerxes, in almost a like case, moderated the severity of the ancient laws of Persia, ordaining that the nobility who had committed a fault, instead of being whipped, as they were used to be,

Who kill the body, and after that
have no more that they can do; •
LUKE, 12.4

Alas! that the half-burnt remains of
the king, exposing his bones,
should be foully dragged along the
ground besmeared with gore. •
CIC., TUSC., 1.106

should be stripped only and their clothes whipped for them; and that whereas they were wont to tear off their hair, they should only take off their high-crowned tiara.

The so devout Egyptians thought they sufficiently satisfied the divine justice by sacrificing hogs in effigy and representation; a bold invention to pay God so essential a substance in picture only and in show.

I live in a time wherein we abound in incredible examples of this vice, through the licence of our civil wars; and we see nothing in ancient histories more extreme than what we have proof of every day, but I cannot, any the more, get used to it. I could hardly persuade myself, before I saw it with my eyes, that there could be found souls so cruel and fell, who, for the sole pleasure of murder, would commit it; would hack and lop off the limbs of others; sharpen their wits to invent unusual torments and new kinds of death, without hatred, without profit, and for no other end but only to enjoy the pleasant spectacle of the gestures and motions, the lamentable groans and cries of a man dying in anguish. For this is the utmost point to which cruelty can arrive: *Ut homo hominem, non iratus, non timens, tantum spectaturus, occidat.*

For my own part, I cannot without grief see so much as an innocent beast pursued and killed that has no defense, and from which we have received no offense at all; and that which frequently happens, that the stag we hunt, finding himself weak and out of breath, and seeing no other remedy, surrenders himself to us who pursue him, imploring mercy by his tears,

*quæstuque cruentus,
Atque imploranti similis,*

has ever been to me a very displeasing sight; and I hardly ever take a beast alive that I do not presently turn out again. Pythagoras bought them of fishermen and fowlers to do the same:

*primôque à cæde ferarum,
Incaluisse puto maculatum sanguine ferrum.*

Those natures that are sanguinary toward beasts discover a natural proneness to cruelty.

After they had accustomed themselves at Rome to spectacles of the slaughter of animals, they proceeded to those of the slaughter of men, of gladiators. Nature has herself, I fear, imprinted in man a kind of instinct to inhumanity; nobody takes pleasure in seeing beasts play with and caress one another, but every one is delighted with seeing them dismember, and tear one another to pieces.

And that I may not be laughed at for the sympathy I have with them, theology itself enjoins us some favor in their behalf; and considering that one and the same master has lodged us together in this palace for his service, and that they, as well as we, are of his family, it has reason to enjoin us some affection and regard to them. Pythagoras borrowed the metempsychosis from the Egyptians; but it has since been received by several nations, and particularly by our Druids:

That a man should kill a man, not being angry, not in fear, only for the sake of the spectacle. • SEN., EP., 90

Who, bleeding, by his tears seems to crave mercy. • VERG., AEN., 7.501

I think 'twas slaughter of wild beasts that first stained the steel of man with blood. • OV., MET., 15.106

*Morte carent animae; sempérque, priore relictæ
Sede, novis domibus vivunt, habitantque receptæ.*

The religion of our ancient Gauls maintained that souls, being eternal, never ceased to remove and shift their places from one body to another; mixing moreover with this fancy some consideration of divine justice; for according to the deportments of the soul, whilst it had been in Alexander, they said that God assigned it another body to inhabit, more or less painful, and proper for its condition:

*muta ferarum
Cogit vincla pati, truculentos ingerit ursis,
Prædonésque lupis; fallaces vulpibus addit;
Atque ubi per varios annos, per mille figuras
Egit, lethæo purgatos flumine, tandem
Rursus ad humanæ revocat primordia formæ.*

If it had been valiant, he lodged it in the body of a lion; if voluptuous, in that of a hog; if timorous, in that of a hart or hare; if malicious, in that of a fox, and so of the rest, till having purified it by this chastisement, it again entered into the body of some other man.

*Ipse ego nam memini, Trojani, tempore belli
Panthoides Euphorbus eram.*

As to the relationship betwixt us and beasts, I do not much admit of it; nor of that which several nations, and those among the most ancient and most noble, have practised, who have not only received brutes into their society and companionship, but have given them a rank infinitely above themselves, esteeming them one while familiars and favorites of the gods, and having them in more than human reverence and respect; others acknowledged no other god or divinity than they: *belluæ a barbaris propter beneficium consecratæ.*

*Crocodilon adorat
Pars hæc, illa pavet saturam serpentibus Ibin;
Effigies sacri hic nitet aurea cercopitheci;
hic piscem flumints, illic
Oppida tota canem venerantur.*

And the very interpretation that Plutarch, gives to this error, which is very well conceived, is advantageous to them: for he says that it was not the cat or the ox, for example, that the Egyptians adored: but that they, in those beasts, adored some image of the divine faculties; in this, patience and utility: in that, vivacity, or, as with our neighbors the Burgundians and all the Germans, impatience to see themselves shut up; by which they represented liberty, which they loved and adored above all other godlike attributes, and so of the rest. But when, among the more moderate opinions, I meet with arguments that endeavor to demonstrate the near resemblance betwixt us and animals, how large a share they have in our greatest privileges, and with how much probability they compare us together, truly I abate a great deal of our presumption, and willingly resign that imaginary sovereignty that is attributed to us over other creatures.

Souls never die, but, having left their former seat, live and are received into new homes. • Ov., MET., 15.158

He makes them wear the silent chains of brutes, the bloodthirsty souls he encloses in bears, the thieves in wolves, the deceivers in foxes; where, after successive years and a thousand forms, man had spent his life, and after purgation in Lethe's flood, at last he restores them to the primordial human shapes. • CLAUD., RUF., 2.482

For I myself remember that, in the days of the Trojan war, I was Euphorbus, son of Pantheus. • Ov., MET., 15.160

Beasts, out of opinion of some benefit received by them, were consecrated by barbarians. • CIC., NAT. D., 1.101

This place adores the crocodile; another dreads the ibis, feeder on serpents; here shines the golden image of the sacred ape; here men venerate the fish of the river; there whole towns worship a dog. • JUV., 5.15

But supposing all this were not true, there is nevertheless a certain respect, a general duty of humanity, not only to beasts that have life and sense, but even to trees, and plants. We owe justice to men, and graciousness and benignity to other creatures that are capable of it; there is a certain commerce and mutual obligation betwixt them and us. Nor shall I be afraid to confess the tenderness of my nature so childish, that I cannot well refuse to play with my dog, when he the most unseasonably importunes me to do so. The Turks have alms and hospitals for beasts. The Romans had public care to the nourishment of geese, by whose vigilance their Capitol had been preserved. The Athenians made a decree that the male and female mules which had served at the building of the temple called Hecatompodon should be free and suffered to pasture at their own choice, without hindrance.

The Agrigentines had a common use solemnly to inter the beasts they had a kindness for, as horses of some rare quality, dogs, and useful birds, and even those that had only been kept to divert their children; and the magnificence that was ordinary with them in all other things, also particularly appeared in the sumptuousness and numbers of monuments erected to this end, and which remained in their beauty several ages after.

The Egyptians buried wolves, bears, crocodiles, dogs, and cats in sacred places, embalmed their bodies, and put on mourning at their death.

Cimon gave an honorable sepulture to the mares with which he had three times gained the prize of the course at the Olympic Games. The ancient Xantippus caused his dog to be interred on an eminence near the sea, which has ever since retained the name, and Plutarch says, that he had a scruple about selling for a small profit to the slaughterer an ox that had been long in his service.

MONTAIGNE'S SOURCES

Cic., Fam.	Cicero, <i>Letters to Friends</i>
Cic., Nat. D.	Cicero, <i>On the Nature of the Gods</i>
Cic., Off.	Cicero, <i>On Duties</i>
Cic., Tusc.	Cicero, <i>Tusculan Disputations</i>
Claud., Ruf.	Claudian, <i>Against Rufinus</i>
Hor., Carm.	Horace, <i>Odes</i>
Hor., Epod.	Horace, <i>Epodes</i>
Hor., Sat.	Horace, <i>Satires</i>
Juv.	Juvenal, <i>Satires</i>

MONTAIGNE · ESSAYS

Lucr.	Lucretius, <i>On the Nature of Things</i>
Luke	<i>Gospel of Luke</i>
Ov., Met.	Ovid, <i>Metamorphoses</i>
Sen., Ep.	Seneca, <i>Epistles</i>
Verg., Aen.	Virgil, <i>Aeneid</i>