



Paper

Sophistry in the Philosophical and Educational Discourse of Michel de Montaigne

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Abstract

The aim of this work is to examine the intellectual production of the Renaissance philosopher Michel de Montaigne, relating data from his biography and the events of his time to his most outstanding work, *Essays*. It is considered that the theoretical elaborations of an individual, as well as the linguistic forms created by him to express them, derive from events in the physical world – including their derivations of social and cultural order – and as such should be investigated. The origin of this methodological conception is sought in Ancient Philosophy, especially in the Sophists, investigation that provides the parameters for analyzing the specific case of Montaigne.

Keywords: Montaigne, Sophistry, Philosophy of Education.

It is common to state that the intellectual production of a thinker - his ideas, his conceptual apparatus, his theorizing about a particular subject, and so on - is the result of the context, the historical circumstances proper to its surroundings. The concern with the examination of the conditioning factors of the aforementioned production is recent, if we consider its origin in *The German ideology*, a work of 1845 in which Marx and Engels directly oppose the Hegelian philosophy and other idealist conceptions then in vogue in continental Europe.

Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc., that is, real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms. Consciousness [das Bewusstsein] can never be anything else than conscious being [das bewusste Sein], and the being of men is their actual life-process. (MARX; ENGELS, 2010, p. 36).

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Funding Agency: CNPq.

Founder of historical materialism, this thesis integrates a broader philosophical conception, a peculiar way of understanding and explaining the human condition. Contrary to the tradition that begins with Platonism, which subjects the sensible world to the intelligible world, and culminates in the Hegelian idealism, which submits history to the movement of the absolute spirit, this conception states that the theoretical elaborations of an individual are the result of events of the physical world - including its derivations of social and cultural order - and as such should be investigated.

In this register, it can be considered that the linguistic forms created to express theorizations can only be properly analyzed through the interpretative key that associates the discursive expression with the characteristics of its author, not only as an individual, but essentially as a social being. *Marxism and the philosophy of language*, Bakhtin's work published in 1929, is one of the first contemporary initiatives affiliated with such a conception.

An ideological product is not only itself a part of a reality (natural or social), just as is any physical body, any instrument of production, or any product for consumption, it also, in contradistinction to these other phenomena, reflects and refracts another reality outside itself. Everything ideological possesses *meaning*, it represents, depicts, or stands for something lying outside itself. In other words, it is a *sign* (BAKHTIN, 1986, p. 9).

In this paper, we will examine the intellectual production of the Renaissance philosopher Michel de Montaigne, including his ideas on education, relating data from his biography and the events of his time to his most outstanding work, *Essays*. To this end, we will initially seek to identify in ancient Philosophy the emergence of this conception, since the primacy of the empirical universe over the universe of ideas, despite being recently established, was already sketched in Classical Greece by Aristotle and, even earlier, by the Sophists.

Our reflections will have the strictly methodological purpose of establishing references that can be expanded and rectified at any time through further investigations. What interests us at this moment is to compose sufficient parameters for the examination of a specific case - the case of Montaigne, object of the other parts of the paper -, which may serve as a basis for the study of other thinkers whose philosophical propositions have made contributions to education.

Methodological parameters

When examining the elements responsible for the success of persuasion, Aristotle (1994, p. 8) says: "The first kind depends on the personal character of the speaker; the second on putting the audience into a certain frame of mind; the third on the proof, or apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself". The investigation of the conditioning factors of intellectual production - and, consequently, of its discursive expression - does not, however, assume a priority position in *Rhetoric*, since in this work the philosopher's concern is

concentrated on the last two components: the *pathos* of the audience, including the recipients' dispositions of the arguments, and the *logos*, concerning the articulation of the speech.

Although this is not the main object of his analysis, Aristotle supports the study of the sphere in which ideas are produced, recognizing the relevance of the qualities of the person who seeks the effect of persuasion through the spoken word.

Persuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible. We believe good men more fully and more readily than others (...). It is not true (...) that the personal goodness revealed by the speaker contributes nothing to his power of persuasion; on the contrary, his character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses. (ARISTOTLE, 1994, p. 8).

By classifying the character of the speaker as the "most efficient means of persuasion", the philosopher shifts the emphasis from the phenomenon of persuasion to that of the genesis of persuasive speech. In view of Plato's innate conceptions, this genesis needs clarification, which Aristotle (2009) undertakes to do in *Nicomachean ethics*, a work that discusses the acquisition of virtues by man:

(...) we get by first exercising them, as also happens in the case of the arts as well. For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them, e.g. men become builders by building and lyre players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts. (...) And the corresponding statement is true of builders and of all the rest; men will be good or bad builders as a result of building well or badly. (...). This, then, is the case with the virtues also; by doing the acts that we do in our transactions with other men we become just or unjust (...). (*Nicomachean ethics* 2, 1).

In stark opposition to the Platonic Philosophy, Aristotle argues "that none of the moral virtues arises in us by nature", but by *habit* (*ethos*), which is the continued exercise of certain actions: "our moral dispositions are formed as a result of corresponding activities" (*Nicomachean ethics* 2, 1).

Thus, if we wish to understand the genesis of the ideas of a given thinker, as well as the speech given by him, we must study his *habit*, that is, the cultural environment in which his dealings with his fellow men develop. In this environment, the way in which his education took place is extremely important, because, according to Aristotle, it is not of little value "whether we are trained from childhood in one set of habits or another; on the contrary it is of very great, or rather of supreme, importance" (*Nicomachean ethics* 2, 1).

In short, the remote origin of the conception that subjects theoretical elaborations to the circumstances of concrete life can be found in peripatetic Philosophy, thus formulated: it is from the investigation of the environment, with all the breadth that this word assumes in the most diverse contemporary

philosophical currents, that one obtains the key to elucidating a thinker's theories as well as the discursive forms he uses to maintain effective communication with his audience. In this environment, education stands out, which determines the conduct taken by the individual in situations that require his public pronouncement, and also determines the way in which the influences of the culture of his time are installed.

According to the researchers who are part of the contemporary movement to resume the contribution of the Sophists in Classical Greece, even more remote traces of this conception can be identified in Sophistry. Contrary to Plato's image, it is now understood that the teachings of those rhetorical teachers - by definition, the art of persuasively arguing - contained more than simple formulas to be applied in order to convey the opinions of the audience: useful content to the life of the citizen, who was attributed the right and the duty to act ethically in the spaces in which the fate of the *polis* was deliberated (DUPRÉEL, 1948; POULAKOS, 1995; KERFERD, 2003).

Aware that every public manifestation emanates from the ideas of those who speak, which leads to the development of their personal qualifiers - or virtues, as Aristotle would later say -, the Sophists created an innovative method of teaching, a *rhetorical pedagogy*, according to the denomination proposed by Nathan Crick (2010, 2015). The qualities of the citizen desired by Sophistry can be assessed by the discursive forms that should be mastered by them, one of which is the *kairos* form, defined as a creative impulse that is presented in response "to the unforeseen, to the lack of order in human life". *Kairos* responds to the "radical principle of occasionality" that is elaborated in the face of challenging situations of the immediate moment (CRICK, 2010, p. 20-21).

In theory, the *kairotic* way of arguing is opposed to the *decorum* form, characterized by "a sense of stability and continuity across time" that leads the speaker to honor the "history and posterity by creating an object whose beauty endures" (CRICK, 2010, p. 183). The *kairotic* speaker seeks to break current norms for the purpose of transforming the practical order of the world (CRICK, 2010). The *decorous* speaker refers to historically established customs and traditions, valuing their stability (CRICK, 2010).

Although they are by definition incompatible, Crick (2010, p. 181) argues that both can present themselves in the same discourse, constituting a permanent tension in certain situations, a movement that oscillates dialectically between what exists and what is still unknown, between what is taken for granted and what presents itself as novelty. Contrary to the dualism that pervades most arguments, the fusion of *decorum* with *kairos* expresses "the aesthetic form characteristic of great rhetoric" (CRICK, 2010, p. 181), the only one capable of giving rise to the "feeling of transcendence" needed to sketch an upcoming universe; by moving between the opposite ends of thinking, drawing from the opinions established by tradition and, at the same time, incorporating the malleability of particular experiences, the speaker can more effectively dialogue with his audience and can inductively suggest "new universals" (CRICK, 2010, p. 185).

Another discursive form proper to rhetoric is the *antilogic*, seen by G. B. Kerferd (1981, p. 85) as "the most characteristic feature of the thought of the whole sophistic period", present in Protagoras' thesis, which states that man is the measure of all things. The speech, elaborated in such a way, expresses a

permanent question, which makes the speaker unable to indicate to his audience any effective conduct. An alternative interpretation, however, suggests that the antilogic is intended only to prevent the establishment of absolute, unquestionable truths, and is an effective means of seeking plausible agreements that act as a means to deliberation and, consequently, to action.

The almost total lack of primary sources of the Sophists makes it difficult to know precisely what the contents and practices of their teaching were, but it is possible to imagine its configuration through the personal qualities required for the good performance of the speaker. One of the few Sophistic productions to date is the treatise of Gorgias in defense of Helen, the mythological Spartan queen who had fled with the Trojan Paris. Contrary to the current opinion that blamed her for abandoning her husband and children in exchange for worldly desires, the Gorgian argument gives a list of reasons for exonerating her. It is a discursive exercise that runs contrary to what was established, thus, as Tatiane da Silva (2018, p. 124, our translation) states, to develop “the ability to expand our experience beyond our individual perception, producing a sense of community, an agreement, an identity of thought, a consensus”.

The training provided by the Sophists should encourage the same boldness of Gorgias, the same aptitude to seek new agreements with public opinion, in favor of building new values to guide the *polis*. Rhetorical pedagogy should teach the student to develop an imaginative and creative character molded within an ethical and aesthetic sense, a singular individuality capable of proposing new meanings for life in the community. Taking tradition as a starting point in search of horizons not yet experienced, the student of Sophistry should learn to ask, question, doubt and, recognizing the opportune moment, present a discourse focused on deliberation on themes that mobilize the intellectual and affective dispositions of his peers.

Sophistic education probably provided content and practices that, in Aristotle’s vocabulary, aimed at creating a *habit* (*ethos* - εθος) powerful enough to form a *character* (*ithos* - ηθος) that enabled the individual to act in accordance with the ideas he produced in the course of time of his education. The result of this formative process would be observed when the individual was faced with a *rhetorical situation*, an expression that characterizes critical moments permeated by challenges of a changing world, occasions that require mastery of the art of arguing considering the public interest, based on an investigative attitude in search of solutions (CRICK, 2010, p. 41).

Although formulated centuries ago, the concepts presented here remain useful, as it can be seen in Pierre Bourdieu’s conceptualization of *habitus*. Rather than creating a neologism to guide his reflections, the French sociologist states that “actively reproduce the best products of past thinkers by putting into use the instruments of production which they have left behind is the access requirement to really truly productive thinking” (BOURDIEU, 2003, p. 63, our translation).

Extracted from the scholastic vocabulary, the term *habitus* is the Latin translation of the Greek *hexis*, whose etymology derives from *ethos*, a word that translates into French as *habitude*, into Portuguese as *hábito*, into English as *habit*, as it appears in Aristotle’s text transcribed previously, having the connotation of repeated exercise of certain actions. *Ethos* is a central concept of Aristotelian ethics, meaning the result of the constant repetition of a practice:

(...) man, by nature, is potentially capable of virtue or vice, but can only pass this capacity of power to the act through exercise, that is, by repeating a series of acts of the same type (righteous, courageous acts..., or the opposite of these). (REALE, 2001, p. 122, our translation).

When we habitually perform certain acts, the consequence is the acquisition of a *hexis*, that is, a *habitus*, something that “remains within us as a kind of *stable possession* and thus *facilitates further acts of the same kind*” (REALE, 2001, p. 122, our translation). This conceptualization explains how we possess not only virtues and vices, but also “various technical and artistic skills”, and is therefore a summation of relatively stable spiritual and physical dispositions.

Habitus was introduced to Sociology by Bourdieu in the late 1960s, during his analysis of the relationship between Gothic architecture and medieval thought, and was later employed in other works of his own, as in works of various areas of knowledge. Its original purpose was limited to the study of how Science is produced, but it does not oppose those who use the word for theoretical purposes close to his: “to get out from under philosophy of consciousness without doing away with the agent in its truth as a practical operator of object constructions” (BOURDIEU, 2003, p. 62, our translation).

Bourdieu’s resumption of the Aristotelian notion of *hexis* had a combative content. As he states, it was about

(...) to react against structuralism and its strange philosophy of action that (...) was clearly expressed among the Althusserians, with their agent reduced to the supporting role - *Träger* - of structure. (...) I wanted to highlight the “creative”, active, inventive capacities of the *habitus* and the agent (...) by drawing attention to the idea that this generating power is not that of a universal spirit, of a nature or a human reason (...) but rather an agent in action (...). (BOURDIEU, 2003, p. 61, our translation).

By incorporating the revitalized concept of *habitus* into our methodology, we intend not only to illustrate the actuality of the notions derived from the ancients, but also to associate our investigations with the critical theory proposed by Bourdieu. When we analyze an intellectual production relating the universe of theory to the empirical universe, we must move away from mechanistic tendencies, both idealistic and materialistic, that hinder the author’s understanding of a work as a unique individual who, having his own style, acts on the world that surrounds him when required by some *rhetorical situation*, while being influenced by the social and cultural circumstances of his time.

In order to finalize the purpose of this section, we will name the methodology suggested here as Sophistry, considering that this is the most appropriate denomination because of the priority of this philosophical movement regarding the proposition of the methodological framework that we will adopt for the study of Montaigne’s theorizations, just like that of any other thinker. For this study, we will use the author’s texts as primary sources to examine whether and how the argumentative strategies *antilogic*, *decorum*, and *kairos* are used; secondary sources will serve to compose a general picture of the thinker’s *ethos*, the educational environment of his *habitus*, the relatively stable

intellectual and affective dispositions that enabled him to elaborate his work, with particular attention to his educational ideas; in this environment, we will seek to identify the occurrence of *rhetorical situations*, critical moments that led him to compose his work with certain theoretical and aesthetic characteristics.

Antilogic, decorum and kairos

The work *Essays* has awakened controversy since the time it was published. The process of its elaboration lasted approximately two years, being the first edition dated 1580, and the second, with several additions and revisions, appeared in 1588, accepting the posthumous version of 1595 as definitive. Initially restricted, the ranks of his admirers, as well as those of his detractors, widened over time. Bakewell (2012, p. 234) registered that Henry III praised the copy he received from the author in Paris; Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Stendhal enjoyed his laid-back writing; Pascal, Malebranche and Pierre Dupont disparaged the text for similar reasons.

In 1666, the work was included in the Forbidden Books Index of the Catholic Church, which encouraged its use by the most diverse groups of skeptics, atheists and intellectuals, leaving its author in oblivion for about two hundred years (BAKEWELL, 2012, p. 264; LEMGRUBER, 2016, p. 281-282). Since the mid-nineteenth century, the book has been interpreted by many scholars in many countries through various philosophical and literary conceptions. Frampton (2013, p. 20), for example, suggests: “read Montaigne ... He will calm you ... You will love him, you will see”. Coelho (2001, p. 15), in turn, praises *Essays* for having helped the West to doubt itself and for creating a new literary genre that allows a wide range of subjects to be addressed without prejudice.

The book is composed of 107 chapters, or essays, each dealing with non-mutually connected themes, arranged in a nonlinear narrative covering such varied subjects as sadness, idleness, cowardice, fear, imagination, sleep, cruelty, and death. One might say that its goal is to answer one question: how to live? (BAKEWELL, 2012; FRAMPTON, 2013). Judging by its structure and themes, *Essays* has the appearance of a light work that does not appeal much to the reader’s intellect, but these same characteristics have motivated many controversies over the centuries, one of which associated with the use of antilogic, a common resource of Sophistry, as we explained previously.

The author’s reflections on the moral dilemmas concerning how to live do not employ formal theorizing nor offer direct answers, only a series of unusual questions and inquiries (SCHNEEWIND, 2005, p. 225). The essays do not express a unitary and systematic philosophical view; they evade the traditional scheme of imposing conclusions, foregrounding the process of thinking, not its dogmatic outcome (COELHO, 2001, p. 12; PATTIO, 2009, p. 63).

In the French language, the word *essai* means *exercise* or *attempt*, coming from the Latin *exagium*, which refers to the different points of view raised by the same subject (WOLTER, 2007, p. 164; COELHO, 2001, p. 34). Compagnon (2014) considers this to be the attitude of the author, who is always attentive to new possibilities, not even attached to his own opinion, disbelieving absolute certainties: “he is not proud, he does not feel the contradiction as a humiliation, he likes to be corrected when making a mistake. What does not

please him is the arrogant, self-assured, intolerant interlocutors” (COMPAGNON, 2014, p. 13-14, our translation).

In the explanation given by Wolter (2007, p. 163), the meaning of antilogical argumentation in the text is clearly perceived: the author of *Essays* shows that truth is flexible, depending on how different principles and systems are observed, without resorting to unabated statements can be used. Langer (2005, p. 224) adds that the philosophical legacy of the work is not a moral philosophy, but the courage to face the ambivalence generated by the multiple possibilities of choice that often present themselves.

A methodological warning deserves special treatment in the analysis of *Essay*: the lack of thematic unity between the chapters - and even within some - is accompanied by the lack of unity also in the style of argumentation, so that it is impossible to present a typification that contemplates the work as a whole in this respect; a certain way of arguing is found in some and not in other essays, which requires extra attention from those who cite passages in the book for the purpose of illustrating what one wishes to highlight. The quotation should always be surrounded with caution so that it does not seem to translate the purpose of a generalization.

After this warning, we can say that a good illustration of the antilogical way of arguing is found in the essay that discusses the relationship between the intention to achieve some purpose and the various means that may lead to it.

The most usual way of appeasing the indignation of such as we have any way offended, when we see them in possession of the power of revenge, and find that we absolutely lie at their mercy, is by submission, to move them to commiseration and pity; and yet bravery, constancy, and resolution, however quite contrary means, have sometimes served to produce the same effect. (MONTAIGNE, 2006).

The author presents particular cases in favor of either alternative. Prince Edward of Wales, for example, ordered the massacre of the Limoges who had offended him, but allowed

(...) the cries of the people, or the prayers and tears of the women and children, abandoned to slaughter and prostrate at his feet for mercy, to be stayed from prosecuting his revenge; till, penetrating further into the town, he at last took notice of three French gentlemen (...) who with incredible bravery alone sustained the power of his victorious army. Then it was that consideration and respect unto so remarkable a valour first stopped the torrent of his fury (...). (MONTAIGNE, 2006).

Prince Scanderberg of Epirus acted the same way, albeit moved by a different feeling: a soldier besieged by him “resolved, as his last refuge, to face about and await him sword in hand: which behaviour of his gave a sudden stop to his captain’s fury, who, for seeing him assume so notable a resolution, received him into grace” (MONTAIGNE, 2006).

In the first case, what moved the heart of the offended was submission; in the second, the bravery. Entirely opposite means, as the author says, can achieve the same result. Other reports, however, suggest that neither of the

attitudes is able to sensitize the oppressor. Pompey pardoned the city of the Marmertines “upon the single account of the virtue and magnanimity of one citizen, Zeno (...) who took the fault of the public wholly upon himself”, but, in similar circumstances, “Sylla’s host, having in the city of Perugia (...) manifested the same virtue, obtained nothing by it, either for himself or his fellow-citizens”. Alexander, who used to be “so magnanimous with the vanquished”, took another approach in Gaza, when affronted by Betis’s brave and threatening attitude: “commanded his heels to be bored through, causing him, alive, to be dragged, mangled, and dismembered at a cart’s tail” (MONTAIGNE, 2006).

The essay goes no further than presenting cases and offering reflections on the impossibility of choosing the best way to achieve the desired end. If urged to choose, the author states that his motives for forgiveness would be “mercy and goodwill”; but immediately he declares: “I should sooner surrender my anger to compassion than to esteem” (MONTAIGNE, 2006). The ambiguity that possibly afflicts the reader stems from a human characteristic that the author deems unquestioned: “Indeed, man is of a very poorly defined nature, strangely unequal and diverse. We would hardly judge him decisively and evenly” (MONTAIGNE, 1987, p. 10, our translation).

The reader’s distress in the face of so much doubt and lack of complete answer reminds us that the permanent question expressed in the book prevents, as we have said, from taking the work as a guide to effective conduct. The antilogic adopted by the author does not allow to approve, nor to disapprove, to assume this or that path as right, but certainly offers an escape route to the yearning for absolute truths, an efficient way to send reflections and consequent deliberations and conduct, assumed with total autonomy of the reader, without attachment to any philosophical authority

The same methodological caution must accompany the exposition of the passages of *Essays* that illustrate the use of the *decorum* and *kairos* argumentative forms, equally typical of sophistry. In addressing a theme, the author usually exhibits his vast knowledge of philosophy and historiography by presenting opinions of celebrated thinkers or accounts of historical episodes, sometimes merging these two categories of information. This mode of expression, in which the use of *decorative* discourse is noted, is often accompanied or succeeded by a personal reflection that contradicts or at least casts doubt on what has just been said, causing the *kairotic* break of the argumentative order.

This is what we find, for example, in the essay on the mail, which describes, according to Caesar’s narrative, the way in which this service was performed by L. Vibulius Rufus in the face of the need to deliver an urgent message to Pompey: “rode night and day, still taking fresh horses for the greater diligence and speed” (MONTAIGNE, 2006). It also describes the case of Sempronio Graco who, according to Livy, used the same method during the Roman War; and also Cecina, who sent news by means of swallows painted in the colors agreed upon for each type of communication to be transmitted; and even the custom of Roman heads of household, who made use of trained pigeons on whose bodies they tied their letters (MONTAIGNE, 2006).

When this and other precious information conveyed through a clearly *decorated* speech seem to have fulfilled the purpose of listing the various ways of sending messages, the author resumes the first method presented and

comments that the men in the service of the Sultan were also taking fresh horses along the way, just like Rufus, but “they gird themselves straight about the middle with a broad girdle”, which they found to be effective in alleviating tiredness. And the author ends the essay saying: “I could never find any benefit from this” (MONTAIGNE, 2006).

This last sentence, apparently banal and incompatible with the informative content of the text, constitutes the *kairotic* moment of the essay, because with it the author breaks the sequence of his own reasoning, all based on facts from other people’s accounts, to put the reader before a personal experience. The phrase suggests that, even with a wealth of historical information from uncontested authorities, it is important that each of us carry out our own essay - our own *essai*, as it is said in French - to judge the reliability of the solutions traditionally accepted.

The *decorous* speech is also presented in much of the essay that discusses anger, a passion that the author initially denies, especially in cases where he manifests himself against a child: “how often have I, as I have passed along our streets, had a good mind to get up a farce, to revenge the poor boys whom I have seen hided, knocked down, and miserably beaten by some father or mother, when in their fury and mad with rage?” (MONTAIGNE, 2006). Faced with such outrageously unfair cases, one conclusion must be drawn:

There is no passion that so much transports men from their right judgment as anger. No one would demur upon punishing a judge with death who should condemn a criminal on the account of his own choler; why, then, should fathers and pedagogues be any more allowed to whip and chastise children in their anger? ‘Tis then no longer correction, but revenge. (MONTAIGNE, 2006).

When such a negative feeling threatens us, it is best not to act impulsively so as not to lose control of the situation. “Tis passion that then commands, ‘tis passion that speaks, and not we. Faults seen through passion appear much greater to us than they really are, as bodies do when seen through a mist” (MONTAIGNE, 2006).

After mentioning examples from history and offering his own anti-wrath statement and in favor of postponing actions motivated by this passion, the author abandons *decorum* and introduces a *kairotic* confession on the hitherto constructed narrative: “And for my part, I know no passion which I could with so much violence to myself attempt to cover and conceal; I would not set wisdom at so high a price; and do not so much consider what a man does, as how much it costs him to do no worse” (MONTAIGNE, 2006).

Contrary to who is proud “truly remarkable sweetness and composure of their habits”, typical qualities of a *decorous* disposition that opposes anger, the author *kairotically* states that such moderation is acceptable in people who are exposed to public judgment, but what one really has to observe is “What happens inside us”. The one who flaunts those qualities “runs out inwardly (...) to always preserve an outward serenity”. In exchange for exteriority, the author cites a passage from the Stoic Seneca that privileges inner well-being:

I would rather give freedom to my passions than stifle them to my detriment. In allowing them to expand they lose their

strength and are better off acting than against us: “the visible diseases of the soul are the most benign; the most dangerous are those that hide under the guise of health”. (MONTAIGNE, 1996, p. 87, our translation).

In the essay dedicated to the art of conference, an excerpt reveals the position taken by the author before the famous narratives he mentions in his work.

A frank and lofty spirit who judges soundly and surely uses his own examples as alien and presents his testimony as he would someone else's. It is necessary to disregard the common rules of good education when one is at the service of truth and freedom. I not only dare to speak of myself but still speak only of myself; and when I talk about something else, I am wrong, I avoid the subject (MONTAIGNE, 1996, p. 261-262, our translation).

The author prefers narratives based on personal experience, on the description of what is unique, fluid, articulated in response to the immediate moment, as is typical of *kairotic* discourse. This does not preclude him from resorting to time-bound, alien reports established as supposedly true, as it is typical of *decorous* discourse. It does not despise the historian who records “the things he hears from good and respectful people” and believes that history should be written “according to the facts of which we are aware and not in the light of our own opinion”. However, he chooses another way: “I present myself standing and lying, before and behind, my right side and my left, and, in all my natural postures” (MONTAIGNE, 1996, p. 262).

Ethos and habitus formation

The narratives of the *Essays* refer to countless thinkers, many of them transcribed or nominally cited, especially those linked to the three Hellenistic philosophical schools - Epicureanism, Stoicism, and Skepticism - who reflected on the various ways to make better use of life and face death. Analysts agree that it is very difficult to say which one predominates, because the author combines and mixes them as it suits him (BAKEWELL, 2012, p. 120). The Pyrrhus of Elis doctrine (365-275 BC), however, is noteworthy, and an extensive and systematic study is devoted to it in the essay “Apology of Raymond Sebond” (EVA, 2007; POPKIN, 2000). Still, it should be noted that Montaigne uses various skeptical sources to express his views, building his own version of Pyrrhonism (WOLTER, 2007, p. 161).

The philosophical plurality and the very personal style of the work represent an attempt to respond to the complex and multifaceted scenario of the time, whose analysis allows us to understand the ethos of its author, the environment in which his *habitus* was formed. Michel Eyquem de Montaigne lived between 1533 and 1592, a time plagued by uncertainty about who is friend and who is foe (FRAMPTON, 2013, p. 75). The Protestant Reformation, unleashed in 1517 when Luther posted his manifesto against the Papacy in the Wittenberg Church, divided the countries into conflicting groupings around traditional Catholic ordinances and caused drastic disintegration in cities,

villages and families. The period which, according to Chauvi (1987, p. XII), signified the nascent spirit of bourgeois capitalism, can be characterized as the authentic proponent of a *rhetorical situation*.

The Reformation profoundly altered the mentality prevailing during the medieval era, causing the dialogue between man and his own world to replace the “divine source” that inspired the reading of the Bible by the clerical body (SILVA, 2007, p. 105). This was not a struggle for religious power, but only for truth, expressing a sense of doubt compounded by the advance of a way of thinking that contradicted the certainties offered by theocentrism; the bourgeois needed new concepts to explain the human essence, requesting for this the knowledge of the ancient Greeks and Romans who placed man at the center of the universe (CHAUI, 1987, p. XII). The discovery of the New World opened the door to modern thinking, which began to articulate through the resumption of philosophies from the Hellenistic period, as Montaigne did (MARCONDES, 2012, p. 421-422).

The *habitus* of the author of the *Essays* was formed in a family of nobles involved in agriculture since 1477, when Ramon Eyquem, his great-grandfather, favored by the increase of navigations, started to produce wine for export, contributing to making the city of Bordeaux, in the French region of Périgord, an important commercial center. The rise of the family was made possible by cultural, political and economic changes that led to the gradual replacement of the feudal system of production by commercial and manufacturing activities, creating an incipient bourgeois class that rose to the forefront of the social hierarchy (CHAUI, 1987, p. XI).

Montaigne was born in an environment that, according to Bourdieu’s terminology (1998, p. 41-42), was permeated by “a certain cultural capital and a certain ethos” that delineated the “deeply implicit and internalized value system” that started to guide their attitudes towards the world. While social capital represents the position occupied by the person in their midst and economic capital refers to their material goods, cultural capital refers to their educational qualifications (BOURDIEU, 1998, p. 84). Nobility and land ownership gave Montaigne what he needed to be known and respected, leading him to occupy the post of mayor of Bordeaux for a time (CHAUI, 1987, p. VII-VIII).

The possession of these capitals explains the acquisition of the most relevant element in the constitution of their *habitus*, school education, inheritance sometimes more valuable than material goods. At the age of six, little Michel joined as an internal student at the Collège de Guyenne, where he studied until adolescence, which explains his vast knowledge of philosophy and history. He then studied law at the Collège de la Flèche and practiced law for over fifteen years. But the formation of his *habitus* began differently long before its entry into school: the first two years of his life were spent in a peasant home; instead of receiving the nurse at home, his family chose the opposite way, so that the baby could understand the way of life of the commoners. Montaigne grew up believing that these simple people were the legitimate heirs of Socrates and Seneca, as they knew little about anything but their own life (BAKEWELL, 2012, p. 59).

Returning to his parents, Michel was accompanied by a tutor who spoke only in Latin, and all who communicated with them were told to speak only that language. This choice was motivated by the belief that this was the only way to assimilate the old ideals of wisdom and greatness of the soul. Despite having

Latin as his mother tongue, which was certainly useful for him in school studies, Montaigne wrote *Essays* in French, an option that, according to Compagnon (2014, p. 62-63), aimed at making the work accessible to a wider range of readers - certain marginalized groups, women and peasants.

It is not possible to accurately describe the educational practices that formed Montaigne, but early coexistence with the different and later with the wide variety of theorizing about the world provides clues as to why *Essays* so markedly express diversity, doubt and respect for personal experience as responses to the turbulent *rhetorical situation* of his time. Whether due to school influence or contact with the circumstances of life, Montaigne (1987, p. 79, our translation) learned to value a variety of opinions, finding it important to “probe the value of each one: cattleman, bricklayer or traveler. Everyone in their domain can tell us interesting things, and everything is useful to our government”.

He has also learned to stand in front of everything with autonomy and to use all his intellectual potential and moral sensitivity to construct new meanings, convinced that the world is a constantly changing place that significantly alters our dispositions to reality.

For these are my own particular opinions and fancies, and I deliver them as only what I myself believe, and not for what is to be believed by others. I have no other end in this writing, but only to discover myself, who, also shall, peradventure, be another thing to-morrow, if I chance to meet any new instruction to change me. (MONTAIGNE, 2006).

Montaigne expresses the radicality derived from this bold conduct in many of his essays, especially those in which he is dedicated to reflecting on educational themes - “Pedantry” and “Education of Children” - presenting a set of orientations aimed at forming the habitus of the student in line with this radicality.

Bees cull their several sweets from this flower and that blossom, here and there where they find them, but themselves afterwards make the honey, which is all and purely their own, and no more thyme and marjoram: so the several fragments he borrows from others, he will transform and shuffle together to compile a work that shall be absolutely his own; that is to say, his judgment: his instruction, labour and study, tend to nothing else but to form that. (MONTAIGNE, 2006).

Their educational reflections resemble the propositions of the *rhetorical pedagogy* of the Sophists. The student metaphor as a bee presents the challenge of cultivating individuality through a deep dive into the lived experience, in order to make the individual master of his actions, reflecting Protagoras’s statement that man is the measure of all things. Only in this way is it possible to criticize the existing world and imagine a new world, which is not possible when the masters follow a misconception of learning:

To know by heart is not to know: it is simply to retain what we have entrusted to our memory. That which we rightly we can

deploy without looking back at the model, without turning our eyes back toward the book. What a wretched ability it is which is purely and simply bookish. (MONTAIGNE, 2019).

Following this erroneous guideline, “our pedants go picking knowledge here and there, out of books, and hold it at the tongue’s end, only to spit it out and distribute it abroad”. The students, in turn, make “no deeper impression upon them, but passes from hand to hand, only to make a show to be tolerable company, and to tell pretty stories, like a counterfeit coin in counters, of no other use or value, but to reckon with, or to set up at cards” (MONTAIGNE, 2006).

Such as, according to our common way of teaching, undertake, with one and the same lesson, and the same measure of direction, to instruct several boys of differing and unequal capacities, are infinitely mistaken; and ‘tis no wonder, if in a whole multitude of scholars, there are not found above two or three who bring away any good account of their time and discipline. (MONTAIGNE, 2006).

The fruit that can be reaped from teaching, according to Montaigne (2006), is not identified with “profit” – “for so mean an object is unworthy of the grace and favour of the Muses” - nor with “for outward ornament, for this reason it must be chosen for the child a well-made than a well-filled head [...], seeking, indeed, both the one and the other, but rather of the two to prefer manners and judgment to mere learning”; a teacher engaged in forming in the student the ability to judge and deliberate through personal experience: “Let the master not only examine him about the grammatical construction of the bare words of his lesson, but about the sense and let him judge of the profit he has made, not by the testimony of his memory, but by that of his life” (MONTAIGNE, 2006).

As intended by sophistic education, the Montaignean educational proposal aims to develop the imaginative and creative character of the student, his singular individuality, a goal that can be apprehended through the analogy between the work of intelligence and the stomach operation: this is “a sign of crudity and indigestion to disgorge what we eat in the same condition it was swallowed; the stomach has not performed its office unless it have altered the form and condition of what was committed to it to concoct” (MONTAIGNE, 2006).

Let him make him examine and thoroughly sift everything he reads, and lodge nothing in his fancy upon simple authority and upon trust. Aristotle’s principles will then be no more principles to him, than those of Epicurus and the Stoics: let this diversity of opinions be propounded to, and laid before him; he will himself choose, if he be able; if not, he will remain in doubt. (MONTAIGNE, 2006)

No wonder Montaigne welcomes doubt as a final possibility, describing as crazy those who fully trust their own reasoning. After all, it is “not a soul, ‘tis not a body that we are training up, but a man, and we ought not to divide him” (MONTAIGNE, 2006). This Montaignean lesson deserves to be considered

today, when many educational proposals insist on slicing man with the illusory purpose of eliminating any shadow of doubt from education.

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Sent on: 30/September/2018

Approved on: 02/March/2019

Ahead of print on: 17/October/2019