

Professor Warner  
Fall 2010  
Roosevelt University  
Philosophy 373

### Montaigne's Essays

#### Course Description

All of our attention this semester will be directed to a single book, albeit not all of it: Montaigne's *Essays*. We now think of essays as a kind of literary genre. It was Montaigne, however, who more or less originated the genre, so he was doing something new. The French word *essai* means 'trial' or 'attempt.' Its verbal cognate, *essayer*, means 'to try something out.' But what exactly is Montaigne trying out? Are his attempts successful? If so, how and in what way? Whatever Montaigne is doing—something we will be reflecting upon—the scope of his essays, his trials, is immense: the whole of the human thing. Rest assured that no other work finds essays on “thumbs” and “cripples” alongside essays on “fear” and “vanity.” But in any case, Montaigne will be our guide as we think about matters that men and women should think about—self-knowledge and self-blindness, how to live and how not to live, life and death, mind and body, nature and custom, virtue and vice, sameness and difference, and friends and enemies. Montaigne does not make things easy for his readers, and for that, as we will see, we should be thankful!

#### Book

Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne* (Stanford University Press; translated by Frame)

#### Reading Assignments

- September 1 To the Reader (p. 2); Of a saying of Caesar's 1.53  
September 8 By diverse means we arrive at the same end 1.1; Various outcomes 1.24  
September 13 All things have their season 2.28; Our feelings reach out 1.3  
September 15 Of presumption 2.17  
September 20 Of presumption 2.17, continued; also, *Essays*, pp. 408  
September 22 Uncertainty of judgment 1.47; Democritus and Heraclitus 1.50  
September 27 Of constancy 1.12; Of custom 1.23  
September 29 Of Moderation 1.30; Of the inconsistency of our actions 2.1  
October 4 Of drunkenness 2.2; Of books 2.10; Of giving the lie 2.18  
October 6 Of solitude 1.39; Of pedantry 1.25  
October 11 Of physiognomy 3.12  
October 13 Of physiognomy 3.12, continued  
October 18 Of fear 1.18; That our happiness should not be judged until after our death 1.19

October 20 That to philosophize is to learn to die 1.20  
October 25 A custom of the island of Cea 2.3  
October 27 Of the vanity of words 1.51; Of vain subtleties 1.54; Of vanity 3.9;  
November 1 Of vanity 3.9, continued  
November 3 Of friendship 1.28; Twenty-nine sonnets 1.29; Of three kinds of association 3.3  
November 8 Lecture by Professor David Schaefer on "Montaigne on Happiness."  
Sullivan Room (2<sup>nd</sup> floor), 4:00 PM; followed by dinner.  
November 10 Of the inequality that is between us 1.42; Of the disadvantage of greatness 3.7  
November 15 Of conscience 2.5; Of freedom of conscience 2.19  
November 17 Of cannibals 1.31  
November 29 Of cruelty 2.11  
December 1 Of the useful and the honorable 3.1  
December 6 Of experience 3.13  
December 8 Of experience 3.13