

expelled. It is a picture of the human being from a completely third-person perspective. The paradox is that this severe outlook is connected with, indeed, based on, according a central place to the first-person stance. Radical objectivity is only intelligible and accessible through radical subjectivity. This paradox has, of course, been much commented on by Heidegger, for instance in his critique of subjectivism, and by Merleau-Ponty. Modern naturalism can never be the same once one sees this connection, as both these philosophers argue. But for those who haven't seen it, the problem of the 'I' returns, like a repressed thought, as a seemingly insoluble puzzle.<sup>22</sup>

For us the subject is a self in a way he or she couldn't be for the ancients. Ancient moralists frequently formulated the injunction 'Take care of yourself', as Foucault has recently reminded us.<sup>23</sup> And Epictetus persuades us that all that really matters to us is the state of our own *hēgemonikon*, or ruling part, sometimes translated 'mind', or 'will'. They can sometimes sound like our contemporaries. But in reality, there is a gulf between us and them. The reason is that the reflexivity that is essential to us is radical, in the sense of the term that I introduced in Chapter 7. Disengagement requires the first-person stance.

This is what distinguishes the classical writers from followers of Descartes, Locke, Kant, or just about anyone in the modern world. The turn to oneself is now also and inescapably a turn to oneself in the first-person perspective, a turn to the self as a self. That is what I mean by radical reflexivity. Because we are so deeply embedded in it, we cannot but reach for reflexive language.

## EXPLORING "L'HUMAINE CONDITION"

I have been following one strand of the internalization which has gone into making the modern identity. This took me from Plato through the inward turn of Augustine to the new stance of disengagement which Descartes inaugurates and Locke intensifies. To follow this development is to trace the constitution of one facet of the modern self. Adopting the stance of disengagement towards oneself—even if one doesn't push it to the Lockean extreme of punctuality—defines a new understanding of human agency and its characteristic powers. And along with this come new conceptions of the good and new locations of moral sources: an ideal of self-responsibility, with the new definitions of freedom and reason which accompany it, and the connected sense of dignity. To come to live by this definition—as we cannot fail to do, since it penetrates and rationalizes so many of the ways and practices of modern life—is to be transformed: to the point where we see this way of being as normal, as anchored in perennial human nature in the way our physical organs are. So we come to think that we 'have' selves as we have heads. But the very idea that we have or are 'a self', that human agency is essentially defined as 'the self', is a linguistic reflection of our modern understanding and the radical reflexivity it involves. Being deeply embedded in this understanding, we cannot but reach for this language; but it was not always so.

But this is only one strand. I took as my guiding thread the successive understandings of the moral ideal of self-mastery. This was the basis of the contrast between Plato and Descartes. But the line of development through Augustine has also generated models of self-exploration which have crucially shaped modern culture.

Augustine's inward turn was tremendously influential in the West; at first in inaugurating a family of forms of Christian spirituality, which continued throughout the Middle Ages, and flourished again in the Renaissance. But then later this turn takes on secularized forms. We go inward, but not necessarily to find God; we go to discover or impart some order, or some meaning or some justification, to our lives. In retrospect, we can see

Augustine's *Confessions* as the first great work in a genre which includes Rousseau's work of the same title, Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, and Wordsworth's *Prelude*—except that the Bishop of Hippo antedates his followers by more than a millennium.

To the extent that this form of self-exploration becomes central to our culture, another stance of radical reflexivity becomes of crucial importance to us alongside that of disengagement. It is different and in some ways antithetical to disengagement. Rather than objectifying our own nature and hence classing it as irrelevant to our identity, it consists in exploring what we are in order to establish this identity, because the assumption behind modern self-exploration is that we don't already know who we are.

There is a turning point here whose representative figure is perhaps Montaigne. There is some evidence that when he embarked on his reflections he shared the traditional view that these should serve to recover contact with the permanent, stable, unchanging core of being in each of us. This is the virtually unanimous direction of ancient thought: beneath the changing and shifting desires in the unwise soul, and over against the fluctuating fortunes of the external world, our true nature, reason, provides a foundation of unwavering and constant.

For someone who holds this, the modern problem of identity remains unintelligible. Our only search can be to discover within us the one universal human nature. But things didn't work out this way for Montaigne. There is some evidence that when he sat down to write and turned to himself, he experienced a terrifying inner instability. "Mon esprit . . . faisant le chercheur échappé . . . m'enfante tant de chimères et monstres fantasques les uns sur les autres, sans ordre et sans propos" ("My spirit . . . playing the skittish and loose-broken jade . . . begets in me so many extravagant Chimeraes, and fantastical monsters, so orderless, and without any reason, one huddling upon an other").<sup>1</sup> His response was to observe and catalogue his thoughts, feelings, responses ("J'ai commencé de les mettre en rôle"; "I have begun to keep a register of them").<sup>2</sup> And from this emerged a quite different stance towards the impermanence and uncertainty of human life, an acceptance of its limits, which drew on both Epicurean and Christian sources.

It is not that the aspiration to stability is altogether abandoned. Montaigne is certainly acutely aware of the mutability of all things, and above all human life:

il n'y a aucune constante existence, ny de nostre estre, ny de celui des objects. Et nous, et nostre jugement, et toutes choses mortelles, vont coulant et roulant sans cesse . . . Nous n'avons aucune communication à l'estre, par ce que toute humaine nature est tousjours entre le naistre et le mourir, ne baillant de soy qu'une obscure apparence et ombre, et une

incertaine et debile opinion. Et si, de fortune, vous fichez vostre pensée a vouloir prendre son estre, ce sera ne plus ne moins que qui voudrait empoigner l'eau.

there is no constant existence, neither of our being, nor of the objects. And we, and our judgement, and all mortall things else do uncessantly rowle, turne, and passe away . . . We have no communication with being; for every humane nature is ever in the middle between being borne and dying; giving nothing of itself but an obscure apparence and shadow, and an uncertaine and weak opinion. And if perhaps you fix your thought to take its being; it would be even, as if one should go about to grasp the water.<sup>3</sup>

Perpetual change is not only in us, but everywhere: "Le monde n'est qu'une branloire perenne. Toutes choses y branlent sans cesse: la terre, les rochers du Caucase, les pyramides d'Aegypte, et du branle public et du leur. La constance mesme n'est autre chose qu'un branle plus languissant. ("The world runnes all on wheeles. All things therein moove without intermission; yea the earth, the rockes of Caucasus, and the Pyramides of AEGYPT, both with the publike and their own motion. Constancy it selfe is nothing but a languishing and wavering dance").<sup>4</sup>

But nevertheless, or perhaps just because of this, Montaigne proposes to describe himself. Indeed, the point of the sentence just quoted is to justify his kind of self-description, which doesn't seek the exemplary, the universal, or the edifying but simply follows the contours of the changing reality of one being, himself. This life, however, "basse et sans lustre", will reveal as much as any other, because "chaque homme porte la forme entiere de l'humaine condition" ("every man beareth the whole stampe of humane condition").<sup>5</sup>

Montaigne strives to come to a certain equilibrium even within the ever-changing by identifying and coming to terms with the patterns which represent his own particular way of living in flux. So although "we have no communication with being," Montaigne sought, and found some inner peace in, his "maistresse forme" ("my Mistris forme").<sup>6</sup> Self-knowledge is the indispensable key to self-acceptance. Coming to be at home within the limits of our condition presupposes that we grasp these limits, that we learn to draw their contours from within, as it were.

In this new sense, shorn of pretensions to universality, nature can once again be our rule.

J'ai pris . . . bien simplement et crument pour mon regard ce precepte ancien: que nous ne scaurions faillir à suivre nature, que le souverain precepte c'est de se conformer à elle. Je n'ay pas corrigé, comme Socrates, par force de la raison mes complexions naturelles, et n'ay aucunement troublé par art mon inclination.

I have . . . taken for my regard this ancient precept, very rawly and simply: That "We cannot erre in following Nature": and that the soveraigne document is, for a man to conforme himselfe to her. I have not (as Socrates) by the power and vertue of reason, corrected my natural complexions, nor by Art hindered mine inclination.<sup>7</sup>

It is in this spirit that we have to understand the precept: "Mener l'humaine vie conformément à sa naturelle condition" ("lead my life conformably to its naturall condition").<sup>8</sup> To live right is to live within limits, to eschew the presumption of superhuman spiritual aspirations. But the limits which are relevant for me are mine; to live by some universal model is another one of those chimaeric goals which Epicurean wisdom and Christian humility should warn us to avoid.

To attain his just measure, Montaigne took his distance from the excess of moral rigour as much as from those of passion.

Je me deffens de la temperance comme j'ai fait autrefois de la volupté. Elle me tire trop arriere, et jusques à la stupidité. Or je veus estre maistre de moy, à tous sens. La sagesse a ses excès, et n'a pas moins besoin de moderation que la folie.

As I have heretofore defended my selfe from pleasure, so I now ward my selfe from temperance: it haleth me too far back, and even to stupidity. I will now every way be master of my selfe. Wisdom hath hir excesses, and no lesse need of moderation, then follie.<sup>9</sup>

Montaigne repudiates the superhuman standards so often held up by the moral tradition.

A quoy faire ces pointes eslevées de la philosophie sur lesquelles aucun estre humain ne se peut rassoier, et ces regles qui excèdent nostre usage et nostre force?

To what purpose are these heaven-looking and nice points of Philosophy, on which no humane being can establish and ground it selfe? And to what end serve these rules, that exceed our use and excell our strength?<sup>10</sup>

The source of this is pride and an empty self-satisfaction: "toute cette nostre suffisance, qui est au-delà de la naturelle, est à peu près vaine et superflue" ("All our sufficiency, that is beyond the naturall, is well nigh vaine and superfluous").<sup>11</sup> We have to discover the human balance: "J'estime pareille injustice prendre à contre coeur les voluptez naturelles que de les prendre trop à coeur" ("I deeme it an equall injustice, either to take naturall sensualitie against the hart, or to take them too neere the hart").<sup>12</sup> And Montaigne anticipates Pascal in warning against the terrible consequences of this presumptuous rigorism:

Entre nous, ce sont choses que j'ay tousjours veuës de singulier accord: les opinions supercelestes et les meurs sousterraines . . . Ils veulent se mettre hors d'eux et eschapper à l'homme. C'est folie; au lieu de se transformer en anges, ils se transforment en bestes . . . Ces humeurs transcendantes m'effrayent, commes les lieux hautains et inaccessibles.

Super-celestiall opinions, and under-terrestrial manners, are things, that amongst us, I have ever seen to be of singular accord . . . They will be exempted from them and escape man. It is meere folly, insteade of transforming themselves into Angels, they transchange themselves into beastes . . . Such transcending humours affright me as much, as steepy, high and inaccessible places.<sup>13</sup>

Montaigne, like Lucretius, has an idea of nature which is no longer a vehicle for the demands of moral perfection, but which can be used to free us from what is excessive and tyrannical in these demands. The battle is not the Epicurean one with the fear of the gods and their punishment, but rather with the contempt and depreciation of our natural being which these presumptuous standards engender and express. This contempt is often directed at our bodily being. But "c'est tousjours à l'homme que nous avons affaire, duquel la condition est merueilleusement corporelle" ("It is man with whom we have alwayes to doe, whose condition is marvelously corporall").<sup>14</sup>

A quoy faire desmembrons nous en divorce un bastiment tissu d'une si jointe et fraternelle correspondance? Au rebours, renouons le par mutuels offices.

To what end doe wee by a divorce dismember a frame contexted with so mutuall, coherent and brotherly correspondency. Contrariwise, let us repaire and renue the same by enterchangeable offices.<sup>15</sup>

The fight is in a sense to come to accept what we are. And in this regard, as we shall see, Montaigne inaugurates one of the recurring themes of modern culture.

We seek self-knowledge, but this can no longer mean just impersonal lore about human nature, as it could for Plato. Each of us has to discover his or her own form. We are not looking for the universal nature; we each look for our own being. Montaigne therefore inaugurates a new kind of reflection which is intensely individual, a self-explanation, the aim of which is to reach self-knowledge by coming to see through the screens of self-delusion which passion or spiritual pride have erected. It is entirely a first-person study, receiving little help from the deliverances of third-person observation, and none from "science".

The contrast with Descartes is striking, just because Montaigne is at the

point of origin of another kind of modern individualism, that of self-discovery, which differs from the Cartesian both in aim and method. Its aim is to identify the individual in his or her unrepeatable difference, whereas Cartesianism gives us a science of the subject in its general essence; and it proceeds by a critique of first-person self-interpretations, rather than by the proofs of impersonal reasoning. What it ends up with is an understanding of my own demands, aspirations, desires, in their originality, however much these may lie athwart the expectations of society and my immediate inclinations.

Il n'est personne, s'il s'escoute, qui ne descouvre en soy une forme sienne, une forme maistresse, qui luicte contre l'institution, et contre la tempeste des passions qui lui est contraire.

There is no man (if he listen to himself) that doth not discover in himself a peculiar forme, a swaying forme, that wrestleth against the institution, and against the tempests of passions which are contrary unto him.<sup>16</sup>

Descartes is a founder of modern individualism, because his theory throwing the individual thinker back on his own responsibility, requires him to build an order of thought for himself, in the first person singular. But he must do so following universal criteria; he reasons as anyone and everyone. Montaigne is an originator of the search for each person's originality; and this is not just a different quest but in a sense antithetical to the Cartesian. Each turns us in a sense inward and tries to bring some order in the soul; but the likeness is what makes the conflict between them particularly acute.

The Cartesian quest is for an order of science, of clear and distinct knowledge in universal terms, which where possible will be the basis of instrumental control. The Montaignean aspiration is always to loosen the hold of such general categories of "normal" operation and gradually prise our self-understanding free of the monumental weight of the universal interpretations, so that the shape of our originality can come to view. Its aim is not to find an intellectual order by which things in general can be surveyed but rather to find the modes of expression which will allow the particular not to be overlooked.

As Hugo Friedrich put it, where Montaigne tried to bring the particularity of human feeling to expression, Descartes "lays a neatly ordered net of classification . . . over the soul".<sup>17</sup> The very nature of the Montaignean enterprise must lead it to fight free of this. At bottom, the stance towards the self is flatly opposed in these two enterprises. The Cartesian calls for a radical disengagement from ordinary experience; Montaigne requires a deep engagement in our particularity. These two facets of modern individualism have been at odds up to this day.

But Montaigne's study in its own way has to be just as radically reflexive as that of Descartes. We have to turn inward.

Le monde regarde tousjours vis à vis; moy, je replie ma veue au dedans, je la plante, je l'amuse là. Chacun regarde devant soy; moy, je regarde dedans moy.

The world lookes ever for-right, I turne my sight inward, there I fix it, there I amuse it. Every man lookes before himselfe, I looke within my selfe.<sup>18</sup>

A study of the particular not framed from the start in a general doctrine: Montaigne was aware how easily it could miscarry. He was aware too of how the reality studied was susceptible of being shaped by the terms employed:

Je n'ay pas plus faict mon livre que mon livre m'a faict, livre consubstantiel à son autheur, d'une occupation propre, membre de ma vie; non d'une occupation et fin tierce et estrangere comme tous autres livres.

I have no more made my booke, then my booke hath made me. A booke consubstantiall to his Author: Of a peculiar and fit occupation. A member of my life. Not of an occupation and end, strange and forraine, as all other bookes.<sup>19</sup>

Montaigne sought through laborious self-examination the penetrating grasp of the particular, which can arise spontaneously in a deep friendship. Montaigne had lived one such, and he was aware of the link; indeed, he attributed his undertaking the study to the loss of his friend, La Boétie, as though it were but a second best: "Luy seul jouyssoit de ma vraye image, et l'emporta. C'est pourquoy je me deschiffre moy-mesme si curieusement" ("He alone partook of my true image, and carried it off with him. That is why I so curiously decipher myself").<sup>20</sup> The self is both made and explored with words; and the best for both are the words spoken in the dialogue of friendship. In default of that, the debate with the solitary self comes limping far behind. Epicurus may have also had some insight of this range, who gave such a central place to the conversation among friends.

But one has to resist the temptation to read Montaigne anachronistically; a temptation which is strong precisely because he pioneered so much that is important to us now. The search for the self in order to come to terms with oneself, which Montaigne inaugurates, has become one of the fundamental themes of our modern culture; or so I would claim. His goal still resonates with us: "C'est une absolue perfection, et comme divine, de sçavoir jouyr loialement de son estre" ("It is an absolute perfection, and as it were divine for a man to know how to enjoy his being loyally").<sup>21</sup> And this gives us

another reason to think of ourselves in reflexive terms. There is a question about ourselves—which we roughly gesture at with the term 'identity' which cannot be sufficiently answered with any general doctrine of human nature. The search for identity can be seen as the search for what I essentially am. But this can no longer be sufficiently defined in terms of some universal description of human agency as such, as soul, reason, or will. There still remains a question about me, and that is why I think of myself as a self. The word now circumscribes an area of questioning. It designates the kind of being of which this question of identity can be asked.

In order to conjure the demon of anachronism, we have to remind ourselves that the full modern question of identity belongs to the post-Romantic period, which is marked by the idea, central to Herderian expressivism, that each person has his or her own original way of being. I will discuss this at some length later. Montaigne served as a paradigm figure to illustrate another way in which Augustinian inwardness has entered modern life, and he helped to constitute our understanding of the self.

And, of course, Augustinian self-examination reverberated throughout the Renaissance in all sorts of forms, among followers of both major confessions. Self-exploration was part of the discipline of both Jesuits and Puritans, among others. Its importance to the latter, of course, is more readily recognized, because it is arguably one of the sources of modern English literature, in particular, of the novel. But it was a striking phenomenon in its own right. Calvin, taking up Augustine's doctrine of sin in a single-minded and remorseless fashion, made God's transformation of the will through grace the key to salvation. The Puritan was encouraged to scrutinize his inner life continually, both to descry the signs of grace and election and to bring his thoughts and feelings into line with the grace-given dispositions of praise and gratitude to God. What was remarkable about this discipline is that it was meant only for a small elite of spiritual athletes, but for all Christians. It remained, of course, the property of an elite, but of one more broadly based than any earlier period had seen. In New England, it would appear, "almost every literate Puritan kept some sort of journal".<sup>22</sup> Concerning England, Lawrence Stone writes: "From the seventeenth century onwards there burst on to paper a torrent of words about intimate thoughts and feelings set down by large numbers of quite ordinary English men and women, most of them now increasingly secular in orientation".<sup>23</sup> From Bunyan to Pepys to Boswell and arguably even to Rousseau, the Protestant culture of introspection becomes secularized as a form of confessional autobiography, while at the same time helping to constitute the new form taken by the English novel in the eighteenth century at the hands of Defoe, Richardson, and others.<sup>24</sup>

## INNER NATURE

Thus by the turn of the eighteenth century, something recognizably like the modern self is in process of constitution, at least among the social and spiritual elites of northwestern Europe and its American offshoots. It holds together, sometimes uneasily, two kinds of radical reflexivity and hence inwardness, both from the Augustinian heritage, forms of self-exploration and forms of self-control. These are the ground, respectively, of two important facets of the nascent modern individualism, that of self-responsible independence, on one hand, and that of recognized particularity, on the other.

A third facet must also be mentioned. We might describe this as the individualism of personal commitment. I mentioned in Chapter 7 the legacy of the Stoic conception of the will, in its aspect of our power to give or withhold consent—Chrysippus' *'synkatathesis'*, or Epictetus' *'prohairesis'*. To make this the central human moral power is to open the way to an outlook which makes commitment crucial: No way of life is truly good, no matter how much it may be in line with nature, unless it is endorsed with the whole will. The Augustinian heritage was hospitable to this outlook—Augustine identified the force of sin precisely as the inability to will fully.<sup>1</sup> The appeal of the various purified ethical visions of Renaissance humanism, of Erasmus, for instance, or of the later neo-Stoics, was partly that they offered such an ethic of the whole will against the more lax and minimal rules demanded by society at large.

And one of the driving forces of the Protestant Reformation, as central almost as the doctrine of salvation by faith, was the idea that this total commitment must no longer be considered the duty only of an elite which embraced 'counsels of perfection', but was demanded of all Christians indiscriminately.<sup>2</sup> This was the ground for the reformers' vigorous rejection of all the supposedly special vocations of monasticism.

This three-sided individualism is central to the modern identity. It has helped to fix that sense of self which gives off the illusion of being anchored in our very being, perennial and independent of interpretation. We can see its

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