

"Il faut se connaître soi-même: quand cela ne servirait pas à trouver le vrai, cela au moins sert à régler sa vie, et il n'y a rien de plus juste."¹

These words of Pascal might well have been written by Montaigne for they summarise his own philosophical journey. The Socratic precept "Know thyself" was the central pivot of his thought. Self-knowledge, according to Montaigne, is the beginning of all wisdom and upon this he attempts to establish the criterion of truth and a secular morality. In so doing he was following faithfully in the footsteps of Socrates.

The personality and teachings of Socrates, as Etienne Gilson points out in *L'Esprit de la Philosophie Médiévale*, exercised a tremendous influence upon thinkers from the time of the Stoics up to Montaigne and Pascal, since Socrates emphasized that the proper study of mankind is man and not the external physical world.² Wisdom for St. Augustine was: "rerum humanarum divinarumque scientia."³ This traditional Christian concept, which led to a system of ethics based upon the analysis of the individual conscience according to the doctrines of the Catholic Church, was to be replaced at the end of the sixteenth century by a new secular concept based upon the Socratic ideal of man. The new Renaissance man was an autonomous rational being free to determine his own moral conduct. Such is the portrait of the "honnête homme" that emerges from the pages of Montaigne's *Essais*.⁴

I

MONTAIGNE'S SOURCES FOR SOCRATES

"Tel allegue Platon et Homere, qui ne les veid onques. Et moy ay prins des lieux assez ailleurs qu'en leur source."⁵

Many are the sources, both ancient and modern, that Montaigne drew upon for his portrait of Socrates in the *Essais*. Upon examining the actual textual references to Socrates some interesting facts emerge that enable us to ascertain the most probable sources for Montaigne's portrait of Socrates. The name of Socrates is mentioned 13 times in the 1580 edition of the *Essais*, 26 times in the 1588 edition, 59 times in the 1595 edition. The sources for the references to Socrates in the 1580 and 1588 editions are extremely varied and one can only conclude that Montaigne gleaned his knowledge of Socrates from his readings of Cicero, St. Augustine, Plutarch, Xenophon, Plato, and commonplace books such as Dio-genis Laertius' *Life of the Philosophers*⁶ and Joannis Stobaeus' *Sententiae*.⁷ The major sources in the 1595 edition are clearly Plato and Xenophon, a natural choice on the part of Montaigne since they both knew Socrates personally, wrote copiously about him, and record the defense Socrates is supposed to have made at his trial. Although their evidence conflicts and the portrait of Socrates that Xenophon draws is terribly dull in comparison with the witty metaphysician that Plato describes, Montaigne inclines more towards Xenophon's assessment of Socrates since he stressed the practical morality that Socrates taught:

Pythagoras, disent-ils, a suivy une philosophie toute en contemplation, Socrates toute en meurs et en action; Platon en a trouvé le temperament entre les deux. Mais ils le disent pour en conter, et le vray temperament se trouve en Socrates, et Platon est bien plus Socratique que Pythagorique, et luy sied mieux.⁸

Montaigne most likely used Ficino's Latin translation of Plato's works, since it was the most frequently reprinted translation of Plato in the sixteenth century.⁹ Ficino had a great admiration for Socrates and did not hesitate to establish a parallel between Christ and Socrates that makes the latter the "adumbratio" (a rough sketch) of Christ. Ficino had discovered Socrates and Plato through reading the works of St. Augustine, notably in the *City of God*, and so justifies his defence and apology of Platonism. When writing to the son of Poggio, he stresses the necessity of following the Delphic precept:

Nihil enim magis ad hominem pertinet quam quae de anima disputant. Sic et Delphicum praeceptum illud impletur, nosce te ipsum et cetera omnia sagacius, quae vel super animam vel infra animam sunt investigantur.¹⁰

It is difficult to establish the exact number of direct quotations from Plato's works, since many of them in the 1588 and 1595 editions are taken from Cicero's philosophical works which popularized the thought of the Academy, and we find cross references upon the same topic in Xenophon and Plutarch also. However, from 1588 onwards, which marks a turning point in Montaigne's evolution as a thinker, he studies Plato's works in depth and borrows heavily from him (110 quotations), showing interest above all in Plato's portrait of Socrates. For example, in his essay "Des Coches" Montaigne incorporates a long passage from the *Symposium* (p. 1007), and *The Defence of Socrates* is a primary source for the essay "De la Phisionomie" in which Montaigne quotes a long extract from Socrates' speech before his judges (pp. 1181-1183). In the "Apologie de Raimond Sebond" Montaigne quotes from the *Apology*, the *Timaeus*, the *Theaetetus* and the *Phaedo* in support of Socratic ignorance (pp. 553-564), the maieutic method (pp. 566-567), and the thesis that the proper study of philosophy is man himself (pp. 603, 611). Montaigne introduces the very first reference to the Socratic maxim "Fay ton faict et te cognoy" in a (c) addition to the text of Chapter III (Livre i), p. 35, saying that Plato often quotes this precept and explaining the moral implications. A later reference at the very end of Chapter VI (Livre ii), p. 418 attributes the title of "Sage" conferred upon Socrates to this self-knowledge.

The *Memorabilia* of Xenophon are a major source of Montaigne's knowledge of Socrates and he used Sebastian Castallion's translation of 1551. Montaigne's friend La Boétie had published a translation of the *Oeconomicus* in 1562 in the preface of which Montaigne called Xenophon: "Un gentilhomme de marque, très grand homme de guerre et de paix." Montaigne admired great military leaders and his first mention of Xenophon in the *Essais* is: "comme grand capitaine et philosophe des premiers disciples de Socrates" (p. 49). Montaigne tends to use Xenophon to stress the more practical and civic virtues of Socrates. For example, six quotations from the *Memorabilia* speak of observing moderation and of leading a practical life. Xenophon's Socrates is concerned with elaborating a code of conduct based upon the "golden mean": "(c) Sa grandeur ne s'exerce pas en la grandeur, c'est en la mediocrité" (p. 905). Moreover Montaigne justifies his own moral laziness by taking as his personal motto the maxim "Selon qu'on peut" and inscribing it on the first page of several of his books (p. 916). He also refers twice to Xenophon's interpretation of

the Socratic precept in the *Memorabilia* IV, 2, 24-30, elaborating upon Xenophon's interpretation in Book III of the *Essais* at the end of Chapter IX (p. 1123) and briefly mentioning it in Chapter XIII (p. 1206). He approves wholeheartedly of Socrates' disregard for physics and metaphysics: "C'est, à l'advis de Socrates, et au mien aussi, le plus sagement jugé du ciel que n'en juger point." (p. 599). He justifies his own religious conservatism by referring to the passage in the *Memorabilia* (I, 3, 1-2) when the Priestess at Delphi says one must: "Follow the custom of the State: that is the way to act piously." Montaigne writes: "Car c'est la regle des regles, et generale loy des loix, que chacun observe celles du lieu où il est" (p. 148). Finally Montaigne uses Xenophon as a source for anecdotes about Socrates' wife Xanthippe (p. 656), his concern for preserving good health (p. 1212), and Socrates' courage during the thirty days he spent awaiting death (p. 687).

Much of Montaigne's knowledge of the life of Socrates and his teachings was derived from his readings of Cicero's philosophical works, notably the *Academica* and the *Tusculanae Disputationes*, which he began to study in earnest after 1588. It should be remembered that Cicero's philosophical works were the greatest source of information upon the different schools of philosophy in classical antiquity until the end of the sixteenth century and his own personal eclectic philosophy laid the foundations of the civilisation of the Christian world. Moreover, St. Augustine's knowledge of Platonism was derived from his studies of Cicero, and he achieved thereby a synthesis of classical and Christian thought which was to influence Christianity profoundly, particularly during the Renaissance and Classical periods in Europe. Cicero's account of the historical importance of Socrates underlines the new moral direction that Socrates gave to philosophy as distinct from its former preoccupation with the mysteries of the physical universe.¹¹

In his philosophical treatises Cicero proclaimed himself to be the faithful disciple of both Socrates and Plato and stated that all the followers of the Academy practised Socratic irony.¹² Montaigne, although he says that no one will ever equal Cicero's eloquence as an orator, did admit to being bored by his floods of eloquence. He preferred infinitely Cicero's works on moral philosophy: "(a) Quant à Cicero, les ouvrages qui me peuvent servir chez luy à mon desseing, ce sont ceux qui traitent de la philosophie signamment morale."¹³ Montaigne was to be greatly influenced by Cicero's concept of the "bonus civis" in his formulation of an ethical code for the sixteenth century "honnête homme."¹⁴ Indeed, Cicero, like Montaigne, had proposed a morality based upon the golden mean and inspired by his own interpretation of the Socratic maxim "Know thyself" which would be accessible to the average Roman citizen. Cicero had rejected, as Montaigne did, the lofty moral precepts of the Stoics in order to propound a dynamic ethical system which was more human and more pragmatic.

St. Augustine has already been mentioned as a source of additional information upon Socrates. Montaigne studied in depth the *City of God* between 1588-92, most likely in one of the editions that appeared in Paris (1531, 1541 or 1555) which included the famous notes and commentaries upon the text by Vives. The notes, for example, on the *City of God*, IX, xvi, analyse in great detail the Platonic concept of God which Montaigne may have used in the "Apologie de Raimond Sebond." St. Augustine appreciated also the qualities of Socrates the moral philosopher, as far as the active life in society was concerned: "Socrates in activa excelluisse memoratur."¹⁵ St. Augustine culled his knowledge of Socrates from Cicero's philosophical works.¹⁶

The Augustinian tradition with its insistence upon introspection, upon self-knowledge in order to arrive at knowledge of God, was also to influence Montaigne through his reading and translation of Raymond Sebon's *Liber Creaturarum*. Both Sebon and Montaigne stress that the study of the self is the wise man's chief concern. Sebon states that "l'extrême mal de l'homme est s'ignorer soy-mesmes" and that the first thing one must do is to show man "l'eschelle de nature par laquelle l'homme monte à la cognoissance de soy et de son createur."¹⁷

Plutarch's *Moralia* are a minor source of information upon Socrates. Montaigne valued Plutarch above all as a moralist and he quotes him as having "... les opinions Platoniques; douces et accommodables à la société civile;..." (p. 454). Bernard Latzarus in his study, *Les Idées Religieuses de Plutarque* (Paris: 1920) stresses the direct influence of Socrates upon Plutarch who wanted to propagate a universal religion in which the Divinity was conceived as being the Ultimate Perfection, an eternal timeless being whom one should salute with reverence, saying "Tu es l'Un." The final pages of the "Apologie de Raimond Sebond" from the paragraph beginning: "Finalement, il n'y a aucune constante existence, ny de nostre estre, ny de celuy des objets" (p. 679) are a direct translation of Plutarch's treatise *The E at Delphi* (392-393), with a few quotations inserted from Plato's *Theaetetus* (p. 680) and *Timaeus* (p. 682).

For the humanists of the Renaissance Socrates was a man of divine stature, as portrayed in the *Dialogues* of Plato and the *Memorabilia* of Xenophon. Marsile Ficin was responsible for the launching of the cult of Socrates as the forerunner of Christ. Socrates was considered to be a Prophet because of his sublime message, and to be a Saint also, because of his virtuous life and death.¹⁸ Erasmus honoured Socrates so much that he tells us in the Adage 2201, called "Sileni Alcibiadis," he can scarcely refrain from saying "Saint Socrates, pray for us." Cardinal Sadoletto, an ardent Ciceronian whose ideas on education as shown in his *De Libris recte instituendis liber* (1530) are strikingly similar to Montaigne's, tried to reconcile the best in ancient philosophy with Christian doctrine in his very popular *De Laudibus Philosophiae* (Lyon: 1538). In the second book Sadoletto refers to the Delphic inscription and its moral message in terms that are reminiscent of Cicero.¹⁹ Many are the references to Socrates that abound in the writings of Renaissance humanists: Montaigne had an ample fund to draw upon for his own portrait of Socrates in the *Essais*.

II

PROBLEMS OF INTERPRETATION: SOCRATES' ROLE

The figure of Socrates in history and his role as a philosopher has been subject to much debate and led to many interpretations of his teachings.²⁰ Some historians of philosophy see Socrates as the greatest rationalist of all times, a kind of logical and scientific incarnation of the Greek mind, and a defender of a system of ethics based upon free will. Others see him as a mystic who paved the way for a transformation of religious feeling in the pagan world. The religious beliefs of Socrates are also variously interpreted: for some he is an example of religious conservatism, adhering strictly to the religious rites and customs of his country; for others he adheres to a "religio non licita," and they stress his Orphism and his Pythagoreanism. Xenophon is the chief source which states that Socrates obeys in

everything the laws of the city; Plato, on the contrary, stresses the mystical side of Socrates as far as religious beliefs are concerned.

There are two main schools of thought, then, concerning the role of Socrates. One follows the ancient tradition of seeing in Socrates a philosopher who, before the advent of Christianity, taught men to "contempler le divin en eux-mêmes, dans une âme raisonnable, divine, immortelle."²¹ Kierkegaard, for example, stresses this in his *Philosophical Fragments* stating that: "In the Socratic view each individual is his own center, and the entire world centers in him, because his self knowledge is a knowledge of God."²² The other school, following the lead of the eighteenth century free thinkers, calls upon Socrates to justify their polemics against revealed religion and dates from him the idea that man is born free to live according to the dictates of his own conscience. Hegel, in particular, sees in the Socratic method of interrogation by which the individual is made to reflect upon and become conscious of his own thoughts, and thereby derive a universal law, a thoroughly modern approach to the problem of individual liberty and moral responsibility. It is all the more remarkable that Socrates adopted this approach to philosophical problems at a time when his fellow Greeks were still consulting oracles, prophets, and reading entrails.

III

MONTAIGNE'S PORTRAIT OF SOCRATES THE MAN

The physical portrait that Montaigne draws of Socrates in the *Essais*, like that of Rabelais in the prologue to *Gargantua*, is not flattering.²³ A reference to the ugliness of Socrates, for example, substantiates one of his most important statements upon the criterion of truth in the "Apologie de Raimond Sebond" when he develops the argument that man always makes a subjective judgment, based upon appearances: "Tout ainsi comme qui ne cognoit pas Socrates, voyant son pourtraict, ne peut dire qu'il luy ressemble."²⁴ In a previous essay he quotes Socrates as saying that his face would lead people to believe that he had a vicious nature and that it was only by discipline that he had corrected a natural propensity to vice.²⁵ In a later chapter of the *Essais* Montaigne goes on to say that Nature did Socrates a great injustice, for he, a lover of beauty, was given such an ugly body and face that ill became the beauty of his soul.²⁶

Montaigne's essay "De la Phisionomie" revolves around the portrait of Socrates whom he calls "... le plus digne homme d'estre cogneu et d'estre présenté au monde pour exemple..."²⁷ He refers to the fact that our knowledge of Socrates has been transmitted to us second hand, either through the accounts of his disciples or other witnesses. He then goes on to say that, if Socrates were alive in Montaigne's time, few men would esteem him, as highly wrought and artificial graces alone were appreciated. The naiveté and the simplicity of the Socratic dialogues, Montaigne says, would not be appreciated by his contemporaries who were totally lacking in insight and they would consider his naiveté as bordering upon folly. Socrates drew his examples from everyday life and spoke a language that even a peasant could understand. However, Montaigne's contemporaries were so accustomed to an eloquent and ostentatious exposition of doctrine that he feels they would be incapable of understanding the nobility and splendour of Socrates' thought. This leads him into a humorous comparison "Nostre monde n'est formé qu'à l'ostentation: les hommes

ne s'enflent que de vent, et se manient à bonds, comme les balons."²⁸

Montaigne's great admiration for Socrates stems from the fact that the life and death of Socrates fully bear out his philosophy:

servare modum, finemque tenere, / Naturamque sequi.²⁹

Socrates is a fine example of the essential dignity of man and reveals to us a potential that is latent within us all. "Il a fait grand faveur à l'humaine nature de montrer combien elle peut d'elle mesme."³⁰ Socrates, in the manner of his death, has taught us all how to die; in the manner of his life, he has taught us all how to live. Throughout the essay Montaigne preaches that philosophy should teach us how to live, it is an "ars vivendi" rather than, as he used to assert in previous chapters when he was influenced by Stoic doctrine, "Tota philosophorum vita commentatio mortis est."³¹ Montaigne now prefers to seek models of the simple life, such as the peasants working in his fields, who are living in harmony with nature. Socrates, in the eyes of Montaigne, is one of the "bons regens, interpretes de la simplicité naturelle."³² He quotes at length from Socrates' speech to his judges and praises it in the highest terms for its moral nobility. The admiration that Montaigne feels for Socrates is boundless: he calls Socrates "le maistre des maistres"³³ and places him above all the great heroes of classical antiquity, saying that he surpasses even Alexander the Great because he led a life of moderation in conformity with nature.³⁴

There are constant references in the *Essais* to the courage and fortitude of Socrates in the face of death. Montaigne even inserts a small homage to Socrates in one of his first chapters where he discusses various attitudes towards death as shown by historical figures. Socrates was not at all concerned about his own funeral arrangements and left them entirely to his friend Crito.³⁵ Nature has condemned us all to death, says Socrates, and he is indifferent to death since "Un quart d'heure de passion sans consequence, sans nuisance, ne merite pas des preceptes particuliers."³⁶ Montaigne considers Socrates' death to be more noble and beautiful than that of Cato who committed suicide rather than live under a tyrant's yoke. Socrates had thirty days to meditate upon his death and never lost his serenity or sense of humour, as shown in this reply to his wife who had said: "O qu'injustement le font mourir ces meschans juges! – Aimerois-tu donc mieux que ce fust justement, lui repliqua il."³⁷

Love, marriage and procreation are subjects that Montaigne quotes Socrates upon also. As an old man Socrates still felt the sting of love when a chance touch of the shoulder thrilled him for five days. Montaigne comments "Pourquoy non dea? Socrates estoit homme; et ne vouloit ny estre ny sembler autre chose."³⁸ According to Socrates, love was a desire to procreate, stimulated by the agency of beauty. The act of love he considered to be divine, since love expresses man's desire for immortality. Montaigne concurred with this belief, stating that children satisfied our own desire for immortality and that his *Essais* were the children of his mind. As far as marriage is concerned neither Socrates nor Montaigne seem to have a good word for it. When asked whether it was better to marry or not, Socrates replied "Lequel des deux on face... on s'en repentira."³⁹ In any event, marriage, according to Montaigne, was a greater trial of Socrates' fortitude than anything suffered by the Stoic philosophers: "Socrates s'essayoit, ce me semble, encor plus rudement, conservant pour son exercice la malignité de sa femme: qui est un essay à fer esmoulu."⁴⁰

Socrates, the citizen of the world, reaps Montaigne's praise.⁴¹ Montaigne believed strongly in the educational value of travel and he condemned the parochialism of the French: "... j'estime tous les hommes mes compatriotes, et embrasse un Polonois comme un François, postposant cette lyaison nationale à l'universelle et commune."⁴² Travel, however, is not the sovereign remedy for all ills and cannot take away our inner torment. Socrates comments, when told that someone had not got better after a journey: "Je croy bien... il s'es-toit emporté avecques soy,"⁴³ and Montaigne comments "Nous emportons nos fers quand et nous..."⁴⁴

In his chapter "De l'Institution des Enfants" Montaigne refers directly to Socrates four times but the influence of Socrates upon Montaigne's theory of education is far greater than these direct references would lead one to suppose. Renaissance educational theory was inspired by the noble ideals of Socrates and Plato as they had been transmitted through the treatises of Cicero, Quintilian, Seneca and Plutarch upon the best way of forming the perfect orator. The perfect orator was not only "vir bonus dicendi peritus" he was also dedicated to the pursuit of wisdom and a loyal citizen of the state.⁴⁵

The basic concepts of Montaigne's educational theory were undoubtedly influenced by this inheritance of Greek and Latin thought and, in particular, by the ideals of Socrates as expressed in the Platonic dialogues. Montaigne's rigorous insistence upon the formation of judgment, the training of the child to become an independent thinker, the formulation of moral values not based upon an inherited ethical system but drawn from his own personal experience of life, all of these ideas were to be found in the dialogues of Socrates. The basic aim of education, according to Socrates and Montaigne, is to teach us how to live and to improve the quality of our life. This can only be done if the child is encouraged right from infancy to seek out *virtue* (that goodness is a matter of knowledge was a profound conviction of Socrates) and to follow a life of *moderation*. These aims were stressed by Socrates in the *Protagoras* and embodied in a detailed programme of education by Plato in the *Republic* and in the *Laws*. Interestingly enough Montaigne quotes Plato in support of his argument of the supreme importance of training the very young to hate all vices: "Il faut apprendre soigneusement aux enfants de haïr les vices de leur propre contexture, et leur en faut apprendre la naturelle difformité, à ce qu'ils les fuient..." (p. 137). Montaigne heartily endorses Socrates' view that education should be of a practical nature and that its end is moral. Moreover, the virtue that the teacher preaches should be made easily accessible so that children as well as grown men may understand and practise it. This was preached first of all by Socrates (who has been accused of advocating hedonism by some critics)⁴⁶ and Montaigne praises him: "Socrates, son premier mignon, quitte à escient sa force, pour glisser en la naïveté et aisance de son progres." (p. 196) The true path to goodness, however, can only be taught by telling the pupil to "know himself" and to examine his life, as Socrates states: "A life unexamined is not worth living" (*Apology* 38^a). These Socratic maxims were to be the guiding principles behind all of Montaigne's thought. Thus the private individual's conscience becomes the ultimate arbiter. Only one law is paramount: the good citizen must obey the laws of his city or country.

MONTAIGNE'S PORTRAIT OF SOCRATES THE PHILOSOPHER

The importance of the Socratic maxim "Know thyself" in the evolution of Montaigne's thought is inestimable.⁴⁷ Montaigne justifies his withdrawal from the world by a reference to Socrates⁴⁸ and he concludes magnificently his essay "De la Vanité" with a reference to the Delphic inscription; man without self knowledge is subject to misery and vanity, his egocentric tendencies blinding him to the fact of his own helplessness:

Il n'en est une seule si vuide et necessiteuse que toy, qui embrasses l'univers: tu es le scrutateur sans connoissance, le magistrat sans jurisdiction et apres tout le badin de la farce.⁴⁹

The maxim "Know thyself" is the very foundation of a theory of knowledge whose criterion of truth is the subject's own conscious perception of reality.⁵⁰ It is the "prise de conscience" of his own existential situation and becomes the dynamic principle behind all moral and metaphysical science.⁵¹ When Montaigne assures his readers in the preface to the *Essais*: "...je suis moy-mesmes la matiere de mon livre" he is not being vainglorious; he is stating a philosophical method that he is following in the *Essais* which will allow him to judge reality upon the basis of his own personal experience. Later on he writes "Ce ne sont mes gestes que j'escris, c'est moy, c'est mon essence."⁵² From a consideration of the particular, just as Socrates proceeded to do in the *Dialogues*, Montaigne was able to set forth general truths that he says may help others "Ce qui me sert, peut aussi par accident servir à un autre."⁵³ Although few writers of classical antiquity, and none since, revealed their most intimate thoughts, Montaigne justifies what might be conceived as self-indulgence by a direct reference to Socrates:

Dequoy traite Socrates plus largement que de soy? A quoy achemine il plus souvent les propos de ses disciples, qu'à parler d'eux, non pas de la leçon de leur livre, mais de l'estre et branle de leur ame?⁵⁴

The object of relating his personal reflections is not to teach or indoctrinate others: Montaigne is recounting the unfolding of his own being, which is in a state of constant mobility, and hoping to fix thereby the essential traits. He wishes to communicate with others by way of his "estre universel" since "chaque homme porte la forme entiere de l'humaine condition."⁵⁵ This meditation upon the self, upon the individual consciousness, allows Montaigne to formulate his own particular brand of wisdom which is simply the art of learning how to live well. "Mon mestier et mon art, c'est vivre."⁵⁶ Personal experience forms our judgment, teaches us to avoid any excess and to live in harmony with nature.⁵⁷

However, Montaigne cautions his reader time and time again against an excessive reliance upon the faculty of reasoning. The first step towards acquiring knowledge is made when one admits one is ignorant.

Par ce que Socrates avoit seul mordu à certes au precepte de son Dieu, de se connoistre, et par cette estude estoit arrivé à se mespriser, il fut estimé seul digne du surnom de Sage. Qui se connoistra ainsi, qu'il se donne hardiment à connoistre par sa bouche. (p. 418)

The Socratic assumption of ignorance is "une docte ignorance," to use a common sixteenth century term, and is an integral part of the Socratic method of ascertaining truth; doubting leads to knowing. Later on Descartes in his *Discours de la Méthode* was to lay down as the first rule in his method of arriving at the truth: "Le premier était de ne recevoir jamais aucune chose pour vraie que je ne la connusse évidemment être telle..." Montaigne's own use of doubt, which was Socratic in origin, was to be one of the guiding principles in Cartesian philosophy.

The declaration of ignorance was an essential part of the Socratic method, maieutics, which sought to awaken the individual conscience and, by an analysis of concrete reality, conclude with an affirmation of general truths. Montaigne devotes a paragraph in the "Apologie de Raimond Sebond" to an analysis of the Socratic method, this intellectual midwifery.⁵⁸ He had himself envisaged the use of Socratic dialogue but had preferred finally a form which lent itself more easily to a long inner monologue. Montaigne compares his own ready acceptance of criticism with that of Socrates because they were both seekers after the truth. Montaigne fully understood that the art of the Socratic dialogue lay in its exposition of all points of view in order that the truth should finally emerge.⁵⁹

The Socratic maxim "Know thyself" is profoundly moral in intent, as is stated quite clearly by Critias in *Charmides*.⁶⁰ It means "Be wise" as well as "Nothing in excess." Montaigne evidently understood the ethical implications of the maxim and in a (c) addition to his essay "De L'Yvrongnerie" states: "Comme Socrates disoit que le principal office de la sagesse estoit distinguer les biens et les maux; nous autres, à qui le meilleur est toujours en vice, devons dire de mesme de la science de distinguer les vices..." (p. 375). Above all Montaigne admires Socrates for preaching "la médiocrité," the golden mean, which can only be followed after self-knowledge has been gained.

In his last essay "De l'Experience" Montaigne stresses that Socrates' contribution to philosophy was "toute en meurs et en action" (p. 1246). Temperance, moderation, prudence, common sense, serenity of mind are all qualities of the way of life that Socrates preached and which Montaigne admired the most in him. Moreover, Montaigne approved also of Socrates' political abstention, which Socrates justified by saying that it was better not to compromise one's own integrity, which would necessarily happen if one were involved in active political life.⁶¹ Montaigne commends likewise Socrates' action in obeying the laws of his own country, even though it meant his own death, rather than to engage in civil disobedience.⁶²

The only criticism that Montaigne makes of Socrates concerns his system of metaphysics. After reading many authors on Socrates' demon, notably Plutarch, Montaigne concludes that the demon is a kind of intuition, a divine inspiration, that he himself has sometimes experienced.⁶³ However, he does state at the end of the *Essais*: "(c) Ces humeurs transcendentes m'effrayent, comme les lieux hautains et inaccessibles; et rien ne m'est à digérer fascheux en la vie de Socrates que ses ecstases et ses demoneries..."⁶⁴ In the "Apologie de Raimond Sebond" Montaigne also criticizes Socrates and Cato for not being Christians, their acts of virtue being without merit since they were not motivated by love of God. He also criticizes Socrates and his followers for having contradictory opinions upon the form of God and as to whether there was one God or several. These quibbles belong to an earlier period of Montaigne's thought and certainly do not detract from his eulogies of Socrates in the *Essais*.

The portrait of Socrates in the *Essais* is that of the ideal figure of the sage. After 1588 Montaigne quotes Socrates incessantly as he becomes emancipated from the bonds of Stoic doctrine. Socrates taught Montaigne that man's first duty was to learn how to live and then how to act. The words of the inscription with which the Athenians had honoured Pompey describe marvellously well the impact of Socrates' teaching upon philosophy:

D'autant es tu Dieu comme,
Tu te recognois homme.

They form a fitting conclusion to the *Essais* and to Montaigne's own philosophy of life which had led him to be called in his turn the French Socrates. As long as man recognizes that he is mortal, and is content not to search the skies and seek godhead for himself, then he will be able to enjoy life truly.

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Notes

All quotations and references to the *Essais* are taken from the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade edition (Paris: 1953).

- 1 *Pensées*, 81 (75). *L'Oeuvre de Pascal*, Jacques Chevalier, ed. (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1950), p. 1104.
- 2 Etienne Gilson, *L'Esprit de la Philosophie Médiévale*, (Paris: 1932), p. 6.
- 3 Cited by Eugene F. Rice Jr., *The Renaissance Idea of Wisdom* (Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 2. The whole Renaissance concept of wisdom is finely analysed in this masterly study.
- 4 Montaigne's *Essais* were a major source for French seventeenth century theories upon "l'honnêteté." See E. Limbrick, "La conception de l'honnête homme chez Montaigne," *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa*, (1971) pp. 47-57.
- 5 Liv. iii, ch. XII, p. 1185. On the same page Montaigne quotes Socrates who ridicules the sophists in *Euthydemus* just as Montaigne ridicules the pedants of his time for their useless knowledge.
- 6 Diogenes Laertius' *Life of the Philosophers*, was pillaged methodically by Montaigne from 1588 onwards, he making no fewer than 125-130 quotations and references to it, 8 of which are direct quotations from "Life of Socrates." See P. Villey, *Les Sources et l'Evolution des Essais de Montaigne* (1908; rpt. New York: Burt Franklin, 1968), I, pp. 115-117.
- 7 The *Sententiae* of Stobaeus furnished 9-10 direct quotations in the 1580 edition of the *Essais*. See Villey, *op. cit.*, pp. 221-222. It is interesting to note that under the heading "De Cognoscendo seipsum," sermo XIX, Stobaeus quotes Xenophon and then Plato upon the meaning of the

Delphic inscription.

- 8 *Essais*, Liv. iii, ch. XIII, p. 1246.
- 9 See Villey, *op. cit.*, pp. 192-194. Ficino's portrait of Socrates is dealt with in Raymond Marcel's excellent study, *Marsile Ficin* (Paris: 1958), pp. 625-627.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 653.
- 11 Cicero, *Academica*, Loeb Classical Library (1933 rpt., London: 1961), I, iv, 15, p. 424: Tum Varro ita exorsus est: "Socrates mihi videtur, id quod constat inter omnes, primus a rebus occultis et ab ipsa natura involutis, in quibus omnes ante eum philosophi occupati fuerunt, avocavisse philosophiam et ad vitam communem adduxisse, ut de virtutibus et vitiis omninoque de bonis rebus et malis quaereret, caelestia autem vel procul esse a nostra cognitione censeret vel, si maxima cognita essent, nihil tamen ad bene vivendum." Cf. Montaigne, *Essais*, Liv. iii, ch. XII, p. 1164: "C'est luy qui ramena du ciel, où elle perdoit son temps, la sagesse humaine, pour la rendre à l'homme, où est sa plus juste et plus laborieuse besoigne, et plus utile."
- 12 Cicero, *Academica*, II, v.
- 13 *Essais*, Liv. ii, ch. X, p. 455.
- 14 Cicero's philosophical treatise *De Officiis* elaborates a practical code of morality for the average man, the "bonus civis." Montaigne made 37 direct quotations and borrowings from this work.
- 15 *De Civitate Dei*, I, viii, c. iv.
- 16 See F. Cayré, *Initiation à la philosophie de Saint Augustin* (Paris: 1947), p. 62.
- 17 Cited by Joseph Coppin, *Montaigne Traducteur de Raymond Sebon* (Lille: 1925), pp. 121-122.

- 18 See Raymond Marcel's article, "Saint Socrate Patron de l'Humanisme," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 16 (1951), Fasc. 2, p. 136.
- 19 "Noscenti igitur nobis nosmetipsi, et in id curriculum vitae inducendi, in quod natura ipsa nos immittit, Quae sane nostrum cognitio, non ab exquisitis et abditis primo rationibus, sed a communi hominum intelligentia petenda est: sit enim postea increbrescent studio, et progredientibus rationibus, ut nostri nobis notio in dies reddatur certior." Jacobi Sadoleti, *De Laudibus Philosophiae*, Lib. II (Lyon: 1538).
- 20 The best study on the historical figure of Socrates is by V. de Magalhães-Vilhena, *Le Problème de Socrate* (Paris: 1952).
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 53.
- 22 S. Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 14.
- 23 "Tel disoit estre Socrates, parce que, le voyans au dehors et l'estimans par l'exteriore apparence, n'en eussiez donné un coupeau d'oignon, tant laid il estoit de corps et ridicule en son maintien, le nez pointu, le regard d'un taureau, le visaige d'un fol, simple en meurs..." Rabelais, *Gargantua*, ed. Jean Plattard, Société des Belles Lettres (Paris: 1946), p. 3. Rabelais had borrowed this description from Plato's *Symposium*, as he indicates in the text.
- 24 *Essais*, Liv. ii, ch. XII, p. 679.
- 25 *Ibid.*, Liv. ii, ch. XI, p. 473. Montaigne probably acquired this information from Cicero's *Tusculanae Disputationes* IV, 37, which he was reading at the time he made this (a) addition.
- 26 *Ibid.*, Liv. iii, Ch. XII, p. 1187.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 1163.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 1163.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 1163.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 1164.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 1180.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 1181.
- 33 *Ibid.*, Liv. iii, ch. XIII, p. 1208.
- 34 *Ibid.*, Liv. iii, ch. II, p. 905.
- 35 *Ibid.*, Liv. i, ch. III, p. 40.
- 36 *Ibid.*, Liv. iii, ch. XII, p. 1180. Compare Liv. i, ch. XX, pp. 116-117.
- 37 *Ibid.*, Liv. ii, ch. XII, p. 656. The probable source is either Valerius Maximus, *Factorum ac dictorum memorabilium libri novem* (7.2. ext. 1) or Diogenes Laertius, *Clarissimi historici de vitis ac moribus priscorum philosophorum libri decem*, XVI, 35, since they both make Xanthippe the author of this remark, not Apollodor as in Xenophon (*Apology*, 28).
- 38 *Essais*, Liv.iii, ch. V, p. 999.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 952.
- 40 *Ibid.*, Liv. ii, ch. XI, p. 465.
- 41 *Ibid.*, Liv. i, ch. XXVI, p. 190. This anecdote probably originates from Cicero's *Tusculanae Disputationes*, V, 37, 108 since Montaigne was reading them at the time of this (a) addition. It is also found in Epictetus, *Discourses*, 1, 9.1 and Plutarch, *Exile*, 600 F.
- 42 *Ibid.*, Liv. iii, ch. IX, p. 1089.
- 43 *Ibid.*, Liv. i, ch. XXXIX, p. 276.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. 277.
- 45 In the *De Oratore* Cicero returns to the Platonic idea of education, as outlined in the *Phaedrus*, of a union of eloquence and wisdom. In the *De Officiis* he traces the portrait of the "honnête homme," the good citizen of the state and also of the world.
- 46 See G.M.A. Grube, *Plato's Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), pp. 59-62.
- 47 Montaigne makes 5 explicit references to this maxim in the *Essais*: Liv. i, ch. III, p. 35; Liv. ii, ch. VI, pp. 416 and 418; Liv. iii, ch. IX, p. 1123 and in ch. XIII, p. 1206. Pierre Charron, in his *De la Sagesse* devotes all of the first chapter to a commentary upon the "nosce teipsum," most of the ideas being culled from the *Essais* of Montaigne.
- 48 "Socrates dict que les jeunes se doivent faire instruire, les hommes s'exercer à bien faire, les vieux se retirer de toute occupation civile et militaire, vivants à leur discretion, sans obligation à nul certain office." (Liv. i, ch. XXXIX, p. 280)
- 49 *Ibid.*, Liv. iii, ch. IX, p. 1123.
- 50 Montaigne analyses the value of his own introspective method of arriving at truth thus: "Cette capacité de trier le vray, quelle qu'elle soit en moy, et cett' humeur libre de n'assubjectir aisément ma creance, je la dois principalement à moy...." (*Ibid.*, Liv. ii, ch. XVII, p. 743).
- 51 "Je m'estudie plus qu'autre subject. C'est ma metaphysique, c'est ma physique," (*Ibid.*, Liv. iii, ch. XIII, p. 1204).
- 52 *Ibid.*, Liv. ii, ch. VI, p. 417.
- 53 *Ibid.*, p. 415.
- 54 *Ibid.*, p. 416.
- 55 *Ibid.*, Liv. iii, ch. II, p. 900.
- 56 *Ibid.*, Liv. ii, ch. VI, p. 416.
- 57 *Ibid.*, Liv. iii, ch. XIII, p. 1239 and 1254.
- 58 *Ibid.*, Liv. ii, ch. XII, p. 567. Montaigne's description is highly reminiscent of Plato's in the *Theaetetus*.
- 59 René Schaerer defines the object of the Socratic dialogue thus: "Si tu veux devenir sage, nous dit-

il, habitue-toi à remonter de tes opinions personnelles aux principes les plus universellement admis pour descendre ensuite aux définitions les plus générales (Xénophon, *Mémoires* iv, 6.1; 13; 15); renouvelle cet exercice à chaque occasion et sois heureux si tu t'arrêtes devant une impasse (aporie), car l'ignorance, en devenant *consciente*, ouvre la voie du vrai savoir; mais, pour qu'apparaisse un jour, une vérité vraiment commune, aie soin d'écarter toute séduction rhétorique en pratiquant l'entretien dialogué" (René Schaerer, *Le Héros, le Sage et l'Événement*, Aubier, Editions Montaigne, Paris, 1964, p. 111).

60 *Charmides* 164d.

61 *Apology* 31 c, 32 a.

62 *Essais*, Liv. i, ch. XXIII, p. 148. Montaigne refers to this law of custom again in Liv. ii, ch. XII, pp. 652-653 and again in Liv. iii, ch. XII, p. 1190. Xenophon stresses this aspect of Socrates' thought in his *Memorabilia*, 4.4.1-4.

63 *Ibid.*, Liv. i, ch. XI, p. 65.

64 *Ibid.*, Liv. iii, ch. XIII, p. 1256.