



## Education from montaigne's perspective within the renaissance context

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**ABSTRACT.** Michel Eyquem de Montaigne's (1533-1592) philosophy foregrounds a pedagogy based on intellectual skepticism and moral stoicism. Since the acquisition of definitive or unquestionable knowledge is impossible, there would be the unending search for something that would be somewhat more reliable or probable. Similarly, it would be mandatory to educate the subject within a virtuous conduct to do one's duty. Current article is an attempt to approach philosophy and education and brings to the fore Montaigne's main topics within a review of his philosophy and his ideas on education, within the historical context (Renaissance) and his most relevant work (Essays). Results show that Montaigne's intellectual skepticism and moral stoicism ward off possible mistakes, misconceptions, errors and illusions caused by concepts that do not question to what extent knowledge is reliable and ignore the importance of the formation of human behavior. It is expected that these considerations on Montaigne's philosophical and educational ideas may trigger discussions on the theoretical foundation of education .

**Keywords:** Skepticism, Stoicism, Philosophy, Education.

### A educação segundo a perspectiva de montaigne no âmbito do renascimento

**RESUMO.** A filosofia de Michel Eyquem de Montaigne (1533-1592) oferece a possibilidade de uma pedagogia pautada no ceticismo intelectual e no estoicismo moral, pois, segundo ele, sendo impossível a aquisição do conhecimento definitivo ou inquestionável, restaria apenas a busca incessante por algo que seja, ao menos, um pouco mais confiável ou provável, da mesma forma que seria imperativo educar o indivíduo para uma conduta virtuosa e implacável no cumprimento do dever. O objetivo deste artigo, justificado pela necessidade de aproximar a filosofia e a educação, é esboçar os tópicos principais do pensamento de Montaigne, para apresentar um panorama geral da sua filosofia, assim como das suas ideias sobre educação, tratando-se do contexto histórico ao qual pertence (Renascimento), assim como da sua obra magna (Ensaaios). Como resultado, demonstra-se que o ceticismo intelectual e o estoicismo moral de Montaigne permanecem como alertas contra possíveis enganos, equívocos, erros ou ilusões causados por concepções que não fazem questionar até que ponto o saber é confiável, do mesmo modo que fazem ignorar a importância da formação da conduta humana. Espera-se que estas considerações acerca das ideias filosóficas e educacionais de Montaigne possam suscitar reflexões sobre a fundamentação teórica da educação.

**Palavras-chave:** Ceticismo, Estoicismo, Filosofia, Educação.

### La educación según la perspectiva de montaigne en el ámbito del renacimiento

**RESUMEN.** La filosofía de Michel Eyquem de Montaigne (1533-1592) ofrece la posibilidad de una pedagogía basada en el escepticismo intelectual y en el estoicismo moral, pues, según él, siendo imposible la adquisición del conocimiento definitivo o incuestionable, quedaría solo la búsqueda incesante por algo que sea, al menos, un poco más confiable o probable, de la misma manera que sería imperativo educar al individuo para una conducta virtuosa e implacable en el cumplimiento del deber. El objetivo de este artículo, justificado por la necesidad de aproximar la filosofía y la educación, es esbozar los principales tópicos del pensamiento de Montaigne, para presentar un panorama general de su filosofía, así como de sus ideas sobre educación, tratándose del contexto histórico al cual pertenece (Renacimiento), así como de su obra magna (Ensayos). Como resultado, se demuestra que el escepticismo intelectual y el estoicismo moral de Montaigne permanecen como alertas contra posibles engaños, equívocos, errores o ilusiones causados por concepciones que no nos hacen cuestionar hasta qué punto el saber es confiable, de la misma manera que nos hacen ignorar la importancia de la formación de la conducta humana. Se espera que estas consideraciones en cuanto a las ideas filosóficas y educacionales de Montaigne puedan fomentar reflexiones sobre la problemática de la fundamentación teórica de la educación.

**Palabras clave:** Escepticismo, Estoicismo, Filosofía, Educación.

## Introduction

This article aims to address the educational perspective present in the philosophical thought of Michel Eyquem de Montaigne (1533-1592). In his masterpiece, *Essays*, the author expatiates on the most varied themes and discusses education, whether to disapprove the way it was practiced in his day, or to suggest the manner he considered correct.

Thus, an outline of the main topics of the French thinker is proposed here to provide a general understanding of his philosophy and, particularly, of his ideas about education. In the same way, it is intended to simultaneously draw an insight of the cultural context to which Montaigne belongs, the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a period in which Europe experienced the Renaissance<sup>1</sup>.

The importance of Montaigne for education lies precisely in his skepticism<sup>2</sup>, i.e., in his theoretical option according to which one should not easily accept everything that is supposedly correct and, therefore, practice this view unconditionally, since reasoning is random: "We reason randomly and inconsiderately, says Plato's Timaeus, because, like ourselves, our reason is greatly influenced by chance" (Montaigne, 2004, p. 256). In this argument, his message is clear and precise: if our judgment is relative, it means that our opinion is circumstantial, and this is why something that would be suitable in a given situation would be equally inappropriate in another, and vice versa; the same applies to what is considered beneficial or harmful, since

The merchant only profits because youth loves pleasure; the farmer profits when wheat is expensive; the architect when the house falls in ruins; bailiffs with the processes and disputes of men; the very ministers of religion take honor and advantage of our deaths and the weaknesses from which we must redeem ourselves; no doctor, according to the ancient Greek comic, rejoices to see his own friends with good health; neither does the soldier, to see his country at peace with the neighboring peoples. And, what is worse, one who analyzes oneself will see at the bottom of one's heart that most desires are born and fed at the expense of others (Montaigne, 2004, p. 114-115).

Imbuing such line of thought, we have that

Montaigne would teach that education would become an object constantly subjected to revision and mistrust. Of revision because it is a practice that must be continuously reconsidered, whether in its principles or in its purposes, or even in its methods, which are neither unchanging, nor infallible. Of mistrust because it is something whose effects can be opposed to those expected, i.e., harmful, rather than beneficial, since the writer argues that one should not naively be convinced by anything, no matter how seductive or nice it sounds:

It is not without reason that we assign to simplicity and ignorance the ease with which some people believe and let themselves be persuaded, because I trust I have formerly learned that believing is as the result of some kind of impression on our soul, which is more embracing when is tender and less resistant: 'As well as the weight tips the balance, so the evidence determines the spirit'. The more the soul is empty and has no counterweight, the more it easily gives in to the charge of first impressions. That is why the children, the people, the women and the sick are to be conducted by suggestion. On the other hand, it is a foolish presumption to disdain or condemn as false everything that does not seem believable, a defect common to those that consider themselves more endowed with reason than the ordinary man (Montaigne, 2004, p. 174, emphasis added).

The operationalization of education becomes, therefore, under such perspective, a skeptical pedagogy, for which there are no fundamentals, purposes or unquestionable methodologies, above suspicion; i.e., Montaigne, as one of the modern representatives of the skeptical philosophy, stating that there is nothing that can be blindly trusted, claims, indirectly, that one should not believe that education has full or absolute powers over the development of the human being; hence, one could only act in the context of what would be, at best, likely, from which one can obtain knowledge through experience, despite the fact that a probability is not, in turn, something to which one should acquiesce without any restrictions.

In addition to his stone skepticism, Montaigne also offers of himself the image of a philosopher adept to stoicism<sup>3</sup>, since, while criticizing the unnecessary emphasis given to memorization, much in vogue in the educational practice of his time, he questions the reason why a mind in which is housed such knowledge cannot,

<sup>1</sup> Another five essential events for the understanding of this historical context are included here: the Great Navigations, the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Counter-Reformation, the Scientific Revolution and the Printing Press.

<sup>2</sup> Skepticism, as a philosophical doctrine, has its origins with Pyrrho (ca. 360 BC-270 BC), but its fundamental ideas were already among the Sophists; the term skeptical derives from *skeptikos*, which, in Greek, means: inquiring. In the construction of his thoughts, the Greek philosopher establishes, as his foundation, two principles: a) 'acatalepsy' (the impossibility of knowing the nature of things, as both the affirmation and the denial of anything have equally valid arguments, reason why one should equally suspend any type of judgment (*epoché*); therefore, there are no affirmation or denial that is better than the other); b) 'ataraxia' (unconcern, since, in view of the contradiction of reality, it is useless to be upset about or to fuss over it, reason why the most appropriate conduct would be not to bother with anything). Pyrrho had followers, who became known as pyrrhonists; in the same way that his ideas influenced Platonic philosophers of the Academy, so that, in the end, two types of skepticism were settled: a) Pyrrhonic skepticism (directly derived from the ideas of its founder); b) Academic Skepticism (combination of Pyrrhonism with Platonism).

<sup>3</sup> Stoicism was founded by Zeno of Citium (333 BC – 263 BC); the term stoic derives from the Greek word *stoa*, which means: portico; thus, the Stoic is the philosopher of the porticos, since it was there that the scholar Zeno and his disciples gathered in Athens. In summary, the stoicism divided philosophy into three parts: a) Physics: study of nature or of the universal and rational order; b) Logic: study of laws of reason to reach the truth; c) Ethics: study of what the human being must do and avoid. The Stoics, who flourished in the Hellenistic period and had exponents among the Romans (imperial stoicism) stood out, in general, due to their ethical ideal, 'apathy', which means: imperturbability, fearlessness or impassiveness, whether in face of adversity or prosperity, since, above all, it is necessary to bend to duty, which is what reason determines to be done or avoided, since virtue means to act rationally.

in return, use it to morally enhance oneself:

“But how come that a soul enriched with so much knowledge does not become more alive and smart, and that a vulgar and rude brain stores, with no predicament, the works and judgments of the greatest spirits that the world produced?” (Montaigne, 2004, p. 138).

Therefore, this constitutes a serious harm not only to knowledge, but also to morality, since the way in which we teach and learn, though making people more erudite, leaves them unable to improve, not only intellectually (since enhancing the memory does not necessarily imply in developing the intellect), but, above all, morally:

The way we learn, it is not surprising that neither students nor masters become more able, though more learned. In fact, the care and expenses of our parents are aimed only to fill our heads with science; common sense and virtue are not mentioned. Show the people someone and say ‘a scholar’ and qualify another one as good; no one will show lack of respect to the former. Would not this people deserve to be pointed out and called: ‘empty heads!’ We always ask if individuals know Greek and Latin, if they write in verse or prose, but asking if they became better persons and if their spirits developed – what really matters – does not cross our minds. Hence, one should ask who knows best, not who knows more (Montaigne, 2004, p. 140, emphasis added).

#### Aspects of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Renaissance scenario

The 1500s constitute a century in which Europe experienced, at the same time:

a) the cultural splendor, unleashed and disseminated by the Renaissance, which, from the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century, brought, under the auspices of Humanism, an unprecedented cultural renewal of intellectual, philosophical, scientific, artistic and literary character. To define better what is meant by Humanism, it is emphasized, according to the British historian Peter Burke, that

Humanism is a very springy term, with different meanings for different people. The word *Humanismus* started to be used in German in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to designate the traditional classic education, whose value began to be called into question, seeming to have been Mathew Arnold the first to use the term in English. Regarding ‘humanist’, the word was originated in the 15<sup>th</sup> century as a student slang referring to the professor of ‘humanities’, the *studia humanitatis*. This was an old Roman expression to describe an academic program composed specifically by five disciplines: Grammar, Rhetoric, Poetry, Ethics and History (Burke, 2008, p. 25, emphasis added).

b) the maritime and commercial expansion, franchised by the Great Navigations that, apart from

bringing substantial wealth from the colonial exploitation of the New World in the West, and the trade with the Indies in the East, particularly expanded the perception of world of the European man. In his proverbial skeptic distrust, Montaigne thus refers to a report that had been made by someone who lived in a French colony founded in Brazil:

For a long time I had beside me a man who remained for ten or twelve years in this part of the New World, discovered in this century, in the place where Villegaignon was established and was named ‘Antarctic France’. This discovery of a vast country seems very broad and fosters serious reflections. So many eminent characters were wrong about this discovery that I do not know if the future holds another of equal importance. Anyway, I am afraid we have eyes bigger than our bellies, more curiosity than means of action. We embrace all, but catch nothing besides wind (Montaigne, 2004, p. 193, emphasis added).

c) the rupture of the Western Christian religious unit, promoted by the Protestant Reformation, which, in addition to dividing the Western Christian into Catholics (Papists) and Reformed (Protestants), gravely compromised the political influence of the Roman Catholic Church on some important European States, progressively undermining the intervention of the Papacy in the directions of the continental policy. The success of the Reformation is explained, according to Cambi, by the following factors:

At its base, there are religious reasons, as the aversion to the ecclesiastical hierarchy, considered responsible for the disciplinary disorder and for the moral corruption that ruled the Church of Rome, and especially the widespread aspiration for a return to the authentic spirit of ‘original Christianity’, from which the medieval theological schools and the religious practices had shoved away many of the faithful. However, there are also social and economic reasons, such as the ‘increasing hostility of the financial bourgeoisie of several countries’ toward the papal fiscalism and, in Germany, the ‘rising national sentiment’, ‘the social unrest that moved peasant masses against large landowners’ and protests of the new secular intellectuals (Cambi, 1999, p. 247, emphasis added).

d) the reaction of the Holy See to the systematic loss of religious and, consequently, political domain, implemented by the Counter-Reformation, which, in addition to reaffirming the papal and dogmatic official ecclesiastic authority, implemented changes to its own midst, whose purpose was to recover the faithful lost in the Protestant movement and to prevent it from gathering more faithful in the newly discovered lands. Cambi, citing Geymonat, claims that the basis of the Counter-Reformation movement were:

[...] the strong political pressure exerted on the Church

by the monarchs faithful to Catholicism, the resistance posed by many conservative prelates to any authentically reformist initiative, the stiffening of the new Protestant churches and the outlines of the open fight between them and the Roman Church (Geymonat apud Cambi, 1999, p. 256).

e) the changes desired by humanist within the scientific and philosophical thought that, while trying to break with the Aristotelian-Thomism scholastic paradigm, sought to build a new model of interpretation of the nature and the human being, paradigm no longer subjected to theology, with a double foundation on reason and experience; the result was a 'true' Scientific Revolution<sup>4</sup>. From then on, the binomial reason-experience assumes unprecedented importance to the history of thought, as Philosophy and Science, predominantly speculative, and until then hegemonic and orthodox, were replaced by a Philosophy and a Science much more interested in the empirical world, whose observation will constitute the corner stone of reason. Experience gained, then, a powerful scientific status by being elevated to the maximum criterion to provide rational consistency to the theoretical thought. As emphasized by Cassirer, "The experience is no longer the opposition and the opposite pole to the fundamental strength of the theoretical knowledge, to scientific reason; it actually represents its means par excellence, its field of action and its confirmation" (Cassirer, 2001, p. 279).

f) the introduction of the Printing Press, by Gutenberg, which was invented in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and became one of the key elements in the spread of new ideas, accelerated the process of transformation of the European mentality by providing access to information to a wider public, who in turn joined the purpose of adding forces in order to claim changes towards a new social, economic and political order. Although it was not an event that, in short to medium term, would have been so influential in the spread of the Renaissance movement, according to Burke,

[...] it might at least be said that in the long term the invention of the printing press increased the availability of information, therefore extending the mental horizons and stimulating critical attitudes regarding authority by making the discrepancies between different authorities more visible (Burke, 2008, p. 100).

Since the Renaissance is inextricably linked to Humanism, the polysemy that these two terms comprise, because they are names that describe complex and heterogeneous events, leads to this warning by Debus, to whom:

The very terms 'Renaissance' and 'Humanism' have been used with such diverse connotations that it is unlikely that a single definition will simultaneously satisfy two different scholars. It is not necessary to try it here. The Renaissance undoubtedly implied a kind of 'rebirth' of knowledge – in both arts and literature. It also certainly corresponded to the period of development of a new science. Therefore, it is necessary to be careful to avoid simplifications. The new love of nature expressed by Petrarch (deceased circa 1374) and by other humanists of the 14<sup>th</sup> century resulted in more than one effect. We accept without difficulty that it was an instrument in the development of a new study of natural phenomena based on observation, but we also know that Petrarch and the subsequent humanists harbored a deep distrust in the traditional scholastic emphasis on philosophy and sciences. The rhetoric and history they preferred corresponded to a conscious response to the more technical 'Aristotelian' studies, which constituted the basis of medieval universities for a long time. The humanists sought the moral edification of men, and not so much the logic and scholastic discussions, characteristic of traditional higher education (Debus, 2002, p. 2, emphasis added).

Hence, Debus states that both Renaissance and Humanism are the two main terms that express the new situation formed in the mid-1300s, in contrast to the medieval context; i.e., both constitute the notion of vanguard of the modern Western civilization, according to which the human being is placed as something that is worth in itself, reason why all that is peculiarly human is emphasized in itself, so men become, under this perspective, the axis around which all speculation and action gravitate. Consequently, Humanism can be considered, in all fairness, the central idea from which the Renaissance finds its justification and its legitimation. The following passage summarizes the profile of this Renaissance culture, in contrast to its immediate predecessor, namely, the medieval culture, to which it was opposed, despite failing to break completely with it:

In open polemic with medieval and scholastic tradition, prone to value the role of religious transcendence and put the individual in a strict social scale, the new civilization conceives men as 'master of the world' and reference point of creation, 'copulation of the universe' and 'conjunction link of the being'. A non-irreligious man, therefore, who does not exclude God, but who turns his back to the ideals of asceticism and renunciation, is ready to immerse himself in the real historic world with the intent to master it and expand in it his own humanity. The man of the new civilization, once he acquired awareness of the possibility of being the architect of his own history, wants to live the city life intensely along with his peers; to do so, he dives in civilian life, engages in politics, in trade and in the arts, expressing a harmonic and balanced view of the diverse aspects within which is

<sup>4</sup> This expression, coined by Alexandre Koyré (1892-1964), philosopher and science historian, translates a twist in the conception of nature or reality launched by modernity, since, according to this author, "While the medieval and the old man aimed at pure contemplation of nature and of the being, the modern man desires domination and subjugation" (Koyré, 2006, p. 5).

developed the human activity. Here is the evident difference from the past. The world is no longer the place of atonement and pity, but the expression of the reactive power and the sense of initiative of men. This is no longer the ascetic, the medieval knight of faith, but the merchant, the practical man of business, one that expresses his activity in the world and sees in it the direction of his actions. Here are born a new conception of virtue, ideally expressed by the term 'humanitas', and a new range of ethical and social values in which there is no more place for the traditional noble and ecclesiastical hierarchy (Cambi, 1999, p. 224-225, emphasis added).

The major theorists associated with the humanist movement proclaimed in chorus, but each in his own way, the primacy of everything that relates specifically to the human dimension, emphasizing its dignity or its value. Besides Montaigne, Francesco Petrarch (1304-1374), Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1536), Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), François Rabelais (1494-1553), Thomas More (1478-1535), among other authors, entered history as intellectuals whose works were focused on the treatment of a genuinely human problematic. These authors engaged the discussion, under various perspectives, about what meant to be human, in the context of this new model of humanity that was being molded, which, in turn, directed the spirit of that period to reflect on education:

The new anthropological conception needs innovative conditions to ensure its realization. Hence, the interest of the new era is the educational problem in both the theoretical and the practical levels. It is not only educators and pedagogues that devote attention to this issue, but also writers, politicians, representatives of the rising bourgeoisie (merchants, artisans, bankers). It can be said that all educational production of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, despite their discontinuities regarding the guidelines and values, is characterized by a deep aspiration for giving shape and concreteness to the new ideal of man (Cambi, 1999, p. 225).

Under the auspices of Humanism, the Renaissance also brought a real Scientific Revolution; its starting point was given by Astronomy, in which the Ptolemaic Geocentric model was, in principle, disputed, although hypothetically, by the Copernican Heliocentrism. In addition, the experiments of renowned scientists, such as Tycho Brahe (1546-1601), Johannes Kepler (1571-1603) and Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), besides endorsing and improving the heliocentric theory of Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543), boosted searches both in Astronomy, particularly, and in Physics, generally, which, in turn, reached their peak in the 18<sup>th</sup> century with the works of Sir Isaac Newton (1643-1727), consolidating the foundations of modern natural

science.

Moreover, this revolution could not have been more successful if it did not have the prior contribution of two major lines of modern philosophical thought: Rationalism and Empiricism. Despite the epistemological conflict between the theorists of each line, all conjoined to defend the progress of science, which, in turn, was still considered part of Philosophy; proof of this are the works of René Descartes (1596-1650), Francis Bacon (1561-1626), John Locke (1632-1704) and Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646-1716), to name only a few of the most renowned philosophers.

The new philosophy-science of rationalist-empiricist array put in check centuries of philosophical-scientific tradition that, until then, was mostly limited to support the researches of Aristotle (384-322 BC.), ancient Greek philosopher whose thought was officially advocated by the Roman Church (interpreted by scholastic philosophy), which is why a direct attack to the scholastic Aristotelianism meant an indirect attack on the Papacy. Consequently, demonstrating the equivocalness of the Aristotelian thought, biased by Scholastic hermeneutics, involved revoking the ecclesiastical authority in philosophical-scientific matters, what became something very risky or dangerous, considering the reaction of certain members of the church hierarchy. These were, as a rule, reactionary, retrograde or hostile toward those who dared to contradict their orthodoxy, even if it was a re-reading of the Aristotelianism, since, from the Renaissance, new interpretations of the works of the Greek philosopher have surfaced.

The transformations through which passed the conceptions of the world and of human being in Europe were also fostered by the Great Navigations, which, in addition to transferring its maritime trade center to the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans, allowed Europeans to have more and more contact with different cultures, expanding and changing their perception of the universe and, simultaneously, of themselves.

As the accounts of naval expeditions brought news of new lands, unknown peoples, intriguing habits, exotic customs, strange languages, unprecedented plants and different animals, among so many other things considered until then as 'flamboyant', the knowledge gained from such experiences became inevitable, leading European minds, especially the more insightful, to rethink their knowledge, their certainties or truths; so, Montaigne, referring to the peoples newly discovered by Europeans, argues that

Therefore, these peoples do not seem to deserve the qualitative wild only because they have been otherwise very little modified by the interference of the human spirit and have lost almost nothing of their primitive simplicity. The laws of nature, not yet perverted by the

intervention of our own, governed us so far and remained so pure that I regret sometimes that our world have not met them before, when there were men able to enjoy them (Montaigne, 2004, p. 196).

Montaigne can be counted among such minds, restless and inquiring, considering his profile as one of a thinker who, before a time deeply marked by uncertainty and endless discoveries, embodied a spirit that, simultaneously, questioned and established the values on which was erected the civilization that he was inserted, since he considered that "Our judgments are far from being fair, because they resent the depravity of our customs" (Montaigne, 2004, p. 214).

Thus, the introverted French essayist presented himself as someone who, noticing the decay of his medieval, feudal, theocentric, close and finite world, makes of this one of his main mottoes to reflect about his personal and particular condition, before a new cultural reality, progressively modern, mercantilist, anthropocentric, open and infinite, which is also his own and, equally, is not considered less decadent, given that "Our century, at least in the environment in which we live, is so flawed that not only it does not practice virtue as it does not even conceive it. It could be said that it is no more than an academic jargon" (Montaigne, 2004, p. 213).

Fluctuating between the Middle Ages and Modernity, Montaigne, in describing himself, projects in his *Essays* a facet of the nature of the Renaissance and the Humanist men, who, no longer feeling firmly supported by the unquestionable safety of religious belief, sponsored by theology, recognize themselves definitely at the mercy of their own reason and experience, which they must use to try and build their flawed and biased knowledge; however, they need to be able to judge what position to assume or what action to take; thus, Montaigne is aware that "Knowledge does not present reality as it is, in an absolutely neutral way, but represents it, i.e. refers to it from a certain perspective, imbued with certain values" (Wolter, 2007, p. 159).

Though he resorts to Greek-Latin tradition, given the bulky set of Hellenist and Roman authors he cites in his *Essays*, Montaigne does not do it in accordance with dogmatic medieval frames, with authoritarian arrogance, but in the skeptic modern parameters, often using a certain dose of irony and always suggesting that nothing is irreproachable, reason why everything became subjected to observation and, mainly, to challenge or doubt: "So, reader, I am the subject of this book, which may be reason enough for you not to use your leisure in such a futile and unimportant subject" (Montaigne, 2004, p. 31).

By entering the ambitious Renaissance project of combining the purpose of returning to the ancient Greek-Latin classics, extolling their magnitude, with

the scope of creating something new from then on, under their inspiration, Montaigne, by urging, in his *Essays*, the self-consciousness, as an example of which he offers himself, sums up the Humanist ideal, since "[...] the very idea of Renaissance can only be understood in its true meaning if we are able to capture this movement of resumption that results in the creation of something new; movement that, on the other hand, is made possible by an awareness about oneself" (Azar Filho, 1999, p. 10).

By proclaiming his self-investigation, Montaigne invites to self-reflection, which one must perform on oneself and, consequently, unravel the universal human condition, because minding oneself is the capital task, to each one must be dedicated: "My craft, my art, is to live; who represses me for talking about it according to my own feelings, my experiences and to which end I use it, then must forbid an architect to refer to his own buildings, forcing him to comment them according to someone else" (Montaigne, 2004, p. 326).

The winds that blew Humanism, by challenging the scientific and philosophical thought of ecclesiastical backing, equally caused concerns and disputes among intellectuals, since there were, on the one hand, thinkers supporting the theories accepted by the church, and on the other, authors developing doctrines and experiments that made increasingly impracticable to consider the Papacy an unshakable authority, not only in religious matters, but also in philosophical and scientific issues. About this scenario, Montaigne states:

With regard to the great quarrel that divides us today, where there are a hundred articles to be suppressed or inserted and all of great importance, only God knows how many people can boast of having studied the essential reasons, in favor of or against each party. The number of scrupulous individuals is limited, if there are any; and they were not meant to disturb us. But, besides them, where is this whole crowd going? The reform produces the effect of every ineffective and ill-applied medicine: the moods of which it seeks to rid us, it excites them and makes them bitter; and they are still in us. It cannot purge us in its weakness, and, however, it weakens us; and from its action, we take only endless internal pain (Montaigne, 2004, p. 128).

Though considering himself a staunch Roman Catholic<sup>5</sup> and opposed to the reformist movement, as demonstrated by the passage above, Montaigne expresses his suspicions regarding this constant clash of opinions, preferring to admit that, given the instability of human judgment, the most sensible attitude would be to refrain from such disputes, so that there is more peace, since they are responsible for so many acts of violence

<sup>5</sup> Here is a quote that proves it: "We, 'Catholics', confess to God and to our confessor, while Protestants do it in public" (Montaigne, 2004, p. 326, emphasis added).

and atrocities, triggered by the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. The reason why Montaigne argues in favor of the uselessness or sterility of disputes, regardless of their nature, lies in the fact that

Our usual way of doing it is to follow our instinctive impulses to right or left, up or down, depending on the circumstances. We only think of what we want at the very moment we want it, and we change our will as the chameleon changes color. What we propose at a given moment, we change it subsequently and then go back, and it is all oscillation and inconstancy. 'We are conducted as puppets controlled through a wire' (Montaigne, 2004, p. 292, emphasis added).

The Reformation, whose mentor was the Augustinian monk Martin Luther (1483-1546), began with a mobilization in favor of the internal moralization of the Roman Church, which, according to him, as well as to several other contemporaries, had been seduced by the power of politics, luxury, richness and ostentation. In the opinion of the reformers, the Church would have strayed from its true mission: to announce the gospel message, according to ideals of humility, simplicity, poverty and charity. Outraged, above all, with the sale of indulgences, which denoted the ecclesiastical corruption, Luther, theologian by training, developed a line of thought and action, devoting himself mainly to cut trade of sacred things. Thus, on October 31, 1517, he fixed his 'Ninety Five Theses' at the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, proposing a discussion that confronted the papal authority and the sale of indulgences, among other official Roman Catholic teachings.

Luther's project of returning to the origins of Christianity meant, at first glance, an attack to the Renaissance spirit of resumption of Classical Antiquity. Burke, however, emphasizes, regarding Luther, that

[...] he was not opposed to Humanism in the sense of *studia humanitatis*. He himself had received a classical education and approved of the resurgence of the old school, which he believed to be promoted by God in preparation for the reform of the Church. He also supported the efforts of his colleague Philip Melanchthon to attribute a humanist curriculum to the University of Wittenberg (Burke, 2008, p. 69, emphasis added).

Pope Leo X (1475-1521) was initially indifferent to the movement; later, he became very hostile. He declared Luther heresiarch, condemned his writings and, finally, excommunicated him, after several years of discussions, in which Luther was always coerced to renounce his convictions, but always remained immovable. An imperial condemnation followed the papal one. Charles V (1500-1558), of the Holy Roman-German Empire, issued the Diet of Worms that declared him fugitive and heretic, and also proscribed his books.

However, he was protected by Prince Frederick III, the Wise (1463-1525), Elector of Saxony, who, although remaining a Roman Catholic, offered him shelter at the Castle of Wartburg, after the Diet of Worms, which resulted in the condemnation of the reformist movement, thus prompting a bloody period between Catholics and Protestants.

Faced with the inevitable loss of believers, the Roman Church organized its counterstrike. In 1543, Pope Paul III (1468-1549) convened the Council of Trent (1545-1563), also known as the Council of Counter-Reformation. From there, the foundations were laid for the internal restructuring of Roman Catholicism, and the ecclesiastical dogmas, contested by the Protestants, were reaffirmed. More than a reaction to the reformist movement, the Council of Trent meant, above all, an unprecedented renewal within the Catholic Church that, from then on, strengthened its dogmatic, hierarchical and disciplinary unit, and made it more conscious about the importance of the morality of its practices, reason why the sales of indulgences were definitely banned. In addition, the papal authority, rejected by the Reformation, was reaffirmed. The Court of the Holy Office, also known as the Holy Inquisition, was reactivated; biblical texts and ecclesiastical documents rebutted by the Protestants had their acceptance officially acknowledged. The *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* (Index of Forbidden Books) was organized, a list of book titles whose reading was condemned; a new breviary, the *Roman Breviary* (Official Book of Prayers, currently known as *Liturgy of the Hours*), and a new catechism, the *Roman Catechism* (Official Book of Christian Instruction) were edited. This was also the time when the 'Society of Jesus' (*Societas Jesu*) was founded, also known as 'Jesuit Order', whose main purpose was to fight in favor of the Roman Catholicism, whether in the context of the European Christianity itself (preventing the spread of the Protestant faith) or in the non-Christian context (evangelizing pagan people to convert to Catholic Christianity); to do so, its pedagogical activity was decisive, systematized in the work known as *Ratio Studiorum*.

In summary, the various aspects of the Renaissance mentioned here (namely: Humanism, the Great Navigations, the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation) might not have had such a swift repercussion if not by Gutenberg's Press. Thanks to it, the books, which until then could only be manuscript or copied by a restricted number of specialists (usually monks, called 'copyists' or 'amanuensis') could be printed, reason why not only the volume of published works increased, but also the quality of their texts. Although the majority of the European population was illiterate in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the literate circles benefited from this

quantitative and qualitative bibliographic growth, considering the speed with which titles circulated, simultaneously spreading and secularizing the culture. Thus, the Printing Press contributed to the breaking of the ecclesiastic monopoly of culture, enabling the secular aristocracy and bourgeoisie to access an intellectual universe so far restricted to the Clergy. However, it should be noted that the dissemination and the secularization of the culture in question did not involve the development of the modern scientific model in the same proportion, since, according to Woortmann, who, in turn, is indirectly based on another author cited by him, claims that:

The invention of the printing press itself, contrary to what one might imagine, resisted the emerging scientific spirit because, in the early days, it served to affirm the predominance of the written word over facts and experimentation. The press divulged, besides the Bible – making the Holy Scriptures more powerful – the text of the sciences of the Antiquity and the fabulous reports of travelers, full of monstrous beings. In addition, as presented by Minois (1990), the hegemony of writing over experience is revealed by the gap between the geographical discoveries and their record in scientific books (Woortmann, 1996, p. 8).

### Final considerations

It is expected that these considerations about the philosophical and educational ideas of Montaigne, linked to their historical context, give rise to reflections on the problems of the theoretical foundation of education. The formulations of Montaigne allow us to conceive pedagogy as an activity that, despite the tireless speculative and pragmatic efforts of its professionals, entails limits, flaws, prejudice and imperfections of various orders, reason why it will never be considered an inconsistent or dogmatic prescription for the formation of the human being, but a guide to self-improvement.

Montaigne's intellectual skepticism and moral stoicism remain as a warning against possible mistakes, illusions or deceptions caused by conceptions that do not question the extent to which knowledge is reliable. In the same way, they lead to ignoring the importance of the formation of human conduct. May the present text contribute to the emergence of reflections on the issues of the theoretical foundation of education, toward a pedagogical practice that makes use of the theoretical contributions of philosophy.

The education marked by skepticism and by stoicism, as advocated by Montaigne, doubts that education, by itself, will solve the deepest human challenges. On the other hand, its educational proposal does not hesitate in defending virtue, because it is

indispensable for the improvement of the human being. Furthermore, through virtue, human freedom will be introduced, since a virtuous individual will not have his/her mind subservient to prejudices, mistakes, superstitions, and so on. Virtue, force that propels the intellectual and moral progress of human nature, is what releases us from passions that predispose to vices; it is by walking the path of virtue that humanity can reach the higher levels of development. In addition, the skeptical and stoic education of the essayist is a call for the pursuit of wisdom, which is aimed at the acquisition of virtue, which, in turn, is the key to the freedom from the imperfections that characterize human nature.

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